

SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO SETTLE PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN DOWN AFTER A BREAK OR LUNCH

1: An organised, calm entrance into the classroom.

After the excitement of socialising and games after break or lunch, it is natural for children to carry this into the classroom, particularly if everyone is rushed in together.

One way to settle children down is to let children enter in smaller groups, e.g. 5 at a time, and establishing a routine for re-entry, for example each group hangs coats and settles at desks before the next group comes in. If you have a TA, they can oversee an activity, for example stretching exercises, to calm the students queuing outside.

This may sound like work, but once a system is established, you will be surprised at how quickly children fall into a routine, and appreciate it! Although it may take a little longer to get everyone into the classroom, you will create an atmosphere that is calmer, with children that are more settled and ready to learn. This will save a lot of time and reduce the stress caused trying to manage behaviour.

2. Start the afternoon with a good read

A nice way to wind children down is by reading them a story. As with the suggestion above, one of the key aspects of settling children is to set a routine where clear steps and expectations are established. For example, you may have a sign on the door with a book symbol. This means, that before they have even entered the room, they know what will be happening and be ready.

The reading session does not need to be particularly long, you might choose to read one chapter from a book, or a short story related to the theme of your topic. This means that you could move on to for example an engaging starter activity.

3. Set a calm ambiance with dim lights and relaxing music

Dim lighting and calming music (e.g. classical) does have a very real benefit of settling children down, I have seen many teachers use this technique to great effect. It does not only benefit the children; it allows the adults in the room to destress and refocus too!

There are many great (and free) music compilations on YouTube that you can use. Here are just a few of them:

- Healing meditation music with pictures
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rtwjlOQWjJs>
- Relaxing guitar music with sound effects
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qASHqT5O3fw>
- Celtic music with fantasy images
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiqlZZddZEo>

Browse YouTube to find other tracks that you and your children will love.

4: Giving children 'me time'

Giving children a little bit of 'me time' can go a long way. Allow children to find a space and choose a book to read, do a bit of creative writing, or drawing. This encourages independent learning, whilst also creating a calm atmosphere. Letting children choose where to settle also helps, as it provides respite from the usual 'sit at your desk' routine.

Clearly there are other 'me time' activities that you might wish to use.

5: Relaxation exercises

Gentle (or dance) exercise routines such as yoga are great for everyone, including your class! They will allow children to unwind and let go of the excitement of break time. Allowing children to meditate, or directing their thoughts towards serene imagery using a calming, even tone does wonders. There is a wealth of free information and resources online.

Here are a few:

- Fun yoga for kids: 22 positions introduced by a cartoon animal with a special rhyme
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkgSLKib1nY>
- Mindfulness for children: A calming meditation session for children
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEctySiCol0>
- Mindfulness relaxation exercise script
<http://www.meditationinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Mindfulness-Relaxation-Exercise-Script.pdf>

6. Go straight to a warm up activity

It is good to mix up strategies. For example, you may wish to just get children stuck into an engaging, yet not too complex activity that they can do independently while others are settling and you are preparing to teach.

Examples of this include:

- Maths challenge
- Handwriting practice
- Crossword challenge
- Quick quiz (can be related to prior learning)

This approach will settle children into learning mode, and prepare them for the lesson ahead.