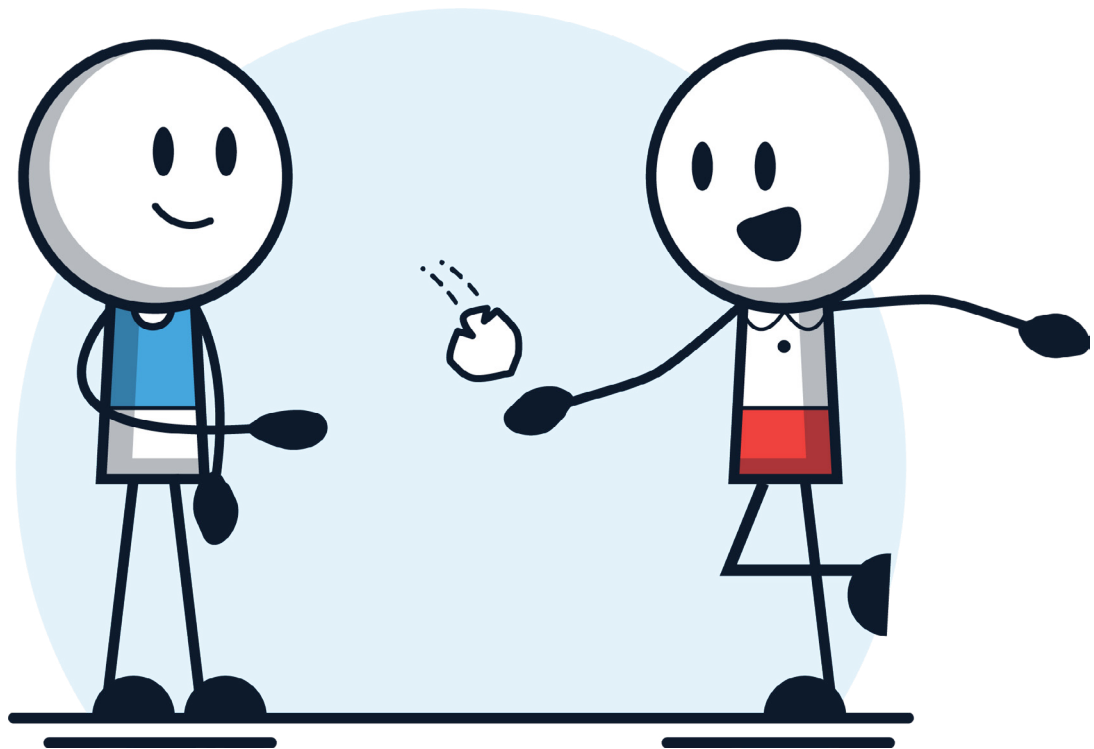


Brain Breaks: Energising Exercises

Ideas for generating Positive Emotions and enhancing Positive Relationships through physical Brain Break activities.



INSTITUTE OF
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Positive Education
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The Benefits of Brain Breaks

The Institute of Positive Education has been collating, adapting and writing brain breaks for a number of years. We passionately believe in the benefits of this teaching and learning strategy and hope the suggested activities below are of benefit.

Studies over the last 20 years have shown promising results, suggesting brain breaks have multiple benefits for student learning. These benefits include improved cognitive functioning, increased motivation and ability to sustain focus on academic work.

By providing students with a social and fun break in a lesson, there is an increased opportunity and a new context for strengthening student-student and teacher-student relationships. Brain breaks alter the classroom climate by introducing a new collective action. Such activities have been shown to increase students' positive emotions and enjoyment within the classroom.

Brain breaks only take up small amount of lesson time yet the benefits are immediately apparent. We've summarised the science behind some of these benefits below.

The Benefits of Movement

There are many benefits related to the physical aspects involved in some of our brain breaks. Research shows that periodical physical activity breaks can enhance student learning and behaviour. Energiser activities can also increase blood flow and epinephrine levels among drowsy learners, and reduce student restlessness.

Movement can be an effective cognitive strategy that reinforces learning, enhances memory and retrieval, and improves students' motivation and morale. When we exercise, we're causing the brain to fire signals along the same network of cells involved in cognitive functions, which solidifies their connections.

Building Rapport and Co-Regulation

Teachers play a pivotal role in establishing a positive classroom environment that contributes to students' social, emotional and academic growth.

As teachers, we are acutely aware of the importance of developing constructive student-teacher relationships. Studies have shown that forming strong and supportive relationships with students has a positive impact on their feelings of safety and security at school, and results in increased feelings of competence, positive connections with peers, and greater academic gains. However, teacher-student conflict in younger years can have a negative impact on student achievement up to seven years later.

Research shows that there are positive reciprocal links between teachers' and students' enjoyment, and that these links are mediated by teachers' and students' observations of each other's classroom behaviours. Therefore, taking part in shared positive experiences, such as our escalating and positively priming brain breaks, can enhance positive connections between teachers and students.

Teachers also have an important role to play in co-regulating the class. Responsive brain breaks build upon relational interactions. Engaging students in short activities that develop teamwork, empathy and interaction also support classroom behaviour systems. As leaders, teachers are constantly demonstrating how to handle stress and adversity. Responding to off-task cues by introducing brain breaks is an act of co-regulation that builds a classroom climate for learning.



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The Benefits of Brain Breaks

Humour

Students feel they belong in school when teachers express involvement and warmth and using humour can be an effective way to facilitate this.

A number of our brain breaks utilise affiliative humour, which involves joking around and laughing with others or telling amusing stories in an effort to enhance relationships. This form of humour is positively correlated with high self-esteem, cheerfulness and psychological wellbeing, and negatively correlated with anxiety and depression.

Using humour in the classroom is an important way to produce a healthy classroom climate and to help teachers to connect with their students, which is essential for student learning and enjoyment. As such, the use of humour in educational settings can also be an effective classroom management tool, fostering student engagement, improving motivation, and encouraging on-task behaviours and academic success.

Our ability to learn is highly dependent on our emotional state. This means eliciting positive emotions through enjoyable activities, games and humour can have a positive impact on student learning. In addition, humour helps teachers to deal with the inherent stressors of the profession.

Research in the field of psychology suggests that, for many adolescents, humour can serve as a coping style or a defence strategy to ease psychological distress and improve wellbeing. Therefore, using humour in the classroom as a coping mechanism may help students to handle feelings of stress. In addition, humour has been shown to have a measurable positive impact on one's physical health.

We hope that the following ideas support your use of brain breaks while teaching remotely. For additional brain breaks resources, please see our online shop and our PEEC website.

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Crazy Crosses



Energy: Medium
Equipment: None
Duration: 1 minute

Help your students to experience a range of physical and mental benefits by engaging in these cross-lateral movements.

Ask students to complete each exercise in given numbers or as a pyramid (i.e. one of each, two of each, three of each, etc). Switch sides after each repetition.

Opposite Knee-to-Elbow: standing with back straight, raise one knee and lower your opposite elbow so they touch.

Opposite Toe Taps: hinge forward from the hips, tap opposite toe to hand and swing your other hand to the sky.

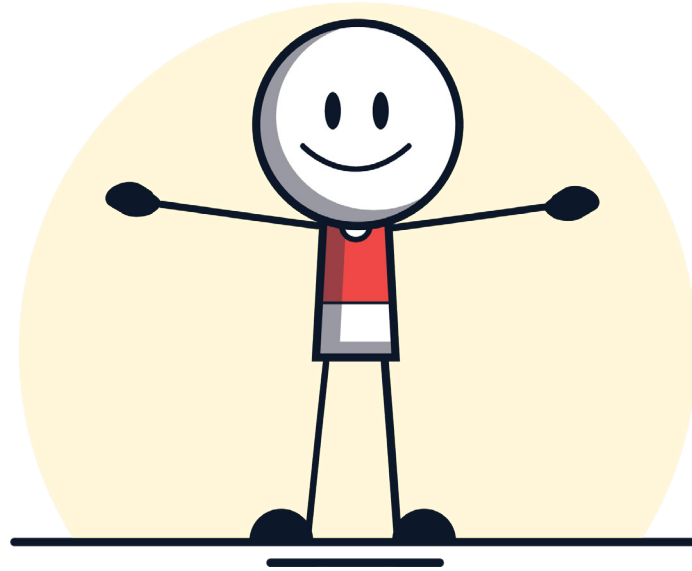
Heel Taps: raise heel to buttocks and tap foot with opposite hand.

Cross Knee: on hands and feet facing the floor in a push up position. Cross opposite knee to elbow.



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I Like to Move it!



Energy: High
Equipment: None
Duration: 1 minute

Engage in these exercises to boost students' attention.

Students engage in a variety of movements in sequence, counting completion of each sequence as 'one', and see how many they can complete in a given time.

Spin: spin on the spot twice, keeping arms out for balance if needed.

Crawl: crawl forward for a count of four.

Roll: lay on the floor with body straight and arms by sides, roll over twice.

Rock: sit on the floor, hold knees to chest and rock backwards then forwards four times.

Point: jump up and disco dance with pointed fingers starting at opposite hip and extending to the sky, four times (twice each side).



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Hold Up!



Energy: Medium
Equipment: None
Duration: 1 minute

Engage in this exercise with your class and encourage each other to build your collective endurance.

1. Sit on a sturdy chair.
2. Place hands either side on the seat (left and right).
3. Push arms straight until your bottom rises off the chair.

Challenge: increase the difficulty by also raising feet off the floor.



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Ready to Roll!



Energy: High
Equipment: Movement Dice
Duration: 1 minute

Print out the 'Ready to Roll Dice' image and ask students to cut this out, folding along the dotted lines and gluing the shaded areas together to create a die.

Demonstrate each of the exercises in turn. Ask students to form pairs or groups and take turns to roll their own die and complete the exercise depicted.

Tip: Play some energetic music and/or set a challenge for students such as engaging in the exercise or movement for 20 seconds without stopping.

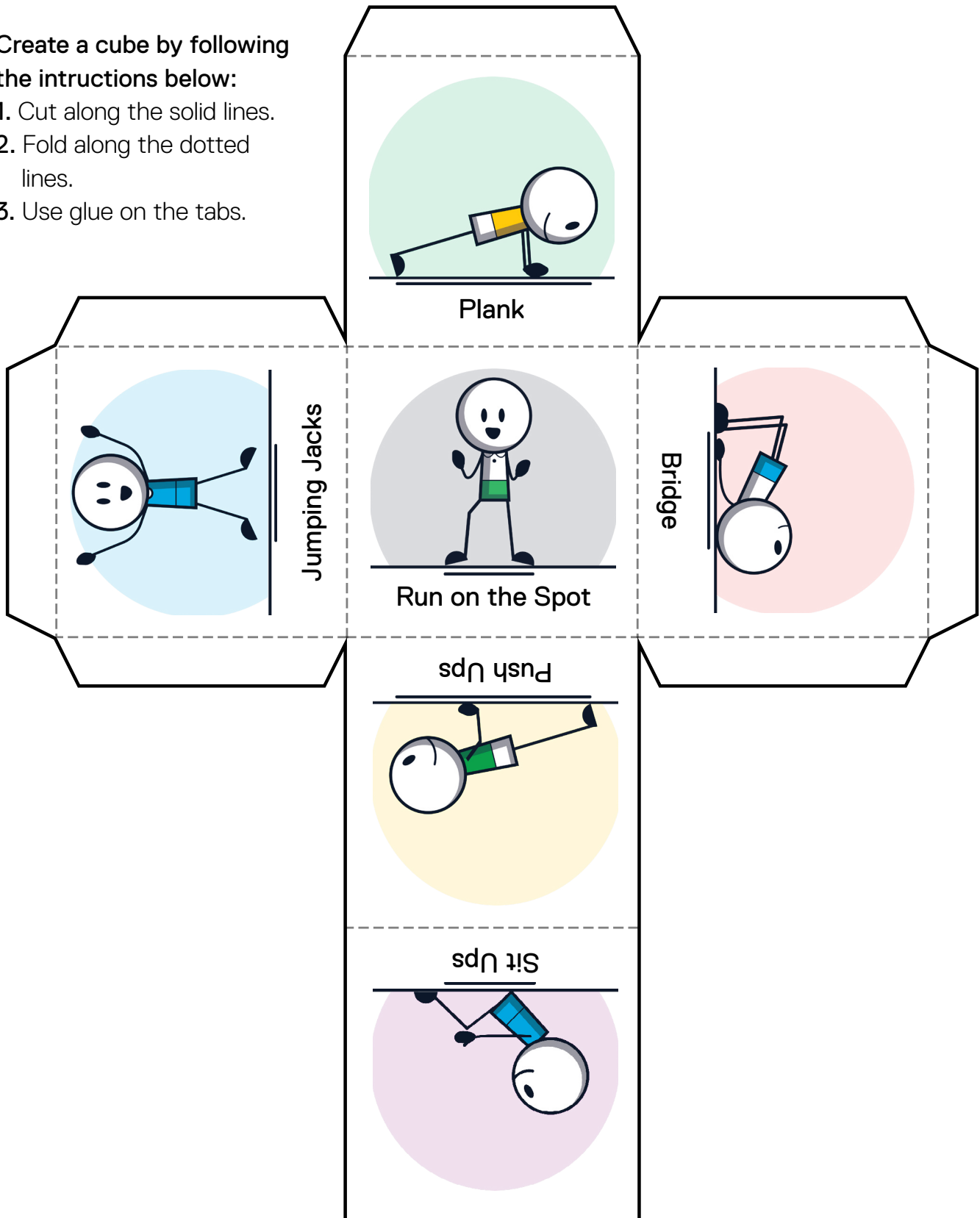


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Ready to Roll Dice

Create a cube by following the instructions below:

1. Cut along the solid lines.
2. Fold along the dotted lines.
3. Use glue on the tabs.



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Want More Brain Breaks?

For more Brain Breaks resources and other Positive Education materials, head to the Institute of Positive Education's [online shop](#).

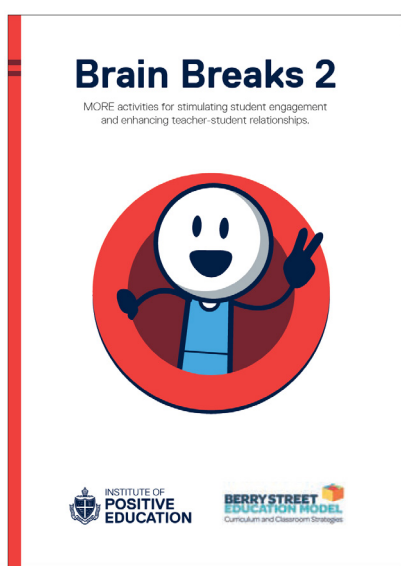


Brain Breaks

These booklets are a helpful Positive Education resource for any teacher wanting to start or expand their Positive Education classroom supplies and resources.

They are not a specific programme, but rather a starting point for thinking about how to integrate physical movement into classrooms and educational environments.

The activities are a creative, fun and easy way to break up a lesson and allow students and teachers to build a connection whilst improving happiness and gratitude as well as refreshing their brain to optimise for learning.



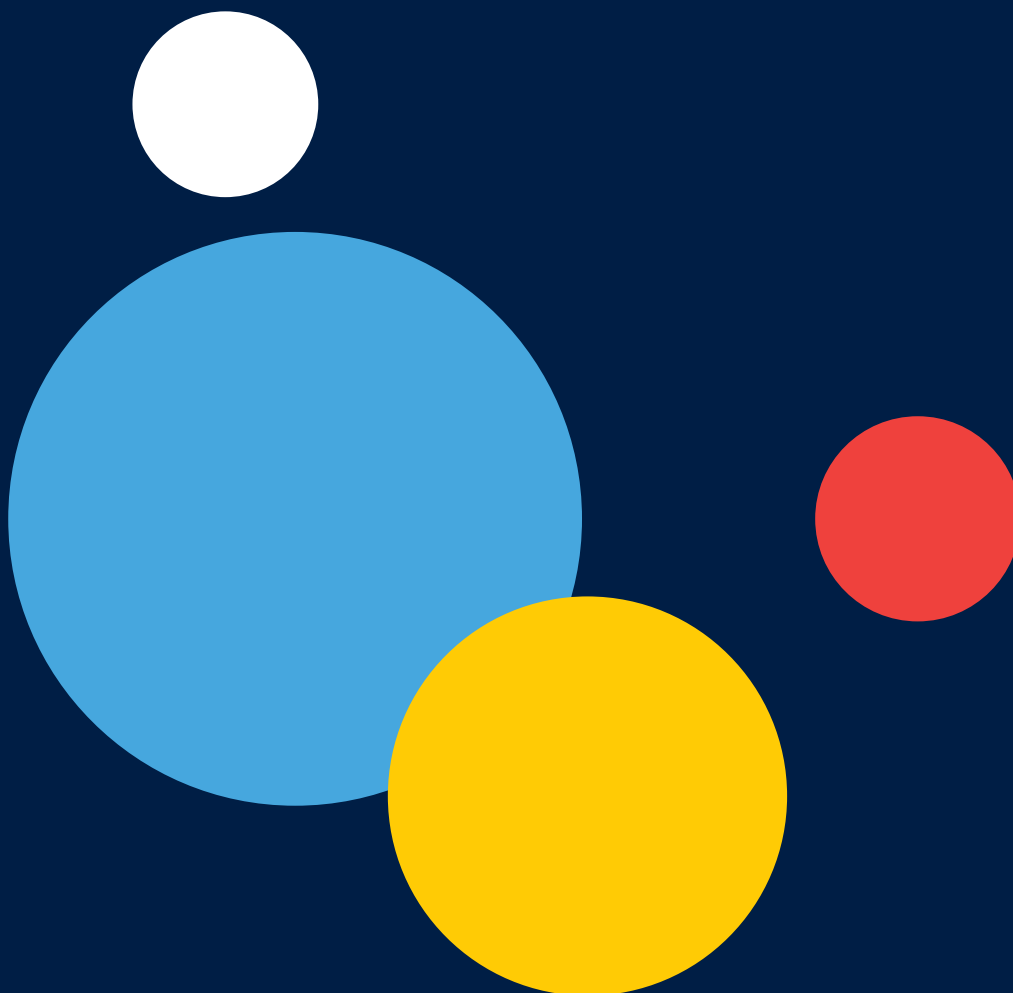
Brain Breaks 2

The Institute of Positive Education and Berry Street Education have collaborated to bring you even MORE brain breaks, with more than 30 new activities!

This new edition includes activities to help build positive relationships and generate positive emotions while increasing students' attention and retention!



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