

Unit Two
CENTERING
CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

In order to make good choices, a child needs to have a readiness mentally and emotionally. “By age five-most children are able to listen carefully and accurately, follow directions, concentrate on an age-appropriate task, and feel comfortable spending time with friends their own age. These are skills that children need to develop if they are to cope successfully with classroom and school routines. These are also the skills needed to get ready for decision making.”* If a child is not able to focus his or her attention, if he or she changes direction often, and does not listen well, practice may be required in these skills to help the child to get ready to make decisions and become centered and calm.

In *The Science of Mind* (p. 193.5 to 194.3), Ernest Holmes tells us that we need to “understand the true meaning of concentration.” He says “to concentrate means to bring to a center, and in Mental Science it means focusing the mental attention on some definite and desired thought, image, idea or thing.” This month the students will be exploring some techniques designed to help them learn how to concentrate, to focus their attention, and to center themselves in the Mind of God.

POINT - Being able to get centered is an important skill for everyone in today’s world. The ability to focus your mind makes it possible to become calm in the midst of stress and excitement, to eliminate “chaos” that is going on around you so you can evaluate the situation, to prepare yourself for meditation and treatment.

RATIONALE - The ability to get your mind calm and focused is extremely valuable because it helps you to be in control. Then you can explore your alternatives and decide what you want to have happen.

EXAMPLES - The story and activities planned for this month encourage the practice of centering and getting calm. Treatment week is actually a time of meditation that can be very peaceful, thus teaching the children the joys of quiet. Add your own experience and insights to the given suggestions to round out the time.

POINT - Before the students leave each Sunday, be sure you review the point with them again. It is often useful to ask them how they will use it in their lives. This personal application can be more meaningful than all your statements. For example, a student might suggest that he or she get calm before taking a test in school during the upcoming week!

*Teach Your Child Decision Making by John F. Clabby and Maurice J. Elias; Doubleday & Company, Inc.; New York, 1987.

Lesson 5 - Lesson Week

PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION:

Read over the games and bring any props or supplies required, such as pre-recorded tapes. Bring a cassette player.

WELCOME:

Prior to beginning of the service, greet the children as they are dropped off by their parents. Connect with the parents. Be helpful and supportive.

ASSEMBLY: (10-15 minutes) Optional.

CREATIVE GOD-TIME: (15 minutes for Kindergarten, 25 to 30 for lower elementary and 40 for upper elementary grades)

OPENING INFORMATION. Use the PREP model and your own ideas to set the scene for the activity which is games that relate to focusing attention. Through learning how to listen and following directions students will gain insight into the skills required to direct their mental attention toward one thing at a time. Both games are suitable for lower and upper elementary; however, select simpler tasks for your kindergarten and first grade.

BENEDICTION

PEACE SONG: Join the congregation

CENTERING ACTIVITIES

INSTANT REPLAY - “We live in a world of many, and almost constant sounds. We also tend to be attracted by what our eyes can see. Often, when sight and sound are in competition, sound loses out. Try going to a movie and just concentrate on the sound track -- it’s quite a challenge! To help our children be more sensitive to things they hear, Instant Replay can be used.” Basically, it involves stopping the action and asking the child what he or she just heard.

Pre-record or select cassette tapes of music, commercials, news broadcasts, stories, or conversations. Have some be slow, some fast. Some could be very simple and some more complicated.

Explain that you are going to play very short portions of the tapes you prerecorded to the group. Talk about what they need to do to get ready. You want to elicit responses such as: be quiet, pay attention, be still, get your mind ready to hear, etc. Let each student respond to the tape at least once; however, ask the whole class to listen to verify what was heard. If you like, you can create a scorecard and hand out stickers for correct listening. The idea here is to encourage cooperation in becoming a better listener because this helps to focus the mind, not to catch the child in an error.

FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS: Careful thinking happens when a person is able to pay attention to a series of details and decide what to do about them. Learning how to follow directions is useful practice in focusing the mind, paying attention, listening, and being present in an activity. This game is similar to Simon Says. In fact, you can play Simon Says if you like! However, instead of having them do only fast or slow steps after Simon’s command, give them a list of three, four or even five things to do. Tell them they have to stay still and listen to ALL directions before they begin acting them out. Example:

1. Simon Says put your left hand on your head, turn around, and take one medium step backward.
2. Simon Says turn around, jump on both feet, clap your hands, say your name out loud, and take one large step.
3. Put your hands on your shoulders, run in place three times, touch your toes, skip three steps forward.
4. Simon Says touch your right hand to your left knee, take two small baby steps forward.

Any child who does not follow the instructions goes back to the start. Of course, no one should follow instruction #3, because Simon did not say to do it! Littler kids need shorter instructions, bigger kids can do more complicated ones. If students become very “rowdy”, use the next exercise!

GET CALM: This is skill building rather than a game. And it is similar to the activity you will do on Treatment Week to prepare for the meditation. Explain to the children that there are times when all of us become very emotional over a situation. We may be angry, afraid, excited, or unhappy. Our feelings are always valid. However, it is hard to figure out what we want to do about the situation when we are deep in the feelings. The activity called GET CALM can help us by teaching us what to do to settle down and focus our minds.

The steps involved in getting calm are:

1. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly. Do it again if necessary.
2. Look at two or three things in the room and say what they are aloud. This distracts you from your feelings and gives you a little time to think about what has happened.

Divide the group into pairs and choose an A and a B. Have partner A tell of a time when they were very excited, angry, or hurt. Partner B then says, "What would you do now to GET CALM?" Partner A then acts out step 1 and 2 above. Then switch roles and have B tell his/her story and GET CALM.

Lesson 6 - Activity Week

PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION:

12 x 18 piece of colored construction paper for each child. 8 1/2 x 11 piece of white paper for each child. Crayons or markers. A craft knife for the teacher. A pad of newspapers or cutting board. Glue or paste.

WELCOME:

Prior to beginning of the service, greet the children as they are dropped off by their parents. Connect with the parents. Be helpful and supportive.

ASSEMBLY: (10-15 minutes) Optional.

CREATIVE GOD-TIME: (15 minutes for Kindergarten, 25 to 30 for lower elementary and 40 for upper elementary grades)

After discussing the value of being calm, getting centered, and focusing for a few minutes, hand out supplies to the children. Have them decide on an affirmation such as "I am quiet and peaceful" or a Bible verse such as "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalms 46:10). Older students can letter their own white paper, younger students may need assistance. Then decorate as desired. Be sure they leave a border around the words!

The student folds the construction paper in half to make a rectangle that is 9 x 12. Crease the fold. Have each student come to the teacher who will make a frame on one side of the paper with the craft knife. Place the paper on the pad or cutting board. Cut a rectangle about one inch in from the three edges and the fold. Return to the student who will then glue or paste his "saying" onto the back side of the frame.

You now have a framed affirmation that will stand on its own!

BENEDICTION

PEACE SONG: Join the congregation.

Lesson 7 – Story Week

PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION:

Practice the suggested story or select one that you like that relates to becoming calm and centered. Plan props or pictures that support the story time.

WELCOME:

Prior to beginning of the service, greet the children as they are dropped off by their parents. Connect with the parents. Be helpful and supportive.

ASSEMBLY: (10-15 minutes) Optional.

CREATIVE GOD-TIME: (15 minutes for Kindergarten, 25 to 30 for lower elementary and 40 for upper elementary grades)

OPENING INFORMATION. Use the PREP model and your own ideas to set the scene for the story.

Our story today is definitely a teaching story. It might generate examples from the children of times when they were angry, sad, hurt, excited, etc. Plan ways to develop their interest in the WAY that Mrs. Sutton encouraged Ted to get calm.

Use role play, puppets, or pictures to help illustrate the story. Ask your class about other times when they could use this technique. Examine ways that they get calm in order to meditate, study, or go to sleep at night.

BENEDICTION

PEACE SONG: Join the congregation.

TED GETS CALM!
Adapted from a case history in
TEACH YOUR CHILD DECISION MAKING
by Clabby and Elias

Mrs. Sutton was sitting on the sofa in her living room, reading the newspaper. She liked Saturday mornings because the kids were usually out playing and she had time to relax after working all week. It was almost time to start the typical Saturday chores but she knew she had a few more minutes.

Suddenly, the door crashed open and Ted, her son, came stomping into the house. The door slammed and she could hear him sobbing. Mrs. Sutton jumped up to see what the trouble was.

“That Kira -- I hate her!” shouted Ted. “I’d like to kill her!”

“Ted, what happened?” his mother asked him gently.

Ted cried, “I’ll show her! I’m not her friend anymore!”

“Ted, I can’t understand you when you are crying.” Mrs. Sutton composedly led Ted over to the sofa and pushed him down, saying “come over here and take a deep breath. It will help you calm down so I can listen to you...”

“I don’t want to calm down,” yelled Ted. “I’m so mad...” he stomped his feet as he shouted.

“Ted, take a deep breath. Here, watch me do it.” Mrs. Sutton takes a deep breath. “Oh, I can feel myself becoming still. Now you take a deep breath.”

Ted manages a shaky, sobbing breath.

“Good. Take another one. Good!” Mrs. Sutton keeps talking to Ted as he breathes deeply. She can tell that he is collecting himself.

“Now, look around and tell me what you see -- what is that over there?” asks his mother.

“No, I don’t want to,” replies Ted.

“Ted, if you do it, I’ll be able to listen to you.” “Okay. It’s the television,” Ted blurts out.

“And what’s that?” asks Mrs. Sutton. She is trying to distract her son from his anger and help him to have the time to deal with it.

“It’s the newspaper?” says Ted readily.

“Good -- you seem a lot more peaceful now. Okay. Tell me where you were with Kira.” Mrs. Sutton sat back to listen.

Ted told her, “We were in the back yard.” “What happened?” asked Mrs. Sutton.

“Kira’s mean, I hate her!” complained Ted. He was able to say it without crying or yelling.

“What did she do?”

“She didn’t want to get off the swing so I could have a turn....” Ted then told his mother all about the problem with Kira.

After dinner that night, when Ted was helping his Mom with the dishes, Mrs. Sutton talked to him about what she had been teaching him.

“Ted, remember our conversation this morning?” she asked. “Yeah, Mom. Why?”

“What did you notice about what I did to help you tell me what was going on?” Mrs. Sutton inquired.

“Well. You had me take some deep breaths first. I remember that.” Ted said thoughtfully.

“That’s right. I did. Can you remember what else I had you do?”

“Let me think a minute,” said Ted. “Oh. You had me look around the room and tell you about the TV and the newspaper. Why did you do that, Mom?” asked Ted.

“If you think about what happened inside of you when I did that, you might be able to tell me the answer to your question. Think about how you felt,” suggested Mrs. Sutton.

Ted looked puzzled for just a moment. Then he said, “I felt angry at first. When I looked at the TV, though, I stopped feeling that way as much. I guess I had to stop thinking about Kira in order to think about the TV.”

“That’s good, Ted,” his mother replied. “What we did is an exercise that is called, Get Calm! When you take a deep breath, and look around you, it gives you time to think about something besides what has happened. Then you can quiet down.”

“But Mom,” said Ted, “you always tell me it’s okay to have feelings. Why did you have me try to stop feeling them?”

“That’s a good question, Ted,” laughed Mrs. Sutton, “Yes, it is always okay to have feelings. Sometimes, though, our feelings are so strong that they get in the way of us doing anything about the problem. If you can Get Calm!, then you can feel the feelings in a way that helps you figure out what to do next.”

“I get it!” exclaimed Ted. “Even after I was calmer, I still felt angry at Kira. But then I was able to talk to you about it.”

“Right! And when you practice getting calm some more, you will be able to do it on your own,” Ted’s mother said with satisfaction. “Then you can use Get Calm! for other things, too.”

“That’s great, Mom,” Ted said confidently. “Then I’ll be more in charge of myself!”

Lesson 8 - Treatment Week

PRE-SERVICE PREPARATION:

Make copies of the “Mandala Color Page” for each student. Bring crayons, colored pencils, or fine-tipped markers. Select a quiet type of meditation tape and have a cassette player to provide a soft musical background during meditation.

WELCOME:

ASSEMBLY: (10-15 minutes) Optional.

CREATIVE GOD-TIME: (15 minutes for Kindergarten, 25 to 30 for lower elementary and 40 for upper elementary grades)

OPENING INFORMATION: Use the conceptual foundation outline and your own ideas to set the scene for the day. Explain to the class what meditation is and what it is for. In the Glossary (p. 609) of *The Science of Mind*, Ernest Holmes says, “...contemplation or continuous thought. We mean to convey something more -- the recognition of the Father within, the certainty of our Oneness with the Whole, the immediate availability of the Power and Wisdom resulting from this Oneness. Such communion with God brings harmony into our lives and affairs; establishes the law of health and prosperity, and makes us a light to all who cross our pathway.” Describe experiences you have had with meditation.

An interesting process for children is to lead them into quiet through breathing. Start with suggesting that the children breath very quickly (not too long though, they might hyperventilate!) and then ask them when a person breathes that way. The answers are usually when running, afraid, or excited. Then have them breathe normally and ask when they breathe this way. Finally, ask them to breathe very slowly and ask again. Many children will make the connection between breathing slowly and becoming calm.

Next, do the “Mandala Meditation Exercise” by handing each child a coloring page and some crayons, colored pencils or fine-tipped markers. Do some body stretching and then have them sit or lie down. Now have them breathe very slowly as you play soft, meditation music. Do a short guided relaxation if they are still “up”. Remind them to breathe slowly as they color their mandala design.

A VARIATION FOR OLDER STUDENTS: Explain the nature of a mandala -- that it is a symbol that assists meditation. It is usually a circle. Show them some examples of mandala designs from the coloring pages. Then have these students create their own designs during the meditation time.

PEACE SONG: Join the congregation.

MANDALA INFORMATION

From: MANDALA by Jose and Miriam Arguelles Shambala Publications, Inc. Berkeley, California 1972

“A Mandala consists of a series of concentric forms, suggestive of a passage between different dimensions.”

“In Sanskrit Mandala literally means circle and center. Its traditional design often utilizes the circle -- symbol of the cosmos in its entirety -- and the square -- symbol of the earth or of the man-made world.”

“...in Eastern tradition the Mandala is essentially a vehicle for concentrating the mind so that it may pass beyond its usual fetters It symbolizes various levels of awareness within the individual as well as the energy that unifies and heals.”

