

# Brain Breaks: Zoom Edition

Activities for generating Positive Emotions and enhancing Positive Relationships through online interactions.



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# The Benefits of Brain Breaks

The Institute of Positive Education has been collating, adapting and writing brain breaks for a number of years. We passionately believe in the benefits of this teaching and learning strategy and hope the suggested activities below are of benefit during this period of remote or online learning.

Studies over the last 20 years have shown promising results, suggesting brain breaks have multiple benefits for student learning. These benefits include improved cognitive functioning, increased motivation and ability to sustain focus for academic work.

By providing students with a social and fun break in a lesson, there is an increased opportunity and a new context for strengthening student-student and teacher-student relationships. Brain breaks alter the classroom climate by introducing a new collective action. Such activities have been shown to increase students' positive emotions and enjoyment within the classroom.

Brain breaks only take up small amount of lesson time yet the benefits are immediately apparent. We've summarised the science behind some of these benefits below.

## The Benefits of Movement

There are many benefits related to the physical aspects involved in some of our brain breaks. Research shows that periodical physical activity breaks can enhance student learning and behaviour. Energiser activities can also increase blood flow and epinephrine levels among drowsy learners, and reduce student restlessness.

Movement can be an effective cognitive strategy that reinforces learning, enhances memory and retrieval, and improves students' motivation and morale. When we exercise, we're causing the brain to fire signals along the same network of cells involved in cognitive functions, which solidifies their connections.

## Building Rapport and Co-Regulation

Teachers play a pivotal role in establishing a positive classroom environment that contributes to students' social, emotional and academic growth.

As teachers, we are acutely aware of the importance of developing constructive student-teacher relationships. Studies have shown that forming strong and supportive relationships with students has a positive impact on their feelings of safety and security at school, and results in increased feelings of competence, positive connections with peers, and greater academic gains. However, teacher-student conflict in younger years can have a negative impact on student achievement up to seven years later.

Research shows that there are positive reciprocal links between teachers' and students' enjoyment, and that these links are mediated by teachers' and students' observations of each other's classroom behaviours. Therefore, taking part in shared positive experiences, such as our escalating and positively priming brain breaks, can enhance positive connections between teachers and students.

Teachers also have an important role to play in co-regulating the class. Responsive brain breaks build upon relational interactions. Engaging students in short activities that develop teamwork, empathy and interaction also support classroom behaviour systems. As leaders, teachers are constantly demonstrating how to handle stress and adversity. Responding to off-task cues by introducing brain breaks is an act of co-regulation that builds a classroom climate for learning.



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# The Benefits of Brain Breaks

## Humour

Students feel they belong in school when teachers express involvement and warmth and using humour can be an effective way to facilitate this.

A number of our brain breaks utilise affiliative humour, which involves joking around and laughing with others or telling amusing stories in an effort to enhance relationships. This form of humour is positively correlated with high self-esteem, cheerfulness and psychological wellbeing, and negatively correlated with anxiety and depression.

Using humour in the classroom is an important way to produce a healthy classroom climate and to help teachers to connect with their students, which is essential for student learning and enjoyment. As such, the use of humour in educational settings can also be an effective classroom management tool, fostering student engagement, improving motivation, and encouraging on-task behaviours and academic success.

Our ability to think is highly dependent on our emotional state. This means eliciting positive emotions through enjoyable activities, games and humour can have a positive impact on student learning. In addition, humour helps teachers to deal with the inherent stressors of the profession.

Research in the field of psychology suggests that, for many adolescents, humour can serve as a coping style or a defence strategy to ease psychological distress and improve wellbeing. Therefore, using humour in the classroom as a coping mechanism may help students to handle feelings of stress. In addition, humour has been shown to have a measurable positive impact on one's physical health.

We hope that the following ideas support your use of brain breaks while teaching remotely. For additional brain breaks resources, please see our online shop and our PEEC website.

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# One, Two, Three Three – Aghh!



Energy: Low  
Equipment: None  
Duration: 3 minutes

Have a laugh with these two Zoom variations on a time-tested classic from our first Brain Breaks book.

Place students in 'Gallery' view and ask them to close their eyes. Any student can begin this brain break by calling out 'one'. Another student must then call out 'two' and so on in numerical order until all students have called out a number. If two students call out the same number at the same time, the count resets and the game begins again.

This brain break can also be played by using the 'chat' function, with students quickly typing a number in the chat box.



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# Story Savouring



Energy: Low  
Equipment: None  
Duration: 4-6 minutes

Research shows the many benefits of savouring. Enjoy this brand new brain break with both students and colleagues as you spend time reminiscing.

Ask students to close their eyes and recall a memory that sparks joy. Place students into breakout groups of 2-3, giving them a couple of minutes each to share their memory.

Encourage participants to share when the event happened, who was there, what occurred and why this memory brings them joy.



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# What Do You Look Like When?



Energy: Low  
Equipment: None  
Duration: 3 minutes

This brain break harnesses the power of affiliative humour. Have a laugh with this activity from our original Brain Breaks book.

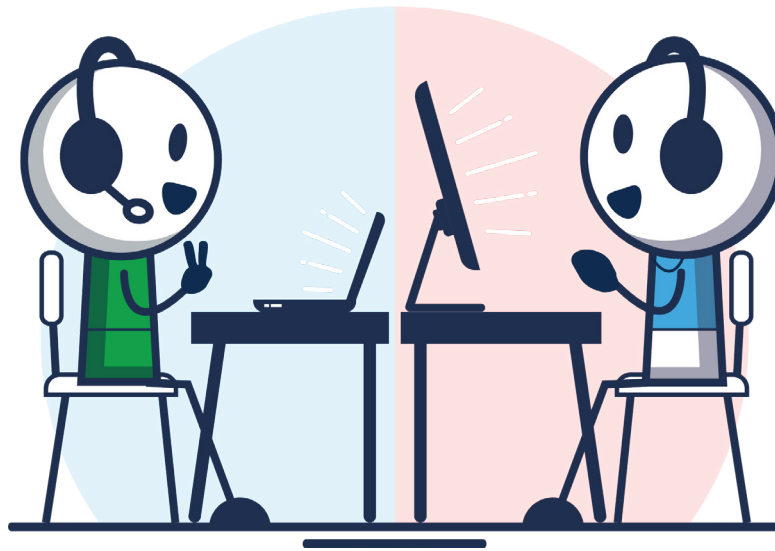
Place your class in 'Gallery' view and ask students to sit side-on to their screens. Ask students to express their reactions physically using the phrase: 'What do you look like when...' E.g. 'What do you look like when it's Friday afternoon?'

After two seconds of silence, as a moment of facial preparation, each student faces the screen with their best facial expression depicting their reaction to the scenario described.



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# Paper, Scissors, Rock!



Energy: Low  
Equipment: None  
Duration: 3 minutes

Have a laugh with this Zoom version of a popular playground game.

Place your class in 'Gallery' view and ask students secretly choose a competitor for each round of this game.

Initiate each round by calling out the actions, 'paper, scissors, rock!' Upon hearing 'rock', students show their desired symbol and see if they beat their secret opponent.

If appropriate, have a few students share who they were competing against at the end of this brain break.



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# Air Karaoke!



Energy: Medium  
Equipment: None  
Duration: 3 minutes

Bond together as a group through music with this fun brain break.

Place your class in 'Gallery' view and mute everyone's microphones.

Encourage your students to activate their character strengths of Bravery, Open-Mindedness and Creativity!

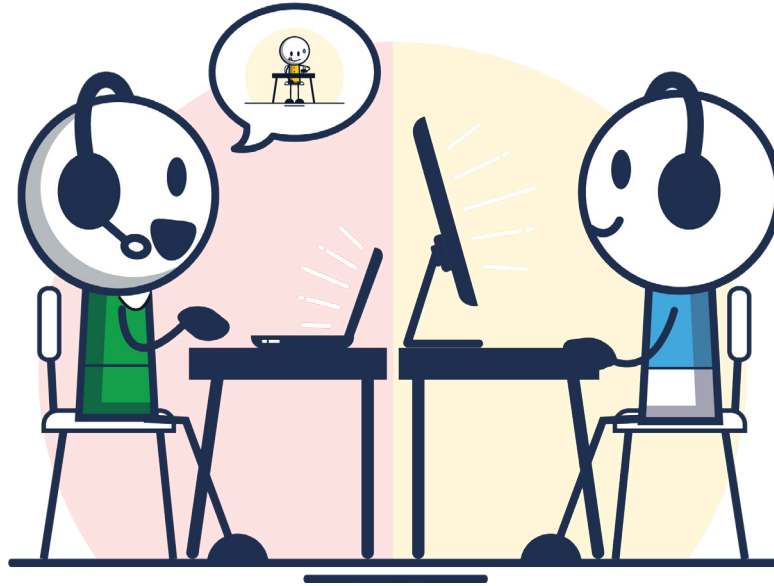
Play a fun and familiar tune and encourage everyone to dance, mime a musical instrument or sing their own karaoke version of the song, while muted.



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# Character Strength Bingo



Energy: Low  
Equipment: Bingo cards  
Duration: 5+ minutes

*Heartfelt thanks to our friends at Saigon South International School who gave us permission to share this activity with you.*

Ask students to write nine character strengths in the grid provided. Place students in breakout groups of three or more. Once in a breakout room, students take turns to share one of their signature strengths and an example of how they have used this character strength in their life.

After a given period of time, students return to the main session and then enter a new breakout group.

While in each group, students can cross out up to three strengths off their bingo card mentioned by others in their group. Type 'BINGO!' in the chat between breakout groups to indicate you have won.

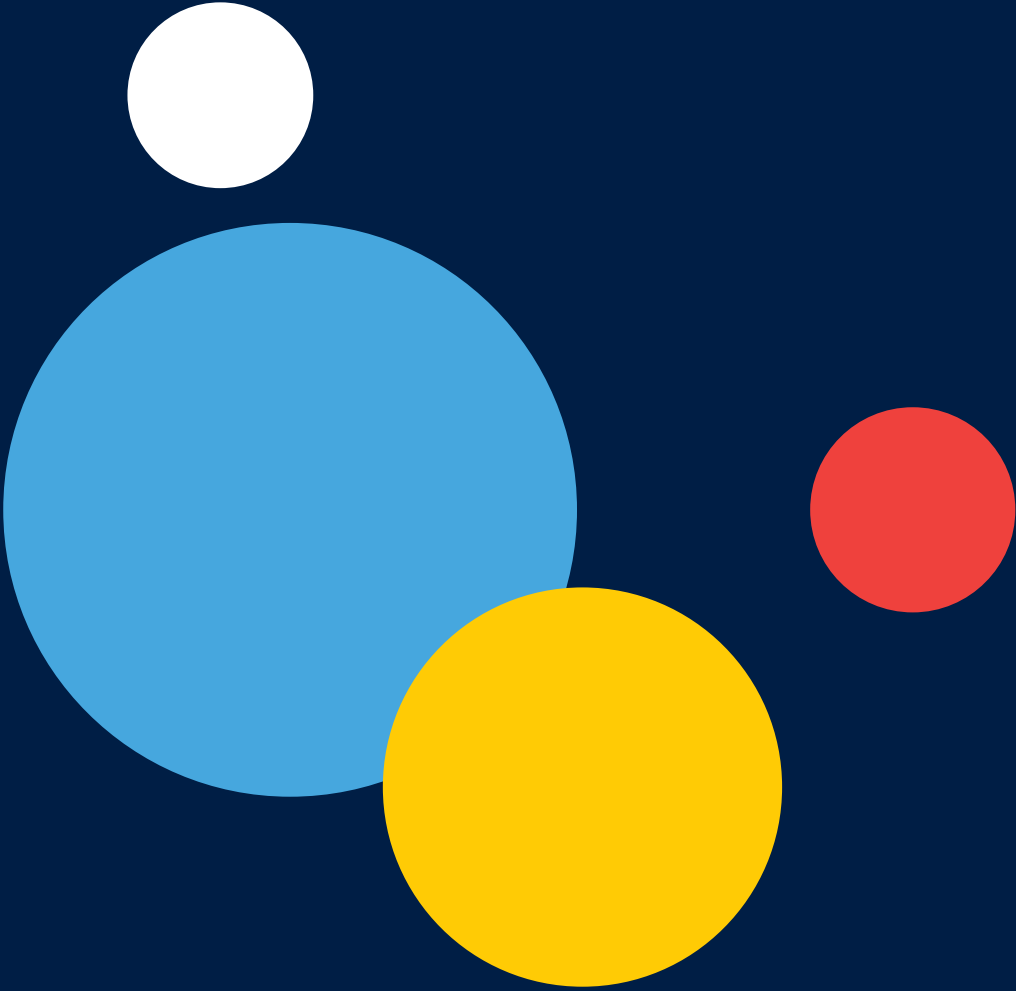


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# Character Strengths Bingo




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