



# **TRAUMA-SENSITIVE TOOLS**

FOR THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR

YOGA ed.



# TRAUMA-SENSITIVE TOOLS FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL

## AN INTRODUCTION

Imagine a school campus in February of 2020: bustling hallways full of students and teachers, a lively hum inside each classroom, a deep sense of community felt by all. At the start of the second semester of this academic year, schools across the nation had found their flow.

A scant four weeks later in late March 2020, schools went from gathering places to ghost towns, empty of their heart and soul—their youth, teachers, administrators, and families. The COVID-19 pandemic abruptly brought to a halt the rhythm and rituals of school communities, a collective trauma that has touched all of our lives.

Trauma is defined as an event or experience that leaves a lasting negative impact on an individual's

physical, emotional, and/or social self. Typically, “trauma” refers to the effect that a specific experience has on an individual or a few people, whereas the term “collective trauma” speaks to the impact of a shared experience that affects and involves entire groups, communities, or societies.

Collective trauma is extraordinary in that it brings distress and adverse consequences to individuals and also has the capacity to alter the entire fabric of their community environment (Erikson, 1976). Collective trauma can impact relationships, shape policies and governmental processes, change the way a society functions, and even transform its social norms (Chang, 2017; Hirschberger, 2018; Saul, 2014).



The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on our schools and education system as a whole amount to collective trauma on a global scale. In a span of moments, students across the world went from brick-and-mortar classrooms to at-home learning in virtual spaces. And troublingly, many of us don't know when or even if we will go back to the way our classrooms thrived pre-pandemic.

This **Trauma-Sensitive Toolkit** is designed as a resource for families and teachers to help:

- Understand ways that trauma may present in children, in various settings including at home and within the online learning space,
- Equip you with accessible yoga and mindfulness tools to support your children through the effects of trauma, and
- Identify the compounding effects of multiple collective traumas on vulnerable youth, including marginalized, disabled, and/or disenfranchised individuals and communities.

As collective trauma affects each of us differently, there are additional considerations to bear in mind as you apply the contents of this Toolkit.

We as teachers, parents and caregivers are ourselves living and working through this pandemic. Additionally, we are all deeply concerned about the effects this collective trauma has on our children—both immediately and in the long-term—and we know that trauma has a direct and potentially overwhelming impact on the ability of any person to learn. Furthermore, the shift to online learning is taking our students even more out of their bodies, making learning and teaching even more challenging.

All of us, adults and children alike, need these trauma-sensitive tools now more than ever.



# ANXIETY

Anxiety often presents in children as excessive worry and nervousness out of proportion to the event. For example, your child may ask an overwhelming amount of questions over an assignment or online activity, or they may shake their leg repeatedly.

## TOOL: BEAR BREATH

Breathing in a consistent, countable ratio provides a point of focus and helps calm the nervous system's response. Using fingers to count the breaths helps orient students to their body and the present moment.



Bear Breath 1



Bear Breath 2



Bear Breath 3

### BENEFITS:

- + Develops breath awareness by deliberately bringing the breath into equilibrium
- + Focuses the mind
- + Increases concentration

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Inhale through your nose for three counts and pause with your breath held in for one to two counts.
2. Exhale through your nose for three to five counts and pause with your breath held out for one to two counts.
3. Repeat.

# INCREASED SENSITIVITY

Sensitivity presents as a heightened response to everyday situations. For example, your child may become tearful or have a lower tolerance for schedule changes or transitions.

## TOOL: EAGLE (SELF-HUG)

Self-containment orients students to the present moment and provides physical support. Offering students the full pose or just the arm crossing can help calm the nervous system and support self-regulation.



Eagle 1



Eagle 2

### BENEFITS:

- + Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, and abdominals
- + Stretches the quadriceps, hip flexors, back, and shoulders
- + Builds focus
- + Develops willpower
- + Stimulates the mind

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin in Mountain Pose behind your chair.
2. Inhale, stand tall in your body.
3. Exhale, wrap your outside leg around your inside leg. Place the outside of your wrapped foot like a kickstand to your inside leg.
4. Inhale, reach your inside arm to the opposite side of your chest.
5. Exhale, bring your other arm to its opposite side of your chest.
6. Hold this position for a few breaths.
7. When you are ready, unwind your arms and legs to return to Mountain Pose.

# DEPRESSION

Depression presents when a child has persistent feelings of sadness. For example, you may notice your child no longer finds joy in the routines and rituals they loved engaging in prior to COVID-19.

## TOOL: JOY BREATH

This stimulating breath offers physical movement to counter sedentary behavior and features elongated exhales for stress relief.



Joy Breath 1



Joy Breath 2



Joy Breath 3



Joy Breath 4



Joy Breath 5



Joy Breath 6



## TOOL: JOY BREATH (CONTINUED)

### BENEFITS:

- + Awakens the body
- + Increases oxygen levels
- + Releases tension

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Stand with your feet wide apart, knees slightly bent, arms straight
2. Inhale, raising your arms up overhead.
3. Exhale, lowering your arms to chest level.
4. Inhale, opening your arms to the side.
5. Exhale, bringing your arms back to the middle.
6. Inhale, raising your arms up and overhead.
7. Exhale strongly and sharply with a “hahhh” sound, bending your knees and swinging your arms down and behind you.
8. Inhale, swinging your arms up and overhead.
9. Repeat this sequence three to five times.
10. Rest and notice how you feel.



# HOPELESSNESS / HELPLESSNESS

Hopelessness and/or helplessness presents when a child expresses that they feel like the world will never get better. For example, your child may speak negatively about themselves or others. They might use absolute terms, such as “I’ll never see my friends again,” or they might state their fears as truths, such as “No one uses real classrooms anymore.”

## TOOL: TREE POSE

Tree pose is an empowering pose where students can experience physical and mental changes in a secure way. Students are offered choices, which provides a sense of control. They also experience growth as their balance develops over time.



Tree Pose 1



Tree Pose 2



## TOOL: TREE POSE (CONTINUED)

### BENEFITS:

- + Lengthens the spine
- + Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, hamstrings, abdominals, back, and neck
- + Stretches the quadriceps, hip flexors, chest, and shoulders
- + Builds concentration and focus

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin in Mountain Pose on the side of your chair.
2. Inhale, bring your inside arm to the chair and your outside arm to your hip
3. Exhale, bend your outside knee and come onto the ball of your foot.
4. Inhale, slide your foot to the inside of your ankle or leg like a kickstand—you choose the position of that foot.
5. Exhale, stand tall in your tree body.
6. Inhale, extend your arms up towards the ceiling—you choose the position of your arms.
7. Breathe.
8. When you are ready, bring your hands back down to your hips and return to Mountain Pose.
9. Repeat on the other side.



# IRRITABILITY

Irritability presents when a child is agitated, has quick reactions, or exhibits restlessness. For example, you may notice that your child expresses frustration with a reasonable task or has a meltdown over an assignment they need to complete for school.

## TOOL: OCEAN BREATH

By focusing on elongating each exhale, this practice offers stress relief while helping lower heart rate.



### BENEFITS:

- + Releases tension in the neck and lower face
- + Calms the mind
- + Lowers the heart rate

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Inhale through your nose.
2. Exhale, open your mouth with a “hahhh,” making the sound of an ocean wave.

# EXHAUSTION

Exhaustion presents when a child has extreme physical or mental fatigue. For example, your child may be falling asleep in class and/or frequently feeling drowsy or tired.

## TOOL: LEGS UP THE CHAIR

This resource offers two supports. One, it can be a tool to improve students' sleep hygiene at appropriate times through regulation of the nervous system and relief for the lower body. Two, this practice can also refocus energy as students change their visual point of focus and their physical body position.



### BENEFITS:

- + Reduces fatigue in the legs and feet
- + Relieves minor backaches and headaches
- + Gently stretches the calves and hamstrings
- + Calms the mind

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin by lying down on your back, facing toward your chair.
2. Inhale, lift your legs up into the air.
3. Exhale, bend at the knees and place your lower legs on the chair seat.
4. Inhale, flex your toes towards your shins.
5. Exhale, bring your hands to rest on your belly.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, bring your legs off the chair seat and bend your knees as you turn to one side.
8. Calmly return to seated in your chair.



# WITHDRAWAL / DISSOCIATION

Withdrawal and/or dissociation presents when a child expresses that they are feeling disconnected from their own body. For example, your child may look spacey or inattentive during online meetup times.

## TOOL: TENSE AND RELEASE

This resource orients students to their body and helps develop self-awareness. Students may notice where they hold tension and experience a release of that tension as they scan through the whole body.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

*Read or paraphrase the following text.*

1. “You can keep your eyes open or close your eyes, whichever is most comfortable for you. Take a deep breath in, take a deep breath out. As if you’re falling asleep, let go of all thoughts. Just feel your breath. I’ll wait for everyone to settle, sigh and melt, release any wiggles, movement, and tension. With every breath, you become more and more relaxed. ...Great.
2. “I am going to take you through a progressive relaxation. When I call out a body part and say ‘inhale’ you will tighten only that body part. When I say ‘exhale’ you will relax that body part.
3. “Beginning with your feet and only your feet, inhale. Tighten your feet and only your feet. Now exhale, release and let go.
4. “Bring your awareness to your legs, your shins, your calves, your thighs, and your hamstrings. Inhale and tighten your legs. Exhale, release and let go.
5. “Bring your awareness to your bottom, your low belly, and your low back. Inhale and tighten. Exhale, release and let go.



## TOOL: TENSE AND RELEASE (CONTINUED)

### INSTRUCTIONS (CONTINUED):

6. “Bring your awareness to your upper chest, your upper back, between your shoulder blades, and your shoulders. Inhale and tighten. Exhale and release.
7. “Bring your awareness to your arms, your forearms, your biceps. Inhale and tighten your arms. Exhale and release.
8. “Bring your awareness to your hands, make two tight fists. Inhale and tighten. Exhale and release.
9. “Bring your awareness to your face, pucker your face, your eyes, your nose, your lips. Inhale and tighten. Exhale and release.
10. “Bring your awareness to your entire body now. Inhale, tighten your entire body. Exhale and release.
11. “Stay with that release and take a deep breath in through your nose. Exhale out through your mouth.”
12. Pause at this point for any amount of time that is appropriate for your setting.
13. “Now it’s time to come back to the room. Gently begin to wiggle your fingers and your toes. Take any stretches that feel good to you, and slowly come back to a comfortable seated position in your chair.”

### BENEFITS:

- + Promotes body awareness and self-regulation
- + Relieves tension and symptoms of stress
- + Refocuses the mind



# DISORIENTED

Disorientation presents when a child appears disconnected from the present moment, time, and space. For example, a student may forget what day it is or be disorganized with their belongings or assignments.

## TOOL: 5-4-3-2-1

Using each of the five senses in turn is a simple way to reorient oneself to time and place. Gently gazing around the room brings students to the present moment and into their physical body.

### BENEFITS:

- + Builds physical awareness and proprioception
- + Calms and refocuses the mind
- + Eases symptoms of emotional stress

### INSTRUCTIONS:

*Read or paraphrase the following text, allowing enough time for students to respond to each prompt.*

1. “We are going to explore our space using our senses. If any of the senses we review are not available to you at this time, you are welcome to use another sense that works best for you.
2. “Take a couple of deep breaths.
3. “Inhale, count to three. Exhale, count to three.
4. “Now if it works for you, open your eyes and look around you:
  - Notice 5 things you can see
  - Notice 4 things you can feel
  - Notice 3 things you can hear
  - Notice 2 things you can smell
  - Notice one thing you can taste
5. “We’ll end this practice with another breath together. Inhale, count to three. Exhale, count to three.”



# BODY TENSION

Body tension presents when a child expresses that they feel tight or uneasy in their body. For example, your child may complain of headaches, stomachaches, or body aches.

## TOOL: SEATED TWIST

Twists offer the experience of tension and release within the student's control. Students can experience what it feels like to engage and relieve their body within their own limits.



Seated Twist 1



Seated Twist 2

## TOOL: SEATED TWIST (CONTINUED)

### BENEFITS:

- + Strengthens the back
- + Stretches the groin, chest, spine, and shoulders
- + Calms the mind

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Begin seated in your chair with your feet on the floor, sitting up tall in your spine.
2. Inhale, reach your arms up.
3. Exhale, reach your right hand to the outside of your left knee.
4. Inhale, sit tall.
5. Exhale, bring your left hand behind you. Twist to look over your shoulder.
6. Breathe.
7. When you are ready, untwist and come back to face forward.
8. Repeat on the other side.

