

Printable Movement Break Cards

Reviewed by Dr. Eva Lassey, PT, DPT · drsensory.com/for-teachers/movement-break-cards/

How to use them

Print, cut along the lines, laminate if you can, and put them on a ring. They are sorted three ways so you can pick in about two seconds: by how much space you have, by how long you have, and by whether the student needs calming or alerting.

A student who needs to move is not misbehaving. Movement breaks work best when they are given *before* dysregulation, not as a response to it.

Space — At desk, Standing, or Whole room. **Time** — 1, 2 or 5 minutes. **Effect** — Calming (deep pressure and heavy work) or Alerting (quick movement and changes of position).

At the desk

Chair push-ups

Hands on the seat, push down, lift your body a little. Hold five.

At desk 1 min Calming

Hand presses

Palms together in front of your chest, press hard, then release.

At desk 1 min Calming

Shoulder rolls

Roll both shoulders slowly backward, then forward.

At desk 1 min Calming

Desk push

Push down on the desk with flat hands, like pushing it into the floor.

At desk 1 min Calming

Seated marching

Lift one knee, then the other, slow and steady.

At desk 2 min Alerting

Finger stretches

Spread all ten fingers wide, then make a fist. Repeat slowly.

At desk 1 min Calming

Chair pull

Hold the sides of your chair and pull up gently, as if lifting it.

At desk 1 min Calming

Neck tilts

Tip one ear toward one shoulder, then the other. Slow.

At desk 1 min Calming

Paper crumple

Crumple a sheet into a tight ball, then smooth it flat again.

At desk 2 min Calming

Chair twist

Hold the back of your chair and turn your body gently each way.

At desk 1 min Calming

Standing at the desk

Wall push

Hands flat on the wall, lean in and push. Count to ten.

Standing

1 min

Calming

Calf raises

Rise onto your toes, hold, lower slowly.

Standing

1 min

Alerting

One-foot balance

Stand on one foot. Swap when you wobble.

Standing

2 min

Alerting

Reach and stretch

Reach both arms overhead, then fold gently toward the floor.

Standing

1 min

Calming

Shoulder blade squeeze

Pull both shoulder blades together, hold, release.

Standing

1 min

Calming

Heel-to-toe line

Walk an imaginary line beside your desk, heel touching toe.

Standing

2 min

Alerting

Air writing

Write your name in the air with one whole arm, big.

Standing

2 min

Alerting

Wall sit

Back on the wall, slide down to a chair shape, hold.

Standing

1 min

Calming

Slow-motion jump

Jump as slowly as you possibly can, five times.

Standing

2 min

Alerting

Pushing the ceiling

Press both palms up as if holding the ceiling off you.

Standing

1 min

Calming

Whole class, whole room

Animal walks

Bear walk, crab walk, or frog jump across the room and back.

Whole room

5 min

Calming

Freeze and move

Move while the music plays, freeze when it stops.

Whole room

5 min

Alerting

Deliver something heavy

Carry a stack of books to the other side of the room.

Whole room

2 min

Calming

Stack and carry chairs

Move chairs to a new spot, carefully, two at a time.

Whole room

5 min

Calming

Slow-motion race

Race across the room in the slowest motion you can manage.

Whole room

2 min

Alerting

Line up by height

Arrange the whole class in order without talking.

Whole room

5 min

Alerting

Wheelbarrow walk

In pairs, one holds the ankles, the other walks on their hands.

Whole room

5 min

Calming

Push the wall down

Whole class lines up at one wall and pushes together.

Whole room

2 min

Calming

Cross-body reach

Touch your right hand to your left knee, then swap. Faster each time.

Whole room

2 min

Alerting

Tidy sprint

Two minutes to put the room back exactly as it should be.

Whole room

2 min

Alerting

Which one to choose

Restless, fidgety, out of their seat → alerting will not help. Try heavy work — pushing, pulling, carrying.

Sluggish, head on the desk, unfocused → try alerting. Quick movement and changes of position.

Escalating → reduce the demand first, movement second. A break is not a consequence.

One honest note. Movement breaks help most students focus, and the evidence for them in classrooms is reasonable. They are not a treatment for a sensory processing difference, and a student who needs them constantly is telling you something about the environment or the level of demand rather than about themselves.

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