

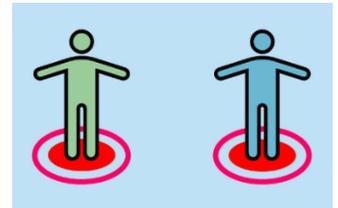
# Relational Games, Up Regulating and Down Regulating Activities

## Social distancing friendly

Authored by:

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It is vital for children and young people's (CYP) emotional wellbeing, to feel connected and in tune with key adults around them. As such, the Resilience Project has developed a list of relational games, emotional up regulating and down regulating activities, for school staff to use to promote connection with a child or young person (CYP). The games can be played whilst following social distancing and government guidelines during the COVID-19 restrictions. School staff can also share these activities with parents/carers, although they may not be restricted to the 2 metre social distancing guidelines. We have included a brief explanation of how to do the activity, and where possible, a link to demonstration videos or further information. We also plan to upload some demonstration videos to the Resilience Project Youtube channel (see end of document). Before suggesting activities it is important to consider the individual needs, abilities and preferences of the child/young person (CYP) you are working with.



### Relational Games

Games and activities that can be played whilst social distancing at 2 meters apart, but still allows adults and CYP to connect and build relationships. The main aim of these types of games is to enjoy being together with a sense of joy and playfulness, it is not about the task itself. The activities require few (if any) resources and can be played either 1:1 between adult and CYP or in groups. These can be played with CYP of any age, however the activities may need to be altered to make it more age appropriate. It is important to consider that for some CYP, their emotional age is often younger than their chronological age (e.g. 14 years old, with an emotional age of 10-11), so some activities will still bring enjoyment, even if they do appear to be emotionally young for some CYP. With any relational game, the adult is always in charge, they set the limits and define clear boundaries in order to keep the CYP safe.



#### 1. Check in

A simple way to get an idea of how a CYP is feeling at the start of the day/session. This is without using a direct question asking 'how are you feeling?', instead using a metaphor. For example; "What animal describes how you are feeling today". The adult always models an answer first, e.g. "*I feel like a bird, because I feel free and relaxed*". Other options can be weather, biscuits, a sound, a gesture, your super power pose, TV or Film character etc. Use curiosity about why they may feel a certain way and acceptance and empathy for what that may feel like for them to help the child feel heard and understood.

## 2. Check out

To use at the end of the day or session to bring it to a positive close. For example; “*What was one kind thing you did for someone today?*” or “*What was something interesting you learnt today?*”, “*What was something you enjoyed from today?*”. Again the adults models first e.g. “*I really enjoyed it when we all sat and had lunch together today?*”. Be prepared for a CYP who cannot give you an answer. You may have to answer for them e.g. “*You looked like you were having fun playing football outside*” or “*you were so helpful helping me tidy up at the end of the day?*”.

## 3. Positive interactions, focusing on students interests

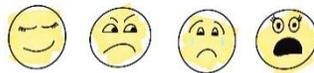
Spend about 2 minutes per student each day creating a positive relationship between the CYP and teacher by finding out their interests. E.g. (favourite film, hobbies after school or weekends, TV programme, game, sports team, music). The adult’s job is to listen more than you talk (think active listening). As the adult, take time to reflect after. How did the student respond to your efforts to get to know them? Has your opinion/view of the student shifted after doing this? This can be repeated with a different topic.

## 4. Transitional objects

Some children in school will have a key adult, and may find it difficult being apart. The key adult could give a small object to the child they work with, such as a bracelet, a shell, a pen, a button. They keep this while they are separated so they still feel connected. This can be done with parent/carers who’s children go to hub schools (e.g. key worker) This could also be made into an activity where you make your own for example, making a bracelet, painting a shell or pebble. This can be kept in their bag or coat, to reduce cross contamination.

## 5. Feelings Hung

Hang feeling face pictures up all around the room. You can print these online, use photos of the children (if consent has been given) or adults making different faces, or have a previous activity when children / young people draw their own. Provide magnifying glasses (if possible) and partners walk around looking for different faces. When they find one, they label the emotion they see in the face (e.g. frustrated) and tell a time they felt that way. Adults should model this first (e.g. “*I think this face is thrilled or excited about something, I felt like that when...*”). Support them in expanding their vocabulary around emotions e.g. instead of just ‘happy’, are they proud, excited, content, relaxed, grateful, delighted, carefree.



## 6. Straight Face Challenge

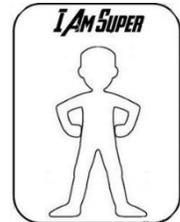
The CYP has to keep a straight face while you try to make them laugh either by making faces or telling silly jokes. If the child feels comfortable, switch places. Adult has to try to keep a straight face while the child tries to make them laugh.

## 7. Mirror game

Start with the adult and CYP facing each other, 2 meters apart. The child creates gestures/movements and the adult copies the moves as if they were the child's mirror. For example, the child could start with holding up a hand in a high five, and slowly moving it around in a circle, the adult copies everything the child does. Swap so the adult makes the movements and the child becomes a mirror.

## 8. Draw your superhero

This quick exercise will help CYP identify inner strengths and other qualities that make them special and powerful. By reflecting on our inner strengths and positive qualities, we can identify our 'inner superhero' and call on them when we are going through challenges. This activity encourages students to come up with their own superhero. They can draw a picture that represents both what their superhero looks like but also what character traits their superhero has inside. The adult could suggest a personal trait they admire about the CYP. This can be done virtually if students create it digitally and add quotes or statements that the superhero might say. The adult can again add their own ideas to the digital copy.



## 9. Special 'handshake'

Make up a special handshake together, taking turns adding new gestures where you keep your distance and don't touch. E.g. air high five, air fist pump. A new gesture can be added each day.

## 10. Quizzes

The relational part of this is making a quiz together. You can research together, come up with topics. You can be the quiz masters together and test other staff members or the rest of the family (video call platforms are brilliant for this).

## 11. Reading and storytelling

Books, short stories or tales. Storytelling is a great way to connect and be with one another in playful way. Afterwards you can ask questions about the story. How did the story make them feel? How did the characters feel? Have you ever felt like the character in the story?



## 12. Zoom-Erk

Sitting in a circle the word "zoom" is passed around the circle quickly. One person can stop the action by making the sound "Erk" (like a braking noise or screeching to a halt). The direction of the word "zoom" reverses and is sent back the way it came. The adult should model the "zoom" and "erk" first.

## 13. Eye Signals

Standing 2 metres apart, face the young person. Use eye signals to indicate direction and number of steps to take, for example; when you wink your left eye twice, both of you should move to the left taking two steps. For older children, you can add signals for forwards and backwards also (head back for backwards, head forward for forwards).

## Emotion Regulating activities

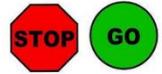
Being connected to a key adult also plays an important role in helping children and young people (CYP) to manage their emotions (regulate). Repeated experiences of adults helping the child to regulate their emotions (co-regulation) enable the child to begin to develop skills in regulating their own emotions. As children get older and reach primary school age, typically they are beginning to understand and regulate their own emotions ('self-regulation'). However, some CYP have not experienced co-regulation with an adult and may struggle to a greater extent to regulate their emotions. They will likely need additional help from adults to 'co-regulate' for longer. We would always advise for these regulating activities to be modelled by an adult alongside the CYP, until they have learnt the skills to 'self-regulate'. The activities have been divided into 'up regulating' (to lift or disperse energy) and 'down' regulating (calming) depending on how the child is presenting, however some activities may apply to both. The aim of both types of regulating activities is to bring CYP back into an emotional state where they more able to engage with learning and social interactions.

### Up regulating activities

These activities are best used when children or young people seem disengaged, bored, withdrawn, low, sad, worried or when they may need to disperse energy before calming. The aim is raise or disperse their energy through fun activities that increases their heart rate slightly.

#### 1. Red light, green light

Ask a CYP to do something, e.g. Run, jump, move arms. Green light means go, red light means stop.



#### 2. Singing and dancing

Put music on and start singing and dancing. Ask the CYP to join in. This can be turned into a different game, by telling the child to freeze when you pause the music.

#### 3. Bike rides

Getting out into green spaces is regulating and allows CYP to get their daily exercise and some fresh air. In schools

#### 4. Band leader

CYP makes musical sounds on household items, adult copies rhythm. This could be trays or boxes, or saucepans if you have access to it. In the house there may be more options e.g. saucepans, frying pans, cake tins.



#### 5. Musical bubbles

Adult sprays bubbles into the air while music is playing. The CYP begins popping the bubbles and when the music stops the CYP stops popping the bubbles. Have them pop the bubble with a particular body part, for example, finger, toe, elbow, shoulder, ear. Change up the game by having them pop them as quickly as they can.

## 6. High intensity exercise

Any type of simple exercise e.g. star jumps, wall push ups. Short bursts of exercise to get their heart racing slightly, even if it for just 10 minutes. You can find some ideas of different exercises you can do in 10 minutes on the NHS website <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/10-minute-workouts/>



## 7. Bean game

Adult shouts a type of bean and both adult and CYP make the gesture/movement for that type of bean (Runner bean = run around, Jumping bean = jump up and down, Jelly bean = wobbly like jelly, Broad bean = stretch out as wide as possible, String bean = stretch out as tall as possible, Frozen bean = Freeze, Chilli Bean = shake and shiver, French bean = shout french phrase e.g. bonjour etc). The CYP can then be the one to call out the type of bean. This could be adapted for older CYP, instead of using types of beans, assign numbers to exercises. E.g. 1 = star jumps, 2 = High knees and so on.

## 8. Water

Have a cold shower, run cold water over hands or splash face with cold water.

## 9. Music

Listen to loud music.

## 10. Awaken the senses

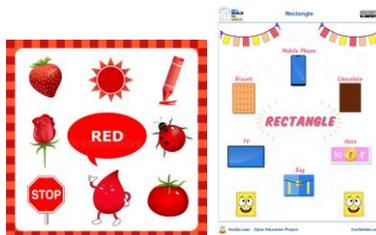
Eat or drink something with a strong taste. You could eat: a lemons /peppermint sweets/spicy food, or smell: citrus oil, perfume. Be aware of allergies / preferences of the CYP.

## 11. Move around

Bounce a ball as fast as you can, or do some stretching.

## 12. Pay attention to your surroundings

Look around the room or take a walk around the school (or house and garden for families) and count as many things of one colour you can see. The same activity can be done with shapes with shapes.



## 13. Visualise

Make a mood board of places you want to visit, or go on holiday. This is where you cut out pictures from magazines, or print pictures from the internet and stick them to A4 or A3 card or paper. You can keep it, and look back at it at times where you are feeling low.



## Down regulating activities

These activities are best used when children or young people are in a high energy state e.g. anxious, excited, hyperactive, annoyed or angry. They aim to slow them down, regulate breathing and try to relax them. Sometimes children will need to do an up regulating activity first to disperse some energy before they can engage in a down regulating activity.



### 1. Making and blowing bubbles

Blowing bubbles is regulating as it helps children to slow down their breathing. Don't be afraid to try it with teenagers. <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-Bubble-Solution>

### 2. Doing arts and crafts

### 3. Nature walks

For school staff, this can just be spending some time in an outdoor area of the school. Families can go out into nature during their one exercise a day.

### 4. Nature hunt

Find a natural object outside (e.g. leaf, stick or something soft, something yellow etc), ask the CYP to bring it back and look at it together noticing all the different colors and shapes in it, get them to feel what textures it feels like, if it makes a sound if you listen to it, does it have a smell? You could make this into a relational activity by creating your own cards with these types of questions on, and then use those for your nature hunt. Or you can purchase packs of cards online at; <https://www.amazon.co.uk/gofindit-outdoor-nature-treasure-families> or <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Mindfulness-Scavenger-Hunt-Kids>



### 5. Hand massage

Adult rubs hand lotion into their own hands slowly in a massage and gets the CYP to copy with their own lotion. Parents can do this by giving their child the hand massage, and allowing the child to do it back.

### 6. Balancing activities

See if you and the CYP can walk from one side of the room to the other on their tip toes. In the house, you could make a path of cushions and see if you and the CYP can get across them. In school, it might be helpful to do the tightrope walk below.



### 7. Tightrope

Have a rope or tape across the room. Have children pretend to walk on the "tightrope" without falling. Once they are comfortable, have them walk sideways, tiptoeing, hopping or backwards for more of a challenge.

## 8. Hide and seek

## 9. Stretches and yoga

The Childline 'Calm Zone' have some great videos for children and young people that demonstrate different yoga activities -

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/#yoga>



## 10. A snack

Eating snacks like crisps, or drinking a warm drink help to regulate and calm. Be aware of allergies / preferences of CYP.

## 11. Hand Breathing

Holding your left palm out in front of you. Start with your right index finger touching the base of your thumb, where it meets your wrist. As you breathe in through your nose, slowly move your right index finger up to the top of your left thumb. At the top, hold your breath for 2-3 seconds. As you breathe out through your mouth, move your right index fingers down the other side of your left thumb. Repeat these steps with each fingers. By the end, you will have moved your right index fingers around the whole outline of your hand.

Here is a demonstration video by Dr Karen Treisman <https://youtu.be/NAIdSdx-jps>



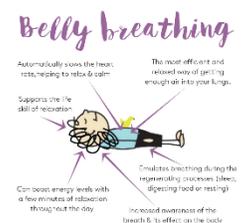
## 12. 5,4,3,2,1 grounding

Take a few minutes to slowly complete this grounding exercise, to help you to be mindful and stay in the present moment. Look for 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 2 things you can taste. Have something ready for the child to drink or eat, as this is regulating in itself.

Here is a demonstration video by Dr Helen Williams from Beacon House <https://youtu.be/bJHupiDtJKA>

## 13. Belly Breathing

The aim here is to become aware of diaphragmatic breathing. This is a deeper, slower breathing which can help the mind and body feel calm and relaxed. As the lungs fill with air it pushes the diaphragm into the belly causing it to rise. It helps to first close your eyes or fix your eyes at a point on the floor. First, place one hand on your belly, right under your ribs. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm moving in and out as you breathe. Place your other one hand on your chest, this will allow you to check that your chest does not rise. Breathe in slowly through your nose. Hold your breath for 3 seconds. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for the count of 5. Repeat 3 times, and then open your eyes when you feel comfortable. This can also be done lying down, placing a bean bag or scrunched ball of paper on your belly, and watching it rise and fall as you breathe.



## 14. Water

Have a warm shower or run warm water over hands.



### 15. Muscle relaxation

Squeeze your hands together into a fist, release and repeat.

### 16. Throwing

Scrunch up paper and throw it against a wall.

### 17. Soothing stroking

Stroke/hold something soft (e.g. a blanket, piece of cotton wool, or teddy).

### 18. Mindful Eating

Eat something as slowly as you can.

### 19. Writing

Write or draw your feelings down on a piece of paper and then rip it up.

### 20. Visualisations

Visualize, or draw, your favourite calming place (real or imaginary).



### 21. Music

Listen to songs that are similar to how you feel - or make a playlist for your mood.

### 22. Running

Run on the spot whilst shouting how you feel.

For more resources and videos, search for 'Cardiff and Vale Resilience Project' on Youtube and subscribe to our channel or follow this link <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCK7a2I3twVLDZuis53tpUoQ>

If you have any other questions you can contact the Resilience Project by email; [resilienceproject.CAV@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:resilienceproject.CAV@wales.nhs.uk) or by contacting the Resilience Worker linked to your school.