Niroga Institute

Founded in 2005, Niroga is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that brings:

**Transformative Life Skills (TLS)**

to individuals, families, and communities through the integrative practice of dynamic mindfulness, including Mindful Movement, Breathing Techniques, and Meditation. The Sanskrit word, Niroga, means “freedom from disease” or integral health—health of body, mind, and spirit.

Niroga programs are widely viewed as evidence-based and trauma-informed, and a cost-effective front-line prevention and intervention strategy for education and mental health, positive child and youth development, and violence reduction. Independent research with students in urban schools has demonstrated that TLS can reduce stress and increase emotional awareness and regulation, enhance school engagement and distress tolerance, and alter attitude towards violence.

**Transformative Life Skills—Curriculum Scope and Sequence**
The full TLS curriculum is four units comprised of eleven lessons, plus one lesson dedicated to reteaching concepts. TLS can be implemented in 15-minute, 30-minute, or 60-minute sessions. In most typical implementation scenarios, three lessons per week are delivered, and a unit is completed in a month. Each lesson focuses on a particular theme and introduces a new posture.
# Transformative Life Skills (TLS) Curriculum

## Unit 3: Self-regulation

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Unit Overview

Self-regulation is the ability to control or alter your behavior. Closely related to self-control, it is the ability to choose your actions rather than follow impulses. Studies have shown that greater self-control correlates with higher grade point average, better adjustment (fewer reports of psychopathology, higher self-esteem), less binge eating and alcohol abuse, better relationships and interpersonal skills, secure attachment, and more optimal emotional responses. Low self-regulation is a significant risk factor for a broad range of personal and interpersonal problems. In this Unit, we will learn tools for self-regulation and how to apply them in our lives.

One tool that yoga gives us for self-regulation is the idea of centering yourself before you act. Centering yourself means pausing to notice what’s happening right now. By centering yourself, you can notice the urges and motivations pushing you to act, and choose whether to follow them or not. If you notice that you are really stressed or angry, you can choose to calm yourself before making a decision, knowing that your brain works better when you are calm and steady.

A famous teaching says: “Your thoughts become your words, your words become your actions, your actions become your behavior.” What scientists have found out is that your behavior can also change your brain! By practicing centering yourself in yoga, you can get better at doing it in your everyday life. If you keep practicing, self-regulation skills can become part of your normal behavior, helping you to be more in control of your actions and more successful at whatever you set out to do.

Unit Objectives

- Define self-regulation and how it relates to self-awareness and stress management
- Understand the connection between thoughts, words, actions, and behavior
- Understand how practicing a behavior can change the brain
- Learn to pause before choosing to act
- Increase and strengthen emotional regulation, healthy adaptive coping strategies, and balance
- Learn what it means to center yourself and why it is important

State Content Standards

5.3.G Use a decision-making process to analyze when it is necessary to seek help with or leave an unhealthy situation.
5.1.S Apply a decision-making process to avoid potentially dangerous situations.
7.2.S Demonstrate conflict resolution skills to avoid potentially violent situations.
7.1.A Use effective coping strategies when faced with various social situations involving the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
7.6.M Practice setting personal boundaries in a variety of situations.
Say: Begin to notice the rhythm of your own breath. Is it fast or slow? Deep or shallow? Take a few moments to notice the rhythm of your own breath. (Pause.)

Now take a moment to find your pulse by pressing your fingers against the inside of your wrist, or under your jawbone, or on the left side of your chest.

Text shown between the script shade-boxes is intended for instructor reference, and contains lesson plan or topics commentary. This text will not be read to students.
Unit 3. Lesson 3.1
Your Environment Affects Your Thoughts and Feelings

Lesson Overview
In this lesson students will be introduced to the Triangle Pose. Physically, this pose:
- Strengthens the legs and ankles
- Relieves stiffness in the legs and back
- Increases mental focus and clarity

Lesson Objectives

Main Activities
- Students will recognize how what happens to them and around them affects their thoughts and emotions.
- Students will practice noticing their thoughts and feelings.

Materials Needed

Main Activities
- Singing bowl or bell
- TLS Curriculum

Lesson Topics and Timeline

1. Student Overview
   - Review Expectations ........................................... 2 Minutes
   - Activate Background Knowledge ......................... 3 Minutes

2. Acting, Breathing, Centering
   - Opening Bell and Focused Breathing .................. 2 Minutes
   - Mindful Movement and Pose of the Day ............ 6 Minutes

3. Mindful Breathing .................................................. 3 Minutes

4. Wrap Up
   - Silent Sitting and Closing Bell .......................... 1 Minute
   - Connection Questions ...................................... 3 Minutes
Student Overview

Review Expectations (2 minutes)

Review the expectations for TLS sessions, including:

- **Students clear desks**
  of all distractions including books, papers, food, cell phones, and music.

- **“One mic” rule:** one person talks at a time.
  If students have questions they can raise a hand or ask at the end of class. Assure students that there will be a few minutes dedicated to questions at the end of each session.

- **Students focus on their own body and breath.**
  That means not making comments about self or others, not touching others, not distracting others from their experience.

- **Students try their best to participate at all times.**
  They won’t know what works for them and what doesn’t unless they try it, and every day is a different experience. Standing aside and watching others is not allowed, as it makes students who are participating feel uncomfortable.

Activate Background Knowledge (3 minutes)

In response to the class environment each day, you may wish provide this information to students when you feel it would be best received—that may be at the beginning of class, weaved in to the poses, or before the final relaxation.

**Say:** Our thoughts and feelings are affected by the people around us. You could be in a good mood, but then your parents tell you something that makes you angry. You could be having a horrible day, but then the person you like texts you and you start smiling.

Since the world around us is constantly changing, so are our thoughts and feelings. The good news is that you are NOT your thoughts, and you are NOT your feelings. All thoughts and feelings will go away eventually. Just by noticing that, you can take away some of the power they have over you.

Activation Question 3.1

**Say:** Do you think your environment affects your thoughts and feelings? If so, how?

Give students a chance to reflect, and choose a few students to share their responses with the class.

**Say:** During class today, notice how your thoughts and feelings come and go in response to what’s happening around you.
Acting, Breathing, Centering

Opening Bell and Focused Breathing (2 minutes)

Say:
We will start our time together today by trying to focus our attention on a sound. I would like to ask you all to listen to the sound of the bell I am going to ring. Try to keep your attention on the sound of the bell for as long as you can, and when you can’t hear it anymore, please raise your hand.

Ring bell or singing bowl.
-- Allow to vibrate to completion and until all students have raised their hands.
-- Then ask students to do the same thing, this time closing their eyes or looking down at their desks to focus just on their hearing, and ring the bell again.
-- Wait until all students have raised their hands.

Say:
That was very good. Now I’ll lead you in a breathing exercise:
-- You can keep your eyes closed, or just look down.
-- Let all the air out of your lungs.
-- Now breathe in, breathe out.

Lead class in simple breathing, encouraging them to breathe deeply and smoothly. Continue for 3–4 rounds.

Then tell students that you are going to do the bell exercise one more time.

Ring the bell again, and students raise their hands when they can no longer hear it.
Mindful Movement and Pose of the Day (6 minutes)

Mountain

Say: Let’s all stand up in Mountain Pose.

If needed, review the elements of Mountain Pose.
-- Feet parallel and hip-width distance apart
-- Legs strong and straight
-- Shoulders relaxed, spine long

If you’d like, press your hands together at your chest, and either close your eyes or look down at the place where your hands meet. Can someone lead us in 3 breaths, saying, “breathe in, breathe out”?

Choose a student to lead the breaths, making sure the student leads them slowly to allow for deep breathing.

Shoulder Isolations

Say: Let your arms rest at your sides. Let’s start making circles with the right shoulder.
-- The circles can be as big or small as you’d like.
-- Try not to move anything else but your right shoulder.

Pause while students do 4-5 circles.

Now try it with your left shoulder.

Pause for the same amount of time.

You can let both shoulders relax. Now we’ll combine the two:
-- One circle with right
-- One with left
-- One with both
-- Right, left, both

Repeat 4-5 times, going faster if you want.

Shake out your arms and let them relax.
Tree

**Say:** Let’s do a balancing pose to help us focus our minds—we’ll do Tree. Feel your left foot planted firmly on the floor. When you’re ready, bring your right foot to your ankle, or to your calf, or to your thigh. Remember, it might help you balance if you focus your eyes on one spot in front of you. Standing up a little straighter can also help you balance. If you’d like, bring your hands to your chest. Take a few breaths here.

Pause.

Feel free to stay in Tree pose, or if you would like, raise your arms up toward the ceiling. Take a few breaths and see if you can find your balance here. If this is still easy for you, try looking up at the ceiling as you balance. *(Student name)* can you lead us in 3 breaths?

If students have a hard time balancing, have them take a deep breath and try to clear their minds of other thoughts. If other students in the class are being distracting, have students notice whether that makes it harder to balance.

When you finish taking 3 breaths, shake out the legs and arms and try the pose on the other side. End in **Mountain Pose** with the palms at the chest and take 3 breaths together.

Side Warrior

**Say:** Make sure you have space behind you because we’re going to take a big step back for Side Warrior. Start in **Mountain Pose** and take your left leg back. Press your left heel to the floor and face your hips and chest to the left. Notice how it feels to bend your right leg as you keep your left leg straight—does that increase the stretch you feel? Make sure your right knee is bent straight forward, not to the side, and it doesn’t go further forward than your ankle. If it feels okay to you, raise your arms to shoulder height and look over the fingers of your right hand. Notice the strength in your legs here.

Now as we breathe in, we’ll straighten our legs and reach our arms up, palms together. As we breathe out, we’ll bend our front leg and bring our arms back out to the sides, palms down. Let’s do this 2 more times with the breath.

Good. Staying in Side Warrior with your right leg bent, we’ll try to stay here for 3 breaths. Focus on your breath and notice whatever you feel in your legs right now. If it feels intense, see if you can use your breath to give you patience, knowing the feeling will not last forever. Who can lead us in 3 breaths?

—Continued next page—
**Side Warrior, Continued**

Choose a student to lead the breaths. When they are done, have students come back into **Mountain Pose** by bringing the left leg forward. Take a few mindful breaths in Mountain before doing the whole Side Warrior sequence with the right leg back. When you finish, come back to **Mountain Pose** and have students take 3 breaths with hands pressed together at chest. Have one student lead the breaths.

**Triangle — Pose of the Day**

*Say:* The **pose of the day is Triangle.** Triangle stretches and releases stress in the hips and shoulders. The pose also helps you to focus your mind and to pause to notice how you feel.

To do Triangle we’ll start in **Side Warrior** with the left leg back. Your chest and belly are facing the left side, and your right foot is facing forward. Straighten your front leg. If you feel your legs are too far apart as we do this pose, you can scoot them closer together.

If you’d like, take your hands to your hips. Breathe in and try pressing your right hip back toward the left leg. Notice your left hip rise up higher than your right hip. When you’re ready, reach your arms out to the sides. Breathe in, reaching the right hand forward. Breathe out, lowering your right hand to your right leg. If it feels okay, try lifting your left arm to the sky, palm facing the left.

Now you’re in Triangle. Notice both of your feet pressing flat on the floor. See if you can make both sides of your waist long—the right as well as the left side. If you want, you can look up at your left hand, but if that feels uncomfortable just let your head hang down. Breathe and notice where you feel this pose stretching. Notice how you feel, if this pose feels good to you, or if you feel frustrated, or focused, or something else?

(Student name), can you lead us in 3 breaths, please?

Good. As you breathe in, lift up to stand up straight. Breathe out, and bring your left leg forward to **Mountain Pose.** Let’s take 3 breaths here. As you breathe, notice what your feel in your body, and any other feelings that are here.

Choose a student to lead 3 breaths. Then lead students through Triangle pose with the right leg back, starting in **Side Warrior.** Finish in **Mountain Pose.**
Mindful Breathing — Rhythmic 4:8 Breathing (3 minutes)

Say: Find a way to sit comfortably with your back straight. You can close your eyes at any time, or just look down at your desk to help you focus inward.

It’s hard to know how you feel, if you don’t first pause and take the time to notice. Sometimes we move through our activities and thoughts at such a fast pace that it’s hard to recognize our feelings. Let’s practice slowing down your breath and your thoughts for a minute so that it’s easier to notice how you feel.

We’ll take deep inhales for 4 counts and slow exhales for 8 counts. I’ll start the first few for you, and then you can do the breathing on your own.

Let all the air out of your lungs. (Pause.)
-- Breathe in 1, 2, 3, 4
-- Breathe out 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (Repeat counting 2 more times.)

Now count silently to yourself:
-- Breathing in for 4 (Pause.)
-- Breathing out for 8 (Pause.)

Now I’m going to be quiet and let you practice 3 rounds on your own. See if you can keep your mind on the counting and the feeling of the breath. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, bring it back to focus on your breathing as soon as you realize it.

Pause, allow students to breathe on their own for 3 rounds.

Good! You can go back to breathing normally. Notice how you’re feeling now… relaxed? Energetic? Sleepy? Excited? Or something else?
Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

Silent Sitting (1 minute)

Say: We’re going to end class by sitting silently for one minute, just noticing your breathing and how your body feels.

Feel free to close your eyes or look down to help you concentrate only on yourself.

If you like, you can even put your head down and rest it on your arms.

Pause.

Notice your feet resting on the floor, your legs relaxed on the seat.

Notice where your arms and hands are; maybe you can allow your arms and shoulders to relax a bit more.

Notice how you’re breathing.

You might even allow the muscles of your face relax as you breathe.

Long pause, allow students to sit silently for remainder of the minute.

Closing Bell

Say: I will now ring the bell one last time. Listen to the bell, and when you can’t hear it anymore, please look up at me.

Ring bell and allow it to vibrate to completion.

Connection Questions (3 minutes)

Say: How is everyone feeling?

Do you think it is possible to stay calm and focused if you are surrounded by chaos?

Ask students if they have any questions about what we did today or about yoga in general. Let the students know when they will see you next and thank them for their participation.