**10 ways to calm a class after lunch or recess**

https://truthforteachers.com/10-ways-to-calm-a-class-after-lunch-or-recess/

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**After recess or lunch can be one of the toughest times to transition back into instruction.**

Often the kids are so wound up that it takes 10 minutes (or more) to get everyone ready to learn again, and with the amount of curriculum we need to teach during the school day, that’s 10 minutes we can’t afford to lose!

Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to get students back into learning mode. *The key lies in creating structured, orderly routines and providing engaging, calming tasks that kids are excited to begin tackling.* Here are 10 great tips to help you settle students down after lunch or recess:

**1. Allow only a few students to enter the room at a time.**

Rather than having 30 overexcited students tear into the classroom all at the same time, set a calm, controlled atmosphere right from the moment they step through the door by allowing them to enter and settle down in small batches. Stand in the doorway and let the first 5 kids in, pause for a few seconds while the area around your coat hooks clears out, then let in the next 5 children, and so on. You can have a student helper lead stretching or breathing exercises with the group waiting in line while you focus on getting everyone transitioned inside.

Be careful not to make this a long, drawn-out process, because then you’ll have kids playing around in the hallway AND in the classroom! The idea is to get everyone inside as quickly as possible without having the entire class crowded into a tiny corner of the room hanging up coats all at once.

Alternatively, you could have the whole class enter the room at one time, go straight to their desks to take off coats/hats/mittens/etc, and then walk over to hang up their belongings once all the winter gear is off.

**2. Set a calm ambiance with dim lights and relaxing music.**

The old “lights half on” trick really does help, and playing classical music is a great way to further the calm atmosphere. [Classical music is known to have a calming effect](http://www.dukechronicle.com/articles/2001/10/11/classical-musics-calming-effect-may-help) on kids–and adults. This can be a great way for you to decompress, too! I downloaded a number of classical music songs and organized them in iTunes by tempo so that I had a playlists that ranged from super mellow and relaxing to more upbeat and energizing.

If you need quick song recommendations, check out this post with the [10 best classical music tracks for calm and tranquility](http://www.letsplaykidsmusic.com/10-best-classical-music-tracks-for-calm/), which has YouTube videos embedded so you can just hit play. Of course, you can venture beyond the realm of classical music: you might find jazz, Native American flute music, piano solos, and other instrumental tracks very calming for your students. I love to expose kids to all kinds of genres, and you can make playlists with relaxing songs of any type.

**3. Engage kids in a read-aloud.**

My teachers used to use this strategy when I was in elementary school, and I still remember everyone gathering around the rocking chair, enjoying the special treat of sprawling out on the rug and having a moment to unwind, listen to a story, and maybe even daydream a bit. You may want to read a chapter of a novel per day, or choose classic stories that are known to be very engaging for kids. Try to give kids input on the books you choose–the more interested they are in what you’re reading, the more likely they are to pay attention–and they’ll make sure their peers aren’t preventing them from hearing the story.

**4. Have kids read (or write) independently in different places around the room.**

If you have a D.E.A.R, S.S.R., or other silent reading time built into your reading instruction, after recess is the perfect time to schedule it. Let the kids self-select their books and choose “their spot” in the classroom to read: on the carpet, at a table in the back, on a bean bag, and so on.

It’s helpful to have students stick with the same spot for about a month so you don’t disrupt the calm atmosphere with kids trying to figure out where they’re supposed to sit. This provides a great opportunity for kids to reap the benefits of independent reading, and the element of choice as well as the break from the normal “sit at your desk” expectation creates a routine that kids are often anxious to dive into. A similar option is to have them do journal writing or other silent writing time.

**5. Use GoNoodle brain breaks.**

[GoNoodle](https://www.gonoodle.com/home) is a website that provides very short video brain breaks. These are games and exercises designed for helping kids stay focused and motivated, and they’re free! GoNoodle has an entire section dedicated to calming activities. I recommend doing the same brain break each day for a week so it becomes automatic for students and they can reap the calming benefits instead of focusing on the directions.

**6. Lead students in yoga, breathing, or stretching exercises.**

You can find these within the GoNoodle video collection, or lead them yourself! Having students spend a few moments stretching, [practicing yoga](http://www.pinterest.com/mhkeiger/yoga-in-the-classroom/), taking deep breaths, doing [breathing exercises](http://move-with-me.com/self-regulation/4-breathing-exercises-for-kids-to-empower-calm-and-self-regulate/) or [yoga breathing exercises](http://www.cosmickids.com/five-fun-breathing-practices-for-kids/). [Meditating](http://www.kidsonthecoast.com.au/article/classroom-calming) or directing their thoughts toward particular topics can also be very calming and focusing. Once students get good at this, you can have them take turns leading the exercises.

**7. Do handwriting practice (yes, really!)**

Even if your district doesn’t require handwriting practice, 5 minutes a day can make a difference in students’ legibility and could be a great use of their time while they wait for the class to finish hanging up their coats, getting drinks, and using the bathroom. And if your state standards include legible handwriting, there’s no better time for kids to write than after recess. Practicing handwriting is a slow, repetitive task that requires concentration and helps students slowly adjust back to the quiet energy of the classroom.

**8. Dive right into a warm up activity.**

Transition times tend to expand and fill however many minutes you allow, so I often prefer to give kids 30 seconds to enter the room, hang up their belongings, and start right away on a warm-up activity.  Try to choose tasks that are not too complex (as students will need to be able to work independently while you get everyone settled down and prepare to start teaching), but do select activities that require some level of focus.

You might choose vocabulary building exercises, a simple math game, or practice problems similar to ones students learned how to complete the day before. I find it helpful to give similar warm-up tasks each day for several weeks so that students get used to the format and know exactly what’s expected. The idea is to help kids switch back into learning mode and prime their brains for the next lesson you’ll be teaching.

**9. Call the quietest group to go to the water fountain first.**

Kids love going to the water fountain and they’re usually thirsty after recess, so establish a routine in which kids complete a warm-up activity and the quietest table is called to get drinks first.

If the class is especially rambunctious, resist the urge to nag or threaten, and up the ante a bit by approaching it like a game in which getting called to get drinks is the prize: “I wonder which team will be the first to get drinks today? Team 1 is all sitting down, they’re getting their pencils out for the warm up, it could be them! Oh, but wait! Team 2 is also all in place! Team 3 has only one person they’re waiting for…oh, this is going to be a close one today!”

Keep the hype going even after you called the first team: “Now, let’s see which team is going to be next … I see a lot of people following directions, so it’s going to be awfully tough for me to decide!” No child wants to be the person that causes their team to lose because they were off-task, so this technique tends to be really effective.

**10. Let kids doodle while listening to audio content.**

This is a great special incentive to use on hectic days right before long weekends, holiday breaks, and so on. More than just a relaxing activity, [doodling is proven to increase concentration, memory, and focus](http://online.wsj.com/articles/the-power-of-the-doodle-improve-your-focus-and-memory-1406675744), and giving your students a few minutes to doodle or draw anything they want can be a great calming activity after recess. Play some soft music if you like, or, make the task more academic by having students doodle while listening to audio content that is related to your lesson.

Many textbooks and curriculum series come with CDs or MP3 downloads that read the text aloud: play a section of the recording that reviews yesterday’s lesson or introduces students to today’s topic, and then begin your lesson by asking questions about what students heard. You can also play podcasts, web clips, radio interviews, or any other media form that’s relevant to your subject area.