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A Strategy for Keeping Calm

- OBJECTIVES**
- To point out problematic situations in which students can use self-control to calm down before reacting
 - To teach students a way to get calm and keep their self-control in a problematic situation

MATERIALS Whole-class display of steps in "Keep Calm" (Worksheet 2.21.1)
 "Keep Calm Reminder Cards" (Worksheet 2.21.2)
 "Smell the Pizza Keep Calm Cards" (Worksheet 2.21.3; *optional*)

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

1. Begin with a Sharing Circle.

Review Topic 20 by having students share a Trigger Situation and that situation's Feelings Fingerprint.

2. Introduce the Keep Calm exercise.

Ask the class when it is important to be able to calm yourself down if you are upset. Explain that today's topic will be keeping calm—why it matters, and how to learn how to do it. Say:

It is possible to handle almost every type of problem or difficulty better if you are able to keep calm. To help us learn to keep calm, we are also going to learn about an exercise called "Keep Calm." This exercise can help you get through a problem situation without saying or doing something you later wish you hadn't.

Think about what happens when you lose your temper and yell or hit people or things. Today we are going to learn what you can do before you do something that could get you into trouble.

3. Explain the behavioral and cognitive components of the skill.

The key to keeping calm is to slow down your breathing.

Refer students to the whole-class display and introduce the four steps of Keep Calm:

1. Tell yourself to STOP!
2. Tell yourself to KEEP CALM.
3. Slow down your breathing with two long, deep breaths.
4. Praise yourself for a job well done.

At this point, it's useful to provide examples of people your students will relate to—sports figures or the heroes in stories you know they're following. Say:

Athletes, performers, and people in the martial arts have used methods like Keep Calm to help them achieve their best.

4. Model the skill.

Model the skill by describing and demonstrating the steps to the class. First present a situation in which you could be irritated or nervous. Describe the situation, then say:

First, I would tell myself, "STOP!"

Then I would tell myself, "Use Keep Calm to calm down."

Then I would take two long, deep breaths. First, I would let out all the air in my lungs through my mouth. Then I would take a slow and smooth breath of air in through my nose to the count of five. I would hold that breath for the count of two and then slowly let the air out through my mouth to the count of five, while still saying to myself on the inside, "Keep Calm." Then I would do the breathing again.

When I felt better, I would say to myself, "Good job." Using self-control can be hard work, and you need to praise yourself.

Ask students to watch you demonstrate how to do it before they try it. Demonstrate the procedure counting with your fingers to five while taking a breath in and to two while holding your breath and again to five while breathing out. Then repeat the breath. Bring your hands down to your sides while you are releasing the breath through your mouth—indicating that you are saying, "Keep Calm." Smile after completing the breathing to indicate you are telling yourself, "Good job" on the inside.

Also show students how Keep Calm should *not* look (puffed out cheeks, breath holding, silliness).

5. Conduct a practice activity.

Have everyone try the procedure. Look for students who are doing the procedure correctly. Be specific in praising—"Nice, smooth breathing." If children need correction, state it positively, with information about what to do. For example, say, "Slow down your breathing" rather than "Don't go so fast."

Tell students that using Keep Calm does not need to be loud or obvious to others. Ask them for examples of when they could use "Keep Calm." After every example, have the whole group pretend that they are in the situation, and again practice doing the Keep Calm steps.

Generate situations when Keep Calm may be used. Most situations fall into three main categories:

- When you are nervous. (Before a test, up at bat, giving a speech, or other types of performance.)
- When you really need to concentrate. (Working on a test, working after recess, when you are distracted by noise in the room.)
- When you are angry or frustrated and about to lose your cool. (Beginning to yell during an argument or when you feel like you will do something that will get you into trouble.)

6. Conduct additional practice activities.

If time and interest permit (and it may be useful to apply this topic across two sessions), some additional practice activities often prove valuable:

- Have children write or draw situations where Keep Calm could be used. Keep papers on hand for future practice.
- Present children with situations by staging role-plays, acting out a situation yourself, or showing a video or pictures, and then have children add examples of their own to those presented. The following situations may be used:

Feeling fidgety and talking in class

Feeling nervous about a test or a report

Being lost in a shopping center

Going to a new school

Competing in a sports event

- Introduce an object (a stuffed animal, a pen, a swatch of soft cloth like velvet or velour) called the "Keep Calm object." Make sure it is something quite different from the Speaker Power object. When an incident occurs in class and a student is upset, you can give them the object to hold to remind them to keep calm.
- Have the students draw a picture of someone before and after using the Keep Calm exercise.

7. Introduce a Reflective Summary.

As outlined in the Introduction, ask students to reflect on the question "What did you learn from today's lesson?" Reinforce key themes, then go over any follow-up work.

8. Follow up.

The following steps will help make sure that the students have a chance to continue working with the new concepts throughout the school day and at home.

Assignment

Encourage students to find a time when they can use Keep Calm and try it. Let them know that you will expect an example of how they used Keep Calm at the next meeting.

Take-Home

Instead of using the cards in Worksheet 2.21.1, students can create posters with the four Keep Calm steps, or a handout with the Keep Calm steps can be distributed to take home to parents and guardians. Parents and guardians should be encouraged to review the Keep Calm steps and hang the poster in a place when their child needs to remember to use Keep Calm, such as by the TV, in their room, on the refrigerator. Parents and guardians should also be encouraged to remind their child to use the Keep Calm technique.

Plans to Promote Transfer and Generalization of Skill

1. Make several posters of the four steps of Keep Calm and have students decorate them. Place them in areas of the room where they can best be used by students to guide them through the four steps while the skill is still new to them.
2. Use the Keep Calm skill prompts when a child is upset or is beginning to lose control:
 - Use your Keep Calm steps.
 - Stop and think about what's happening.
 - Let's use Keep Calm and get focused.
 - Let's take a look at what's going on—describe what is happening and how you are feeling.
 - Take a deep breath and use Keep Calm—then we can talk about it.
3. Try playing "ZZZZZZZZ: ZZZZZZ," a game developed by Marianne Torbert and described in her book *Follow Me: A Handbook of*

Movement Activities for Children (Prentice Hall, 1980), to help children develop social and emotional skills. Here's how it works:

The player pretends to be asleep. At the sound of a bell or timer they jump up and move quickly to another place, where they pretend to fall asleep again. This game was designed to develop the ability to relax quickly. Ask the children to use the Keep Calm steps when they pretend to fall asleep again.

4. In language arts, find characters that are experiencing strong emotion and could use the Keep Calm exercise. Ask students how the story could have changed if the character had used Keep Calm.
5. Remind students about Keep Calm before potentially stressful situations and changes in class such as art, music, physical education, lunch, and playground period. Encourage an upset child to use a Keep Calm object.

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

1. Some students may need a real-life example of what it's like to be nervous, antsy, or in danger of losing their temper. This can be illustrated in several ways. Use a mirror to show differences in physical appearances before and after using Keep Calm. Jogging in place to increase breathing can be used to show the contrast before and after Keep Calm.
2. Some students may have difficulty conceptualizing the breathing component of Keep Calm. Using the "Smell the Pizza" cards (Worksheet 2.21.2) is helpful for these children. They can pretend that they are holding a slice of pizza. They can breathe in to smell how good the fresh pizza smells, pause to enjoy it, and then they can blow on the hot, fresh pizza to cool it down. The concrete image of the pizza can help students with Keep Calm breathing even without the reminder cards.
3. Some students will learn to recognize their Feelings Fingerprints as a sign to use Keep Calm. Others will be prompted by Trigger Situations or other sets of cues. The skill will be learned to the extent that children can be prompted and reminded to use it in everyday situations, such as when moving from class to class, at recess, before a test, before an important meeting, when they are upset at home, or in performance situations, such as reading aloud, being in front of the class, being called on by the teacher, showing their work in music or art, or during sports activities.
4. The goal of Keep Calm is to have students begin to use the skill before they lose their self-control and not wait until after they are already very upset.

5. Regularly discuss and reinforce the use of Keep Calm, and find occasions to talk about the future use of Keep Calm. These discussions will promote future use of self-control. Students should be helped to use Keep Calm to prepare themselves for actual or possible trigger situations.

Keep Calm

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- 2. Tell yourself to KEEP CALM.**
- 3. Slow down your breathing with two long, deep breaths.**
- 4. Praise yourself for a job well done.**

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