



Movement and Mental Health

Three lessons on what five minutes of movement does, and how to keep doing it. This page is the whole series in one view.

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3
What happens	The science, and everyone writes a prediction.	Five minutes of movement, measured before and after.	They design four weeks, and mark each other's.
Print	Page 3, one per student	One of pages 7 to 9, plus page 10	Pages 12 and 13
Buy	Nothing	Nothing	Nothing
Prep time	Five minutes	Ten minutes, plus the room	Five minutes

Why the order matters. Lesson one ends with a written prediction and lesson two tests it, so the lessons only work in order and students have to keep the same sheet across all three. Leaving a fortnight between them is fine; skipping lesson one is not.

What to do, and when

When	What
Any time before	Read page 6 and check the four questions against your own class list. That is the whole preparation for lesson one.
The day before lesson 2	Print spare lesson sheets from page 3, and the method cards on pages 7 to 9. Ten minutes.
Five minutes before lesson 2	Bags under desks, chairs pushed in. Every student needs one step of clear floor and nothing else.
After lesson 3	Photocopy the plans that pass all four tests and hand the set back. One photocopy.

Before you start any of it. This series stays on movement, mood and focus. It is not about how sporty anybody is, nobody is ranked, and no number leaves a student's own sheet. It never presents movement as a treatment for mental illness. Slide 10 of lesson one says all of that to the class, in plain words, before anybody measures anything.



What five minutes actually does

Everything you need for this lesson is on this page.

Before you start. Keep this on movement, mood and focus. It is not about how sporty anybody is, and it never offers movement as a treatment for mental illness. Slide 10 says both of those to the class. If a student raises something heavier, speak to them after.

Print this

Page	What it is	How many
Page 3	The lesson sheet	One per student. It is used in all three lessons, so they keep it.

The hour

Time	What happens	Slides
0 to 4	Pairs rank six things by how awake each one would leave them.	3
4 to 7	Two pairs who disagree explain themselves. Nothing gets settled yet.	4
7 to 10	The science, then the two versions of one morning.	5 to 6
10 to 16	Trace the still morning, the class predicts the other line, then the reveal.	7 to 9
16 to 21	Be the researcher. In pairs they predict a real study's result.	10
21 to 27	The two studies: what happened, and how long it lasted.	11 to 12
27 to 31	Where the evidence is mixed, and the discussion that comes out of it.	13
31 to 33	What this is about. Say it as written.	14
33 to 39	The two numbers, then everybody takes a resting pulse and a focus score.	15 to 16
39 to 43	They write the prediction. This is the thing lesson two tests.	17
43 to 47	Two things that catch people out, then what happens next lesson.	18 to 19
47 to 50	The one thing, and close. Slide 22 is the reference list, for you.	20 to 22

Taking a pulse, if you have never taught it

- Two fingers on the inside of the wrist, on the thumb side. Not the thumb itself, which has a pulse of its own, and not the neck.
- Count for fifteen seconds and multiply by four. Fifteen seconds is short enough that nobody loses count.

About the science. A single burst of movement raises heart rate and blood flow to the brain and releases the neurotransmitters attention depends on. The effect on mood and attention is measurable within minutes and typically fades over the following hour or two. That is the whole claim this series makes, and it is the one the class is about to test.





The lesson sheet

Keep this. You need the same one in all three lessons.

Part one: your starting numbers · lesson 1

Sitting down, quiet. Two fingers on your wrist, count for fifteen seconds, multiply by four.

	A · before	B · straight after	C · ten minutes later
Pulse, beats per minute			
Focus, out of ten			
One word for how you feel			

Which option did you pick in lesson two? Bursts ☐ Strength ☐ Stretch and breathe ☐

Part two: your prediction · written in lesson 1

Numbers, not words. You wrote these before you had measured anything.

Straight after five minutes, my pulse will be _____

Straight after five minutes, my focus will be _____

Ten minutes after that, my focus will be _____

Part three: after you have measured · lesson 2

How far out was your prediction, and in which direction?

Which of your three numbers surprised you most?



Test it on this room

Five minutes of movement, measured three times.

Read page 6 first. This is the lesson where a student can get hurt or humiliated, so page 6 is not optional reading. Check your own class list before the bell rather than asking the room on the day.

Print these

Page	What it is	How many
Pages 7, 8, 9	Method cards for the three options	Four copies of each page, cut up. One card per table.
Page 3	Spare lesson sheets	A few, for anyone who has lost theirs
Page 10	The class tally	One, for you. It is what goes on the board.

The hour

Time	What happens	Slides
0 to 2	The two numbers and the prediction, back up on the board.	3
2 to 5	Safety, and who is sitting this one out. Neither is negotiable.	4
5 to 8	Column A. Resting pulse and focus score, in silence.	5
8 to 11	They pick one of three and read the card on the table.	6 to 7
11 to 16	Five minutes of movement. You time it and you call the stop.	8
16 to 18	Column B, immediately, before anybody talks.	9
18 to 26	The class tally on the board, then how it compares to their predictions.	10 to 11
26 to 30	How this room compares to the study they saw last week.	12
30 to 32	Column C. Ten minutes have now passed since they stopped.	13
32 to 35	Back to the graph. Their three numbers on the line from lesson one.	14
35 to 41	What the numbers do not say, then the only question that matters.	15 to 16
41 to 45	Next lesson, the one thing, and close.	17 to 19

Why the ten minutes matter. Ten real minutes have to pass between column B and column C, which is why the class tally sits between them. Do not shorten it. The gap between a pulse that has gone back to normal and a focus score that has not is the finding the whole series rests on.





The three options, in full

Students pick one. All three run at the same time, in the same room.

What each one is

Option	What they do	Who picks it
Bursts	Sixty seconds on, ten seconds off, four times. Marching on the spot, star jumps, or fast feet.	Most of the room. It raises the pulse fastest, which makes the numbers obvious.
Strength	Three sets: eight wall press-ups, eight chair squats, twelve calf raises. Slow and controlled.	Students who would rather not be jumping in front of people.
Stretch and breathe	Four long stretches, held for twenty seconds each, with four slow breaths between them.	Anyone who is anxious about the whole idea, and anyone staying seated.

If most of them pick the quiet one. Stretch and breathe raises the pulse far less than the other two, and that is a result rather than a problem. Its focus score usually moves as much as the others do, which is the more interesting half of the finding. Say that out loud if the room starts treating it as the easy option.

The seated version of every step

Instead of	Seated
Marching or star jumps	Fast alternating arm punches, or marching the feet while sitting.
Wall press-ups	Press the palms hard together in front of the chest, eight times, five seconds each.
Chair squats	Push down through the arms to lift slightly off the seat, then lower slowly.
Calf raises	Lift both heels off the floor with the feet flat, then lower. Twelve times.
Standing stretches	Every stretch on the card already works sitting down. Nothing changes.

Say this clearly when you set it. Put the seated version on the board rather than offering it quietly to one student. It is on the method cards for exactly this reason. A student who has to ask for it in front of the room will do the standing version instead and you will not find out why.



Safety, and who sits out

Ten minutes of checking, done before the lesson rather than during it.

Do this before the lesson, not in it. Check your own class list against the four questions below before the bell. Asking a room of fourteen-year-olds whether anybody has a heart condition, in front of everybody, is not a safeguarding check. It is a reason for a student to say nothing.

Four questions to have answered before you start

Question	What to do about it
Who has asthma?	Inhaler with them, not in a bag in a locker. Bursts is not the option for anyone whose asthma is triggered by exercise.
Who has an injury, or is recovering from one?	Stretch and breathe, or the seated version, decided with them beforehand rather than in front of the class.
Who has a heart condition, or has been told to avoid exertion?	They record the class numbers instead. That is a real job in this lesson and it is on slide 4.
Who would find this humiliating?	You will usually know. Offer them the tally sheet on page 10 before the lesson, not after they have refused.

During the five minutes

- Watch rather than join in. You are the only person who will notice somebody going pale or stopping and pretending not to have.
- Call the halfway point out loud. Some students will have started far too hard and it gives them a place to ease off.
- Stop anybody who is competing with the person next to them. The instruction is moderate, and moderate is on the slide.
- If a student stops, that is the end of it for them. Do not ask why in front of anybody.

Where the numbers go. Nothing on the sheet is collected, marked or entered anywhere, and the deck says so twice. The class tally on page 10 records bands and totals, never names. If a student wants their own numbers left out of the tally entirely, that is fine and costs the lesson nothing.





Method cards: bursts

Four to a sheet. Print four copies and cut them up. One card per table.



Bursts

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Sixty seconds of marching on the spot, knees high.
Sitting: march your feet, and punch your arms fast.
2. Ten seconds off. Shake your arms out.
3. Sixty seconds of star jumps, or fast feet on the spot.
Sitting: fast alternating arm punches.
4. Ten seconds off. Breathe.
5. Repeat both of those once more. Four minutes of work in all.
6. Slow down if you need to. Stopping early is the only thing that spoils it.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Bursts

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Sixty seconds of marching on the spot, knees high.
Sitting: march your feet, and punch your arms fast.
2. Ten seconds off. Shake your arms out.
3. Sixty seconds of star jumps, or fast feet on the spot.
Sitting: fast alternating arm punches.
4. Ten seconds off. Breathe.
5. Repeat both of those once more. Four minutes of work in all.
6. Slow down if you need to. Stopping early is the only thing that spoils it.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Bursts

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Sixty seconds of marching on the spot, knees high.
Sitting: march your feet, and punch your arms fast.
2. Ten seconds off. Shake your arms out.
3. Sixty seconds of star jumps, or fast feet on the spot.
Sitting: fast alternating arm punches.
4. Ten seconds off. Breathe.
5. Repeat both of those once more. Four minutes of work in all.
6. Slow down if you need to. Stopping early is the only thing that spoils it.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Bursts

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Sixty seconds of marching on the spot, knees high.
Sitting: march your feet, and punch your arms fast.
2. Ten seconds off. Shake your arms out.
3. Sixty seconds of star jumps, or fast feet on the spot.
Sitting: fast alternating arm punches.
4. Ten seconds off. Breathe.
5. Repeat both of those once more. Four minutes of work in all.
6. Slow down if you need to. Stopping early is the only thing that spoils it.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.





Method cards: strength

Four to a sheet. Print four copies and cut them up. One card per table.



Strength

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Eight wall press-ups. Hands flat on the wall, elbows bend slowly.
Sitting: press your palms together hard in front of you, five seconds each.
2. Eight chair squats. Stand up, sit down, no hands.
Sitting: push down through your arms and lift slightly off the seat.
3. Twelve calf raises. Heels up, then down slowly.
Sitting: feet flat, lift both heels, then lower.
4. Rest for twenty seconds. Count it.
5. Do the whole set twice more. Three sets in all.
6. Slow is the point. Fast press-ups are easier and do less.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Strength

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Eight wall press-ups. Hands flat on the wall, elbows bend slowly.
Sitting: press your palms together hard in front of you, five seconds each.
2. Eight chair squats. Stand up, sit down, no hands.
Sitting: push down through your arms and lift slightly off the seat.
3. Twelve calf raises. Heels up, then down slowly.
Sitting: feet flat, lift both heels, then lower.
4. Rest for twenty seconds. Count it.
5. Do the whole set twice more. Three sets in all.
6. Slow is the point. Fast press-ups are easier and do less.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Strength

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Eight wall press-ups. Hands flat on the wall, elbows bend slowly.
Sitting: press your palms together hard in front of you, five seconds each.
2. Eight chair squats. Stand up, sit down, no hands.
Sitting: push down through your arms and lift slightly off the seat.
3. Twelve calf raises. Heels up, then down slowly.
Sitting: feet flat, lift both heels, then lower.
4. Rest for twenty seconds. Count it.
5. Do the whole set twice more. Three sets in all.
6. Slow is the point. Fast press-ups are easier and do less.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Strength

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Eight wall press-ups. Hands flat on the wall, elbows bend slowly.
Sitting: press your palms together hard in front of you, five seconds each.
2. Eight chair squats. Stand up, sit down, no hands.
Sitting: push down through your arms and lift slightly off the seat.
3. Twelve calf raises. Heels up, then down slowly.
Sitting: feet flat, lift both heels, then lower.
4. Rest for twenty seconds. Count it.
5. Do the whole set twice more. Three sets in all.
6. Slow is the point. Fast press-ups are easier and do less.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.





Method cards: stretch and breathe

Four to a sheet. Print four copies and cut them up. One card per table.



Stretch and breathe

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Reach both arms straight up. Hold for twenty seconds.
Works exactly the same sitting down.
2. Four slow breaths. In for four, out for six.
3. Reach one arm across your chest, then the other. Twenty seconds each.
4. Four slow breaths again.
5. Roll your shoulders back ten times, then forward ten times.
6. Last one: stand tall, or sit tall, and take four more slow breaths.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Stretch and breathe

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Reach both arms straight up. Hold for twenty seconds.
Works exactly the same sitting down.
2. Four slow breaths. In for four, out for six.
3. Reach one arm across your chest, then the other. Twenty seconds each.
4. Four slow breaths again.
5. Roll your shoulders back ten times, then forward ten times.
6. Last one: stand tall, or sit tall, and take four more slow breaths.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Stretch and breathe

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Reach both arms straight up. Hold for twenty seconds.
Works exactly the same sitting down.
2. Four slow breaths. In for four, out for six.
3. Reach one arm across your chest, then the other. Twenty seconds each.
4. Four slow breaths again.
5. Roll your shoulders back ten times, then forward ten times.
6. Last one: stand tall, or sit tall, and take four more slow breaths.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.



Stretch and breathe

FIVE MINUTES · YOUR OWN CHAIR

1. Reach both arms straight up. Hold for twenty seconds.
Works exactly the same sitting down.
2. Four slow breaths. In for four, out for six.
3. Reach one arm across your chest, then the other. Twenty seconds each.
4. Four slow breaths again.
5. Roll your shoulders back ten times, then forward ten times.
6. Last one: stand tall, or sit tall, and take four more slow breaths.

Stop and sit down if anything hurts.





The class tally

One, for you. Bands and totals only. No names go on this sheet or on the board.

Pulse change, beats per minute

Under 10	10 to 25	25 to 40	More than 40

Focus change, points out of ten

Went down	No change	Up 1	Up 2 to 3	Up more than 3

Ten minutes later, focus compared with column A

Back to where it started	Still above it	Below it

What to point at. The middle band is the one to say out loud. In most classes the pulse is back to normal within ten minutes and the focus score is not, and that difference is the finding the series is built on.





The one you would actually do

They write four weeks, and somebody else marks it.

Print these

Page	What it is	How many
Page 12	The four-week plan card	One per student, cut up. This is the homework.
Page 13	The marking slip	One per student, cut up.

The hour

Time	What happens	Slides
0 to 2	What the room measured a fortnight ago, in three lines.	3
2 to 5	Why four weeks and not one session. The evidence for keeping it going.	4
5 to 8	The four tests. They write them down.	5
8 to 12	Mark a deliberately hopeless plan together, against all four.	6
12 to 14	What growing slowly actually looks like across four weeks.	7
14 to 22	They write their own plan on the card.	8
22 to 29	Cards pass two tables along and get marked against the four tests.	9
29 to 33	Cards back. What did the room miss, and whose change is worth taking?	10
33 to 36	If, then. The one sentence that predicts whether any of it happens.	11
36 to 41	The class collection, then the honest slide about stopping.	12 to 13
41 to 48	Back to their first prediction, then the exit slip.	14 to 15
48 to 55	The one thing, and close.	16 to 17

The four tests, and why each one is there

Test	What it catches
Small enough	Plans that need more than ten minutes. These stop the first week something goes wrong.
Attached to something	Plans that rely on remembering. An existing habit is a far better cue than intention.
Nothing to get	Plans that need kit, money, travel or another person. Every one of those is a reason not to.
Works on a bad day	Plans written by the version of you that feels fine today, for the version that will not.

The class collection. Photocopy the plans that pass all four and hand the set back the following week. It costs one photocopy and it is the only part of these three lessons that leaves the room.





The four-week plan card

Four to a sheet. One per student, cut up. This card is the homework.



My four weeks

NAME _____

What it is

When exactly? Which days, and after what?

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____

Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

If _____ , then _____



My four weeks

NAME _____

What it is

When exactly? Which days, and after what?

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____

Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

If _____ , then _____



My four weeks

NAME _____

What it is

When exactly? Which days, and after what?

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____

Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

If _____ , then _____



My four weeks

NAME _____

What it is

When exactly? Which days, and after what?

Week 1 _____ Week 2 _____

Week 3 _____ Week 4 _____

If _____ , then _____





The marking slip

Six to a sheet. One per student, cut up. You are marking the plan, not the person.

Marking somebody else's plan

Whose plan: _____

Small enough ☐ Attached to something ☐

Nothing to get ☐ Works on a bad day ☐

The one change that would get it past the test it failed

Would you do this plan? Be honest.

Marking somebody else's plan

Whose plan: _____

Small enough ☐ Attached to something ☐

Nothing to get ☐ Works on a bad day ☐

The one change that would get it past the test it failed

Would you do this plan? Be honest.

Marking somebody else's plan

Whose plan: _____

Small enough ☐ Attached to something ☐

Nothing to get ☐ Works on a bad day ☐

The one change that would get it past the test it failed

Would you do this plan? Be honest.

Marking somebody else's plan

Whose plan: _____

Small enough ☐ Attached to something ☐

Nothing to get ☐ Works on a bad day ☐

The one change that would get it past the test it failed

Would you do this plan? Be honest.

Marking somebody else's plan

Whose plan: _____

Small enough ☐ Attached to something ☐

Nothing to get ☐ Works on a bad day ☐

The one change that would get it past the test it failed

Would you do this plan? Be honest.

Marking somebody else's plan

Whose plan: _____

Small enough ☐ Attached to something ☐

Nothing to get ☐ Works on a bad day ☐

The one change that would get it past the test it failed

Would you do this plan? Be honest.





References

Every figure quoted to the class comes from one of these four. Nothing is rounded up and nothing is inferred beyond what the study reports.

Where each one is used

Used on	Study
Lesson 1, slides 10 and 11. Lesson 2, slide 12.	Xiao, X. (2026). Acute effects of a single recess physical activity session on sustained attention among junior high school students: a randomized controlled trial based on in-class task performance. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 17, 1781997.
Lesson 1, slide 12.	Pontifex, M. B., Saliba, B. J., Raine, L. B., Picchietti, D. L. & Hillman, C. H. (2013). Exercise improves behavioral, neurocognitive, and scholastic performance in children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder. <i>The Journal of Pediatrics</i> , 162(3), 543-551.
Lesson 1, slide 13.	Reyes-Amigo, T. et al. (2025). Effectiveness of school-based active breaks on classroom behavior, executive functions and physical fitness in children and adolescents: a systematic review. <i>Frontiers in Public Health</i> , 13, 1469998.
Lesson 3, slide 4.	Recchia, F., Bernal, J. D. K., Fong, D. Y. et al. (2023). Physical activity interventions to alleviate depressive symptoms in children and adolescents: a systematic review and meta-analysis. <i>JAMA Pediatrics</i> , 177(2), 132-140.

One note on the fourth study. The Recchia meta-analysis is the one to handle carefully. It reports that movement programmes reduced depressive symptoms while they were running, that the effect was larger in students aged thirteen and over, and that the difference had gone at follow-up once the programmes stopped. Lesson three uses the first and third of those to argue for a plan. It does not, anywhere, present movement as a treatment, and neither should you.