

# Relaxation in the Classroom



Primary Schools



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“ After lunch we usually do it and it calms everyone down and it really makes me feel a lot more calmer because I always just like run around a lot . . . I feel like I can like sit down and work again. ”  
 - Pupil

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“ By talking to the pupils very early on about the importance of relaxation, even if not all of them would have gained from it, at least a few would be thinking more about their wellbeing and the need for, if it's not relaxation, another way of looking after one's own wellbeing. ”  
 - Teacher

# Introduction to Relaxation

## What are relaxation based wellbeing skills ?

These are techniques that can help us to feel calmer, less stressed and less anxious. They are processes that help reduce the impact of stress on your mind and body and can help you to cope better with life overall. These techniques have been shown to have positive health benefits such as

- reducing heart rates
- reducing the production of the “stress hormone” cortisol feeling more confident
- reducing blood pressure
- improving concentration and mood
- better sleeping patterns.

“ It's nice to have a bit of time to just be grounded. ”  
 - Pupil

## Why utilise these techniques in schools?

Providing periodic relaxation training to children would provide support in coping with their everyday problems to avoid more severe problems in the future (Lohaus & Klein-Hessling, 2003).

## How to use this manual

In this programme, you will be delivering a relaxation exercise to your class everyday for 5 minutes (ideally the same time each day), with the same group of pupils. The activities in this manual are divided into 2 parts; deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation. When introducing this programme to your pupils, the first week should focus on deep breathing and the second week on progressive muscle relaxation. The activities should continue to be alternated in this way i.e. one week focused on deep breathing and the next on progressive muscle relaxation. Please ensure that only the activities outlined in each section of the manual are followed.

In addition, you may wish to consider the following:

- Mental health can be an emotive subject which can stir up strong feelings for pupils.
- At the start of the activities, communicate to your class any available people in your school that they can speak to and remind them of the support options available.
- We strongly recommend that you establish ground rules around respectful listening and confidentiality with the class, prior to delivering the sessions. You may wish to create a poster so that the children can be reminded of these.
- Should any concerns arise during the activity about a pupil's safety or wellbeing, please ensure that you follow your school's safeguarding policy and procedures.

# Relaxation Based Activities

## Bunny breathing

## Deep Breathing

### Belly breathing



1. Ask the children to breathe normally. Ask them if they notice anything about it. What parts of their body move as they breathe? What does it feel like?



2. Now have them sit comfortably in a chair and place their hands on their bellies. Ask them to close their eyes if it is safe and they feel comfortable to do so.



3. With their mouths closed, ask them to breathe in for four seconds or until they feel their whole chest fill with air all the way down to their belly.

4. Ask them to hold in the air for four seconds.

5. Then ask them to slowly blow all the air out until it's all gone.

6. Repeat for five minutes until the body feels relaxed. Ask them to imagine themselves back in the room and open their eyes when they're ready.

- Ask the children to close their eyes and breathe in and out.
- Ask them to imagine that they are a bunny in a field trying to find food.
- Ask them to take three quick breaths in through their nose and now one long breath out of their mouth.
- Repeat this for a few minutes.
- Ask the children to imagine themselves back in the room and open their eyes when you're ready.



## Birthday cake

- Ask the children to sit in a chair and place their hands on their bellies. Ask them to close their eyes if it is safe to do so.
- Ask the children to hold their left hand in a fist. Ask the children to imagine it is a cake.
- Ask the children to hold their right hand in a fist. Ask the children to imagine it is a candle.
- Ask them to inhale, pretending to smell the cake.
- Ask them to exhale, pretending to blow out the candle.
- Encourage the child to breathe deeply, to really smell the cake. Then tell them to exhale completely, to really blow the candle out. Continue this for five minutes until the body feels relaxed.
- Ask them to imagine themselves back in the room and open their eyes when they're ready.



## Blow the feather

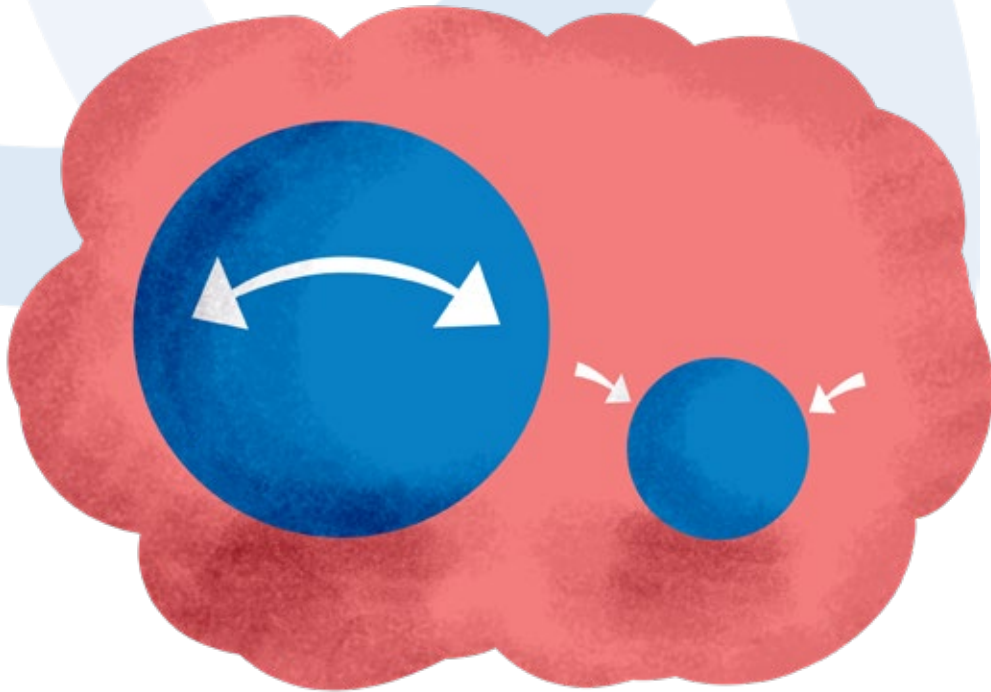
- If you can provide real feathers or cotton wool then that would be great, otherwise, children can use their imagination.
- Ask the children to sit straight.
- Ask them to imagine that there is a feather/ball of cotton in front of them.
- Then ask them to breathe in through their nose and breathe out slowly through their mouth to make the object float.
- Repeat this eight times.





## Expanding ball

- Ask the children to stand up straight and imagine that they have a ball in their hands so that they shape their hands, as if they were holding it. (\*\*Note that you can use a Hoberman Sphere if you have them available\*\*).
- Ask them to now breathe in for four seconds and open their hands and arms, as if the ball was expanding.
- Now ask them to breathe out for four seconds make the ball smaller.
- You can repeat this exercise three times.



## Alphabet breathing

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position and explain that you will be doing some singing breathing with the vowels of the alphabet (A,E,I,O,U).
- Ask the children to take a deep breath in and as they breath out they are going to exhale all of the air out of their lungs by using the letters, starting with A – they will keep saying A until all of the air is out of their lungs.
- You can repeat this process with the other vowels.



## Colour breathing

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position and explain that they can choose to have their eyes closed or they can gaze at the floor.
- Ask the children to imagine their favourite colour or a colour which helps them to feel calm.
- They are now going to take a breath in and imagine that they are breathing in this colour.
- As they breathe out, they are going to imagine blowing a bubble made out of this colour.
- You can repeat this process for a few minutes and encourage the children to see if they can take longer, slower, deeper breaths (both in and out) and blow out larger imaginary



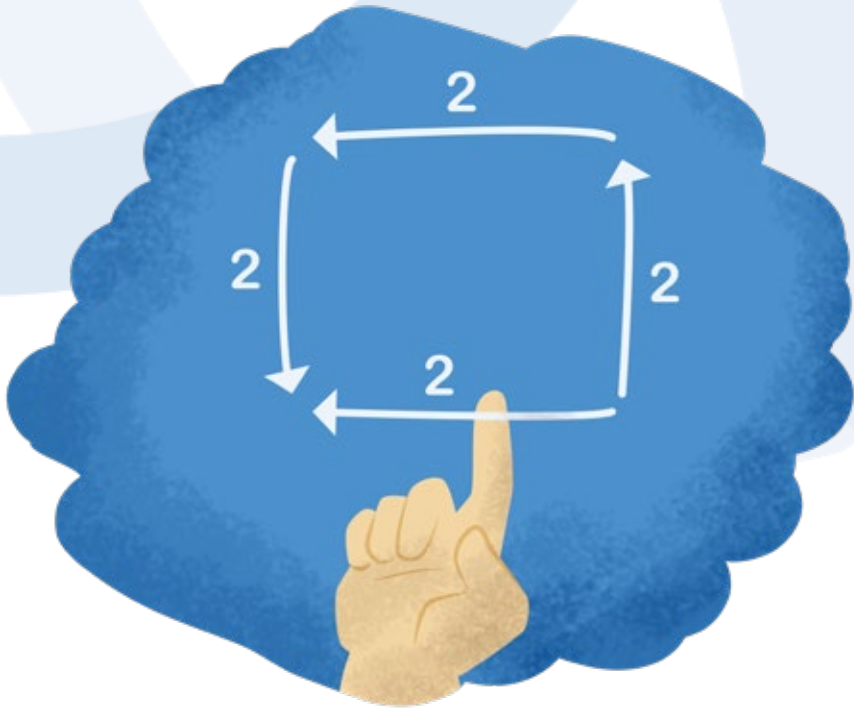
## Counting our breath breathing

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position and explain that they can choose to have their eyes closed or they can gaze at the floor.
- Ask the children to breathe in and count 1-2-3 in their mind.
- Explain that as they breathe out, they should count 1-2-3 in their mind.
- After doing this a few times you can increase the count to 4 and then to 5.



## Square breathing

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position.
- Explain that there are four steps to this breathing technique – breathing in for two seconds, pausing for two seconds, breathing out for two seconds and pausing for two seconds.
- They could draw a square (either on a piece of paper) or with their fingers in the air, to help them to coordinate their breathing in and out.
- Keep counting aloud for the children and repeat this activity for a few minutes.



## Finger counting

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position and to hold one of their hands out.
- Explain that as they breathe in for five counts, they will place each finger into the palm of their hand, until their hand makes a fist.
- As they breathe out for five counts, they will uncurl each of their fingers.
- Keep counting aloud for the children and repeat this activity for a few minutes.



# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

## Slimy fingers

- Ask the children to close their eyes and take a deep breath in and out.
- Ask them to imagine they have a ball of slime in the palm of their hands.
- They're going to squeeze the slime as hard as they can and breathe in whilst they do this.
- Now they are going to breathe out and open their hands imagining the slime spreading across their hands.
- Repeat this five more times.

\*\* You could also adapt this and give the child something physical in their hands like a stress ball, play dough or clay.\*\*



## Reach for the balloon

Guide your class through these steps:

- Close your eyes and take a deep breath in and out.
- Imagine you have a balloon in your hand.
- Along comes a gust of wind and blows the balloon out of your hand.
- Staying seated, stretch up with both arms to try and catch the balloon...stretch as high as you can!
- You've just managed to catch it and you can breathe a sigh of relief!
- Repeat this five more times.





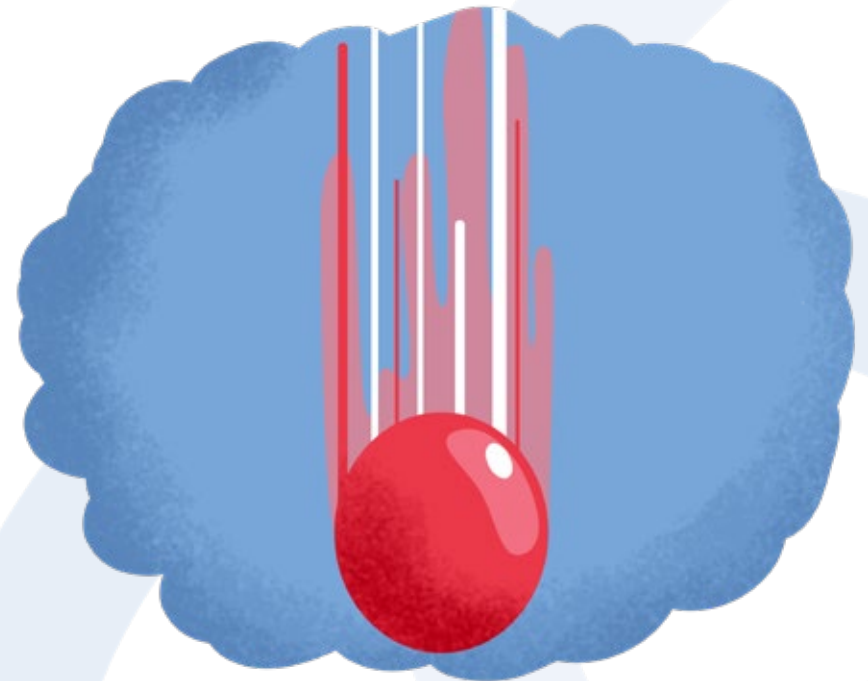
## Hakka chant

- Ask the children to stand up straight. Let them know that they are going to pretend to be rugby players doing the Hakka Chant. You could give them some words to chant, such as "Ka Ora".
- Ask them to raise their hands to the ceiling and breathe in through their nose.
- As they breathe out ask them to exhale all of the air out of their lungs with a Hakka chant as loudly as they can as they strike a Hakka pose.
- Encourage them to stay in their pose for three seconds.
- Repeat this eight times.
- You could change the instructions here and ask them to take on different characters e.g. zombies, goblins, various animals, trees, soldiers etc.



## Martial arts ball

- Ask the children to stand up straight and imagine that they have a ball in their hands.
- Ask them to move their hands to the left (with the ball still in their hands) as they breathe in for four and then to freeze their body for two seconds.
- Now ask them to relax their body and drop the imaginary ball.
- You can now ask them to repeat this on the right side.
- You can repeat this exercise three times.



## Body like jelly

- Ask the children to stand up straight and breathe in and out.
- Now ask them to lift their hands above their head so that they are as tall as they can be.
- Ask the children to stiffen up in this position for a few seconds.
- Now ask them to breathe out and release their body, bend their knees and imagine that their body was like jelly.
- You can repeat this exercise three times.



## Wings in the sky

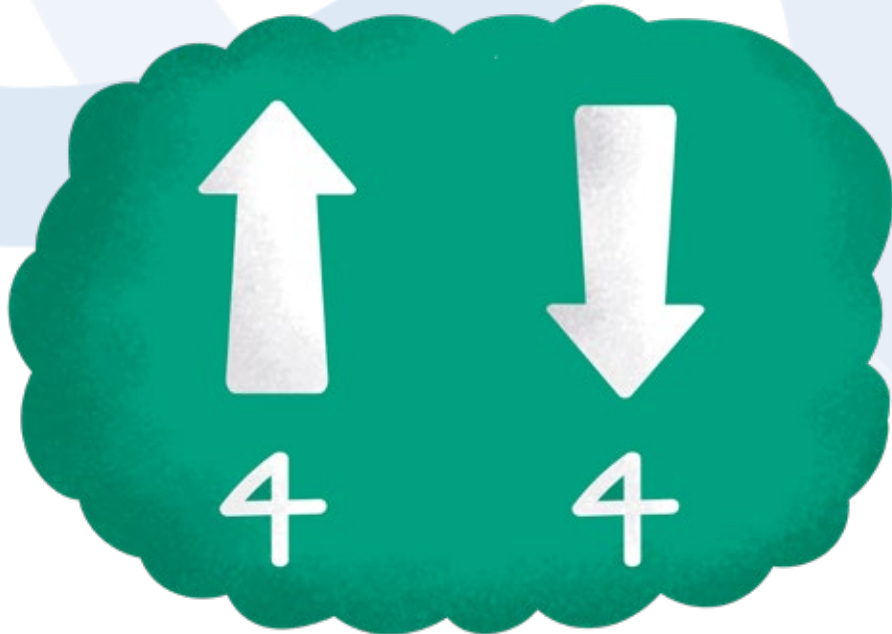
- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position, preferably with their backs straight.
- Ask them to imagine that they are a creature which has wings (it can be any of their choice).
- They are now going to use their breathing to help them to "fly".
- As they breathe in they are going to raise their arms ("wings") into the sky, and as they breathe out their arms ("wings") will fall.
- Remind them to coordinate their breathing with the rise and fall and continue this for a few minutes.



## Rise and fall

Guide your class through these steps:

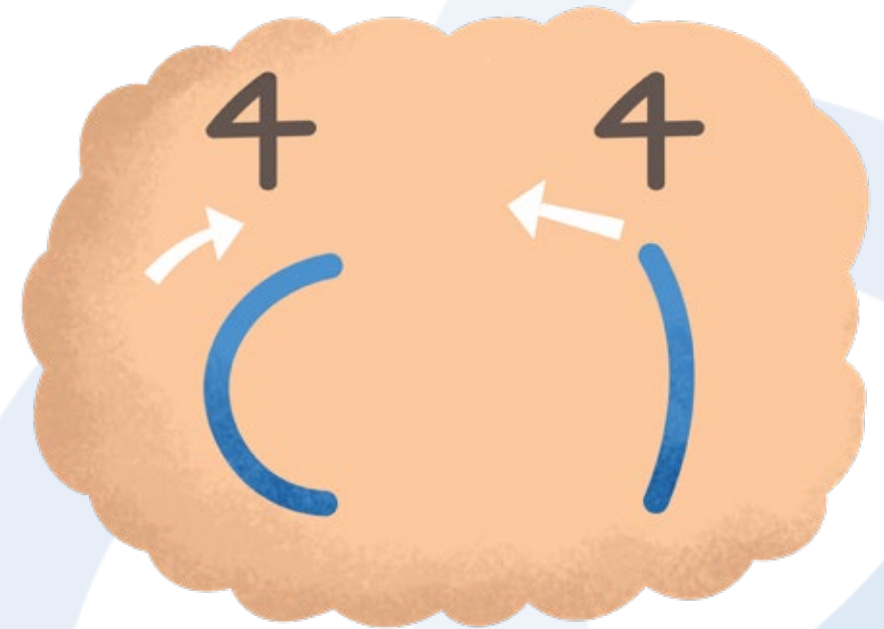
- Ask the children to sit in a comfortable position, preferably with their backs straight.
- Ask them to imagine that they are “rising and falling” with their breath.
- As they breathe in for four counts, they are slowly going to come to a standing position and then stretch their arms into the sky.
- As they breathe out for four counts, they are slowly going to come to a seated position with their arms relaxed by their side.
- Remind them to coordinate their breathing with their rise and fall and continue this for a few minutes.



## Curved “C”

Guide your class through the following steps:

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position, preferably with their backs straight.
- Ask them to imagine that they are turning their bodies into the letter “C”.
- As they breathe in for four counts, they are slowly going to curve their backs into a “C” shape.
- As they breathe out for four counts, they are slowly going to straighten their back.
- Remind them to coordinate their breathing with their changing shape and continue this for a few minutes. They can also try making a “side-C” shape by going into a side bend on one side from a standing position.



## Heart centre breathing

Guide the group to follow these steps:

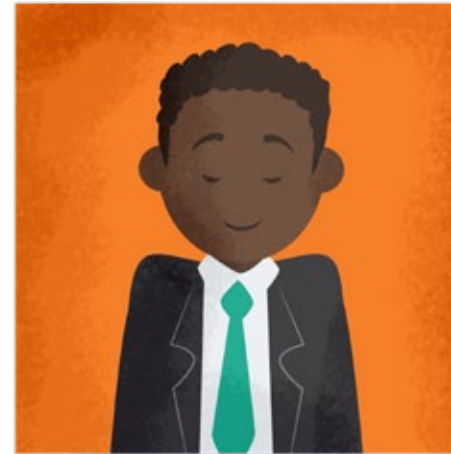
- Ask the children to sit in a comfortable position, preferably with their backs straight.
- Ask them to breathe in and raise both of their hands to the side of them, until their palms meet in the middle above their head.
- As they breathe out, they are going to bring their hands (palms still pressed together) down the centre of their body until they place their hands on their thighs.
- Repeat this four times and remind them to coordinate their breathing with the rising and falling of their hands.



## The shoulder shrug

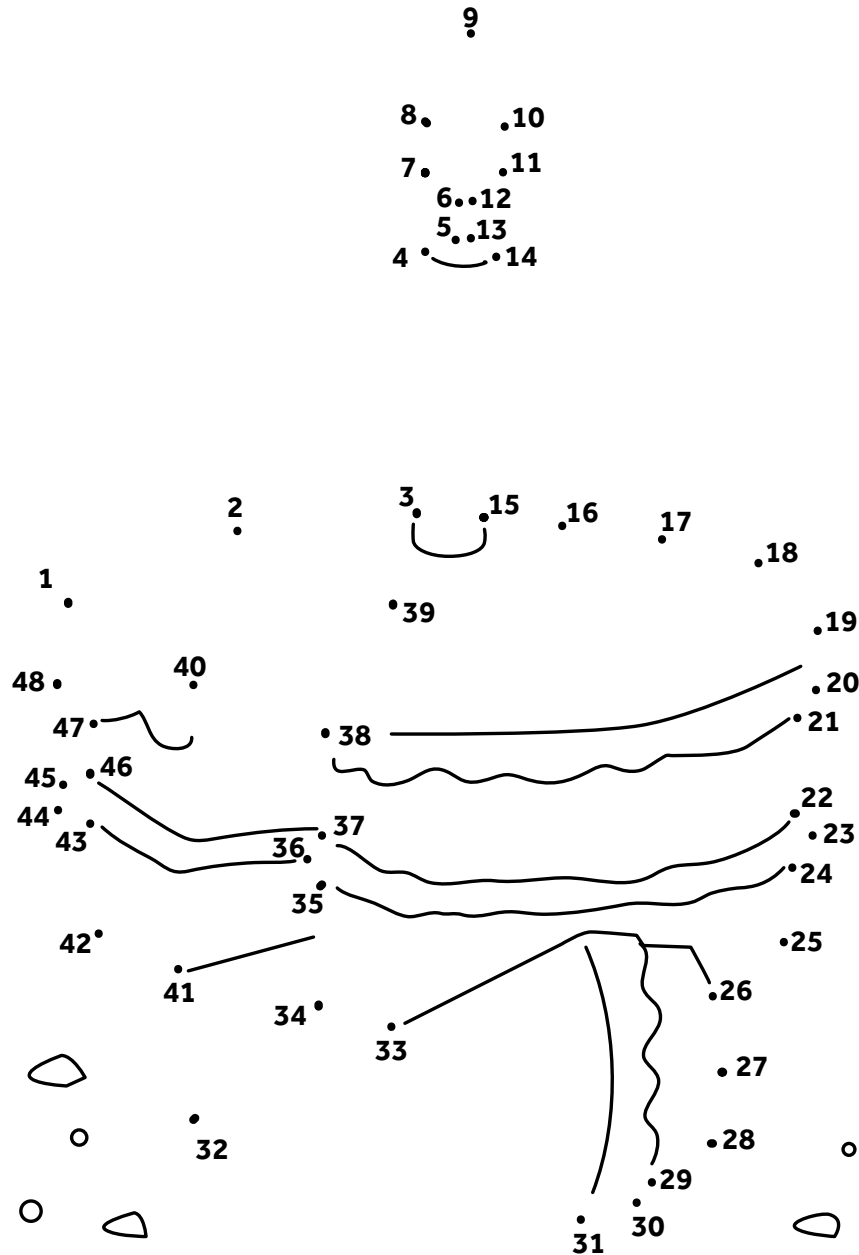
Guide your class through these steps:

- Ask the children to sit or stand in a comfortable position.
- Ask them to breathe in and lift their shoulders towards their ears. Ask them to hold this position.
- Then they are going to breathe out with a big sigh and release their shoulders.
- Repeat three times.





## Relaxation Activity: Join the dots



## Relaxation Activity: Trace the words



# Additional Information and Resources

## Exercises available via proprietary software

We have provided a manual with recommended activities for you to try. You do not need to have access to any additional technology in order to take part in the trial. However, if required and you have a licence or are already using any of the following, below are the activities which are approved for this trial:

- Calm app.
- Breathr app.

## GoNoodle videos:

### Breathing

- Bee breath
- Take a breath
- Rainbow breath
- Weather the storm
- Bring it down
- Relieve anxiety
- Rest well

### Muscle relaxation

- Let's unwind
- Melting
- Victorious
- Chin up
- Manage frustration
- Chillax
- Propeller
- Around the town
- Congratulations
- Crazy chair
- Surfer dude
- Golden horse

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