

# CABIN FEVER

## Learning to calm down

Target competency	Use lifestyle habits that contribute to well-being
Cross-curricular competencies (QEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct their identity</li> </ul>
General objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try out strategies that make oneself feel good</li> <li>Better understand the notion of lifestyle habits</li> </ul>



### REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS WORKSHOP

In the last workshop, we talked about respect and the effect your actions and words can have on others. Do you remember the challenge I gave you? Tell me how it went.

\* The challenge was to say a kind word to three students.

### THE ADVENTURES OF LEO AND CHARLIE

At last, the cabin's all cleaned up! Everything went smoothly, with no conflicts. The students even ended up having a lot of fun. Their evening finished with everyone sitting around a campfire, singing songs. Finally, it's time to go sleep. Charlie, Leo and the other students have to get ready for bed.

Even though it's late, Leo is very energetic. The campfire songs around the fire, the excitement of the activities to come at Camp OFF-TRAIL and the chocolate bars he's been sneaking have made him feel like he could stay awake a lot longer. His thoughts are racing. He'd like to continue the party instead of going to sleep right away.

As everyone settles quietly into their sleeping bags, Leo starts dancing like a tornado around his classmates. Obviously, since the group is in a small space, Leo is disturbing everyone who would like to sleep.

Ms. Marie, the group's teacher, walks up to Leo. Seeing her approach, Leo thinks he's going to get in trouble. He suddenly becomes a little nervous. Leo would like to calm down and go to bed like the others, but his body won't stop moving. He can't help it. Ms. Marie sits down gently beside Leo. She suggests a few strategies to help him calm down. Then Leo can go to sleep like the others.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The heart, lungs and brain communicate with each other.

In fact, their communication is a two-way street. The brain can send a signal to the heart to speed up its beating in response to a strong emotion or a stressful situation. The same signal is sent to the lungs so that breathing can consume as much oxygen as possible and prepare to flee or fight, if necessary. These are stress-response mechanisms that operate through the sympathetic nervous system. Conversely, the brain can also tell the heart and lungs to slow down and rest, via the parasympathetic nervous system.

However, we mustn't forget the messages sent in the other direction. The heart can tell the brain that all is well and that there are no alarm signals to transmit. To achieve this state, we can act on our breathing. In fact, it's the only element on which direct action is possible.

Whether through the practice of mindfulness, a breathing exercise or a relaxation exercise, slowing down and deepening your breathing encourages the heart and brain to calm down.

(Perron, 2021)

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before starting the activity, make sure you have at least one stuffed toy, doll or figurine for each student, and an hourglass large enough for all students to see when you hold it. If you have a few smaller ones, divide the students into small groups so that each group has a visible hourglass. You can also use a clear jar filled with water and coloured glitter.
2. After reading the story, ask the students if they ever feel like Leo and want to be like a tornado at a time when they're supposed to be calm. Suggest that the students try different calming activities, like Miss Marie did with Leo.
3. For the first activity, Invite them to go get a stuffed animal (stuffy) and settle down in a quiet corner. Students must be able to lie on their backs. Once the students are lying down, you can turn off the lights and play soft music. The aim is simply to create an atmosphere of relaxation. Ask the students to place their stuffy on their stomach. Explain that they will be experimenting with belly breathing. When breathing in through their nose, they must try to inflate their belly so that the toy rises toward the ceiling. When breathing out, they release completely. Guide them for at least 10 belly breaths.
4. For the second activity, students can stay where they are, and lie on their backs. You can guide them on the duration of the movements. First, they can clench their fists as tightly as if they were squeezing a sponge and hold them tight for 5 seconds, then release them. Tell them they can become as soft as a rag doll. Repeat the movement 3 times. Then they can press their hands together as if they wanted to glue them tightly together. They can hold them tight for 5 seconds, then release. Repeat 3 times. Finally, suggest that students wrap their arms around their knees as if they were giving each other a big hug, and invite them to rock gently to the sides or back and forth.
5. For the third calming strategy, set up the students in the same situation you used in point 1 above. Ask students to repeat their belly breathing in a seated position, while watching the sand run off or the glitter. Turn the hourglass over at least 3 times or shake the container again with the glitter.
6. Ask the students which of the three activities they found most rewarding, and share the challenge on the next page. Try rehearsing one of the activities in class before the next workshop.
7. Give the students the *Learning to calm down* handout (below) and invite them to colour the images and draw their own way to calm down.



9-10



11-12



13-14



15-16



17

## CHALLENGE

Suggest the following challenge:

- Before the next OFF-TRAIL workshop, ask someone at home or at school to help you practice one of the activities you tried today (belly breathing, mindful movements, or hourglass//glitterjar).



18

## ENABLING REINVESTMENT

In a corner of the classroom or on a chalkboard, place a list of tips, ideally accompanied by drawings, as a toolbox to remind students of what they can do to calm themselves. You can use the following suggestions:

- Take 5 deep breaths;
- Close your eyes and imagine a pleasant place with as many details as possible;
- Adopt a yoga posture and hold it for as long as possible;
- Settle on the floor, wrap your arms around your knees and rock gently;
- Colour;
- Hug a stuffed animal very tightly;
- Push the wall as hard as you can with your arms and body weight.

(List inspired by the [Boîte à outils pour faciliter le retour au calme](#) and AlloProf, 2019c)

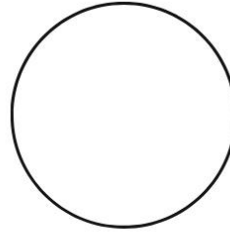
## READING SUGGESTIONS

- Gravel, É. (2021). *Puppy in My Head: A Book About Mindfulness*. HarperCollins.
- Hanh, T.N. (2008). *Mindful Movements: Ten Exercises for Well-Being*. Parallax Press.
- Killen, N. (2022). *Ollie's Back-to-School Bear: Perfect for little ones starting preschool!* Simon & Schuster UK.



Text is under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) licence. Graphics designed with Canva are under [Canva's content licence](#). © [OFF-TRAIL program](#) by Centre RBC d'expertise universitaire en santé mentale (2025), Université de Sherbrooke.

**HANDOUT TO PRINT**  
**Learning to calm down**



↖  
**Your turn!**

