



Level 1: Brainstem and Diencephalon

• Regulation •

Level 1 focuses on regulating the brainstem and the diencephalon, the areas of the brain that control the body's basic life functions like breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, sleep, body pressure, hunger and emotions. It also plays a key role in **survival responses**—like fight, flight, freeze, or fawn—by reacting quickly to perceived danger and preparing the body to respond. It acts as a relay center, sending messages between the brain and spinal cord.

By finding ways to **foster safety and calm** in the brainstem and diencephalon, the arts can help promote predictability through regulating breathe and heart rate and bringing the nervous system out of a stress state; offer a place for safe physical expression, helping release stored tension or energy from the body; and provide sensory-rich calming input that helps the brainstem feel safe and grounded.

Use Level 1 in order to:

- Create safe spaces for connection and collaboration
- Develop routine and repetition for expectations
- Generate calm and peaceful environments through sensory experiences



Rhythmic Drawing

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Music, Visual Art

Goals:

- To regulate the nervous system through *repetitive, rhythmic* drawing.
- To foster group collaboration and flexibility by contributing to shared, evolving artwork, encouraging *relational* and *respectful* interaction.
- To integrate auditory, visual, and motor input for sensory grounding and focus, supporting a *relevant* and *rewarding* multisensory experience.

Materials/Set-up:

- Large paper or butcher paper (mounted on tables or the floor; one shared piece per small group or full class)
- Drawing tools (paint markers work really well, but you can also use crayons, markers, oil pastels—tools that allow for expressive, gestural marks)
- Music with a steady beat (instrumental works well; avoid music with words; vary tempo and mood)
- Open space for students to move around the drawing

Directions:

1. Set the Environment: Lay out large paper surfaces and arrange students evenly around them. Play music softly in the background as students enter. Create a calm or energizing atmosphere, depending on your goal.
2. Introduce the Activity:
 - “We’re going to draw with the music—but not just by ourselves. You’ll work on one big drawing together, moving and adding to each other’s lines.”
 - Emphasize that the activity is about movement, rhythm, and collaboration—not making a ‘perfect’ picture.
3. Warm-Up:
 - Practice drawing rhythmically in the air to a music sample—big loops, zig-zags, tapping motions.
 - Ask, “How does your hand want to move when the music is fast? What about when it’s slow?”

4. Begin Rhythmic Drawing:
 - Students begin drawing to the beat of the music on the section in front of them. Encourage flowing, repetitive, rhythmic marks that match the tempo.
 - Let them draw for 1-2 minutes. Call out a gentle reminder: “Listen to the beat. Let your hand follow the rhythm.”
5. Rotate Around the Paper:
 - Pause the music. Instruct students to rotate one space clockwise around the paper.
 - Once everyone is in a new spot, restart the music with a new tempo, style, or energy. Students begin drawing again—adding onto or responding to what’s already there.
 - Repeat rotations, depending on time and group energy.
6. Final Round (Optional):
 - For the last round, allow students to return to their original spot and see how their section has changed. Give them time to add final touches or responses.
7. Reflection & Discussion:
 - Invite students to step back and look at the whole piece together.
 - Facilitate reflection:
 - “How did it feel to add onto someone else’s drawing?”
 - “What surprised you about the way your drawing changed?”
 - “How did the music change the way you moved or created?”

Adaption Tips:

- Vary music selections for different rhythms, emotional tones, or energy levels.
- For younger students, mark rotation spots clearly to guide movement.



BrainDance Movement Sequence

(by Anne Green Gilbert)

Ages: 3+

Type of Art: Dance

Goals:

- To support brain-body integration through a sequence of patterned, *rhythmic* movements.
- To foster regulation, focus, and coordination by engaging sensory systems tied to early developmental movement patterns, enhancing *repetitive* practice and *relevant* sensory input.
- To create a calming, centering *routine* that can be used daily basis.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for movement
- Soft instrumental music or rhythmic drumming

Directions:

1. Introduce BrainDance: Explain to students that BrainDance is a fun movement sequence designed to help their brain and body feel more connected, focused, and ready to learn. “These movements are like brain food!”
2. Movement Sequence: Lead students through each of the eight BrainDance patterns, encouraging slow, focused movement. Emphasize breathing and full-body engagement throughout.
 1. Breath: Inhale through the nose, exhale through the mouth. Repeat several deep breaths to begin grounding.
 2. Tactile: Lightly squeeze or tap the body from head to toe—“Wake up the body!”
 3. Core-Distal: Stretch out wide like a star, then curl in tight like a seed. Repeat several times with energy.
 4. Head-Tail: Move the head and tailbone/spine like a wave (e.g., cat-cow stretch or seated spine rolls).
 5. Upper-Lower: Move only the upper body while the lower half stays still, then reverse. (E.g., arm circles, then leg marches.)
 6. Body Side: Move the right side of the body independently, then the left. Try reaching, stepping, or stretching one side at a time.

7. Cross-Lateral: Cross the midline with movement (e.g., elbow to opposite knee, reaching across the body).
8. Vestibular (Spin & Balance): Spin gently in one direction, pause, then spin the other way. End with balancing on one foot or holding a still pose.
3. Tempo and Rhythm: Adjust tempo based on student energy levels. Use slow, calming rhythms for regulation or upbeat tempos to energize.

Adaptation Tips:

- For younger children, simplify or narrate each section (“Now we stretch like a star! Now we curl into a ball!”).
- For older students, add more complex cross-body movements or balance challenges.
- Seated adaptations can be used as needed.



Mindful Scribble Drawing

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To facilitate calm and safety by encouraging a non-judgmental creative process, emphasizing *respectful* and *relevant* self-expression.
- To incorporate rhythm using music as a guide for drawing movements, supporting *rhythmic* and *repetitive* regulation.

Materials/Set-up:

- Paper (any size, standard printer paper or sketchbook paper works well)
- Drawing tools: pens (gel pens, fine-liners), markers, colored pencils, or crayons
- Music for a calming atmosphere and giving students a repetitive beat to match

Directions:

1. Set the Environment: Help students find a comfortable, quiet area. Consider dimming lights and minimizing distractions.
2. Guide Initial Focus: Ask students to close their eyes or look down. Lead them in a few deep breaths to bring awareness to the present moment.
3. Initiate Blind Scribbling: Announce, "With eyes closed or looking away, make continuous, free-flowing lines on your paper for 30-60 seconds. Let your hand move spontaneously with the music's rhythm."
4. Transition to Observation: After time, instruct students to "Open your eyes and look at your scribble. Notice the lines, curves, and enclosed shapes."
5. Encourage Discovery: Guide students to "Gently look at your scribble. Do you see any recognizable objects, faces, animals, or abstract shapes within the lines? Let your imagination play."
6. Direct Outlining or Coloring: Explain, "Now, choose some discovered shapes or areas to outline or fill with color. Use different colors to highlight sections, creating a vibrant, abstract piece. Work intuitively." Encourage choice of colors that resonate.
7. Facilitate Reflection: When complete, ask students to "Take a moment to observe your piece." Lead a brief discussion or private reflection on: "How do you feel after this activity? What did you notice about the process? Did you feel more calm or focused?"



Rhythmic Walk

Ages: 6+

Type of Art: Music, Dance

Goals:

- To explore *rhythmic* patterns and spatial awareness through continuous group movement while building on classroom relationships, encouraging *relational* connection.
- To promote coordination and group focus through *repetitive* practice of patterned movement, making the activity *rewarding* and *relevant* to social-emotional learning.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for walking (e.g., classroom, gym, outdoor path)
- Music with a clear, steady beat (various tempos can be explored)

Directions:

1. Introduce Rhythm and Movement: Begin by discussing how rhythm is found in nature (e.g., heartbeat, footsteps, waves), and even our own bodies. Explain that today, students will explore walking with a natural rhythm, then add a musical beat, focusing on continuous group patterns.
2. Rhythmic Warm-up (Natural Rhythm & Circle Formation): Ask students to form a large circle. Encourage them to march in place, finding a comfortable, steady pace without music. Introduce the concept of an "8-count" by counting aloud with their natural pace: "1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8."
3. Group Rhythmic Walk with Continuous 8-Count Patterns (Without Music)
 - Continuous 8-Count Patterns: Lead the group through the following sequence, repeating or cycling as desired:
 - 8 Steps Forward: Take 8 steps moving forward around the circle on the 8-count.
 - 7 Steps Forward, 1 Step Back: Take 7 steps forward, then 1 step back on the next 8-count.
 - 6 Steps Forward, 2 Steps Back: Take 6 steps forward, then 2 steps back on the next 8-count.
 - Continue the Pattern: Lead students to continue this decreasing forward, increasing backward pattern (e.g., 5 Fwd, 3 Back; 4 Fwd, 4 Back; 3 Fwd, 5 Back; 2 Fwd, 6 Back; 1 Fwd, 7 Back).
 - (Optional) Reversing the Pattern: After reaching 1 Fwd, 7 Back, you can reverse the pattern back towards 8 Steps Forward.

4. Adding Music: After students have a good grasp of the patterns and unison movement without music, introduce music with a clear, steady 8 beat. Challenge them to continue the patterns, now synchronized with the music.
 - o Guidance: Clearly vocalize the counts and the movement to start ("Eight forward! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight! Now, seven forward, one back! One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, back!").
 - o If you're not successful the first time - keep trying!
5. Reflect and Share: After the activity, lead a discussion:
 - o "How did it feel to walk precisely to the beat as a group, especially with the music?"
 - o "What did you notice about your body when you were moving with the music in sync with others?"



Play Dough for Emotional Regulation

Ages: 4+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To provide a tactile and sensory outlet for expressing and regulating emotions, offering a *relevant and rewarding* creative experience.
- To support calming and grounding through *repetitive* manipulation and sensory input, encouraging *respectful* self-care.

Materials/Set-up:

- Play dough (various colors, store-bought or homemade)
- Flat, clean surface (e.g., table, placemat)
- (Optional) Small tools for sculpting (e.g., plastic knives, rollers, cookie cutters, toothpicks)
- (Optional) Calming music

Directions:

1. Introduce Emotional Expression: Discuss emotions and explain that play dough can help understand and manage them.
2. Sensory Warm-up & Grounding: Distribute play dough. Have students feel, squish, roll, and pull the dough. Guide them to take deep breaths, focusing on the sensory input to feel present.
3. Sculpting Emotions: Invite students to sculpt how they are feeling (e.g., anger, happiness) using abstract or direct forms. Encourage vigorous manipulation for strong emotions and gentle shaping for calm. Suggest transforming "angry" dough into something peaceful.
4. Refinement and Detail (Optional): Students can add details or transform sculptures using tools or other colors.
5. Reflect and Share (Optional): Lead a discussion. Sharing is optional. Ask: "How did it feel to sculpt your emotions? Did it help you understand them or feel calmer?"



Rhythm - Again and Again

Ages: 8+

Type of Art: Music

Goals:

- To encourage focus, active participation, and non-verbal communication within a paired, repetitive, *rhythmic* activity.
- To develop active listening skills and auditory memory through repeating and building rhythmic patterns, supporting *relevant* cognitive and social skills.
- To foster *relational* connection and *respectful* group engagement.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a circle.
- (Optional) Simple percussion instruments (e.g., shakers, clappers, body percussion like snapping/clapping) or just hands/feet.

Directions:

1. Introduce Rhythm Building: Gather students in a circle. Explain they will create a group rhythm together, building it piece by piece by listening and adding on.
2. Establish the Core Concept (2-Beat Add-On): Explain the rule: The first person makes a 2-beat rhythm. Everyone copies it. The next person adds two more beats to the *entire* rhythm (making 4 beats total). Everyone copies the new, longer rhythm. This continues around the circle, always adding two new beats to the accumulated rhythm. Rhythms can use claps, stomps, snaps, pats, or vocal sounds.
3. Start the First Rhythm: Designate a starting student to perform a clear, repeatable 2-beat rhythm.
4. Everyone Copies: The entire group immediately copies that exact 2-beat rhythm in unison, repeating a few times.
5. Adding On (Next Student): The next student adds two more beats and the group repeats those beats and then performs the *entire accumulated rhythm*.
6. Continue the Pattern: Continue this process around the circle until everyone has contributed. If the rhythm gets too long, you can "reset" it back to 2 beats with a new starting student.



Movement – Again and Again

Ages: 8+

Type of Art: Dance

Goals:

- To encourage focus and participation through a shared sequence of *repetitive* movements.
- To promote non-verbal communication and working memory through *rhythm* and patterns.
- To strengthen a sense of group cohesion and *respectful* engagement through turn-taking and shared creativity.

Materials / Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a large circle.
- No props required, though optional music with a steady tempo can be used as a background.

Directions:

1. Introduce the Movement Game: Invite students to form a circle. Let them know they will create a cumulative movement phrase together. Instead of rhythm, they will use simple body movements—like jumps, spins, arm gestures, or body poses.
2. Establish the Core Concept (2-Movement Add-On): Explain the rule:
 - The first person performs a *2-movement phrase* (e.g., step-touch, then arm reach).
 - The whole group watches, then repeats that exact 2-movement phrase together.
 - The next person adds *2 more movements* to the phrase (e.g., step-touch, arm reach, spin, then squat).
 - The group repeats the full 4-movement phrase together.
 - This continues around the circle, with each person adding two new moves to the growing sequence.
3. Start with a Strong Model: Choose a confident student (or model yourself) to begin with two simple, clear movements.
4. Group Repetition: After each addition, the entire group repeats the full phrase in unison—this supports *body memory* and *group synchrony*.
5. Keep It Manageable: If the sequence becomes too long or confusing, "reset" the game with a new starter and a fresh 2-movement phrase.
6. Reflect: End with a short discussion:
 - What was challenging or fun?
 - How did you keep track of the movements?
 - How did you feel moving together as a group?



Soundscape – “Make it Rain”

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Music

Goals:

- To foster collaborative creativity and group synchronization through a *rhythmic* “wave” of sound and movement, building *relational* trust.
- To support sensory regulation and group focus through *repetitive* and *rewarding* shared experience.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a circle.

Directions:

1. Introduce & Demonstrate Sounds: Gather students in a circle. Explain they'll create rainstorm sounds, building from a single drop to a downpour, then fading. Demonstrate sounds: Light Rain/Drizzle (rub hands), Medium Rain/Pitter-Patter (snap fingers), Heavy Rain/Downpour (pat knees), Thunder/Storm (stomp feet).
2. Starting the storm: Designate a starting student to perform the first sound (e.g., rubbing hands). The sound then travels sequentially around the circle. Have the next student make the sound a little bit stronger. Then the next student even stronger, and so on. Think of this like a wave in a stadium.
3. Build the Storm: Once the current sound wave completes a full circle, introduce the next sound (e.g., snapping fingers). This new sound also travels in a wave, getting stronger each time. Continue adding sounds in sequence (patting knees, stomping) to build the storm's intensity.
4. Fade the Rain: At the storm's peak, signal to reverse the sound sequence, moving back down the intensity scale (e.g., stomping to knee pats, then snaps, then hand rubs), again in a wave around the circle. The sound fades completely as the last student finishes.

Extensions:

- Different Leaders: Allow different students to take turns being the "storm leader" who initiates the sounds and signals changes in intensity.
- Go Backwards: After a full storm cycle, try having the wave travel in the opposite direction around the circle.
- Creative Sounds: Encourage students to invent new "rainstorm" sounds or effects.



Who Started the Motion?

Ages: 6+

Type of Art: Drama, Dance

Goals:

- To develop trust and teamwork in a low-stakes, *relational* group activity.
- To create *rhythm* within the group and develop keen observation skills and non-verbal communication, fostering *respectful* engagement.
- To encourage *repetitive* practice of subtle group dynamics and attention.

Materials/Set-up:

- Open space for students to form a circle.

Directions:

1. Prepare the Guesser: Choose one student to be the "guesser" and send them out of the room.
2. Form Circle & Choose Leader: Students form a tight circle, facing inward. Secretly choose one student as the "leader." Remind the leader to be subtle and avoid eye contact with the guesser.
3. Start Motion: The secret leader begins a simple, repetitive motion (e.g., hand rub, snap, knee pat, stomp, finger wiggle).
4. Everyone Follows: All other students immediately and subtly copy the leader's motion without looking directly at them.
5. Leader Changes Motion: After 5-10 seconds, the leader subtly changes to a new motion. Everyone quickly and quietly switches to the new motion.
6. Bring in Guesser: Once the group performs the second motion smoothly, call the guesser back to the center of the circle.
7. Guess the Leader: The guesser watches. The leader continues to change motions every few seconds, and the group follows. The guesser tries to identify the leader, with three chances to guess.
8. Reveal & New Round: If the guesser finds the leader, that leader becomes the new guesser. If not, the current guesser goes out again, and a new leader is chosen. Continue for several rounds.

Reflect:

- "What strategies did the guesser use to find the leader?"
- "What did the followers do to make it hard for the guesser to find the leader?"

Adaption Tips:

- **Subtlety is Key:** Remind students, especially the leader, to be subtle in their changes.
- **Fair Play:** Emphasize that the goal is fun and observation, not to trick or frustrate the guesser unfairly.
- **Variety of Motions:** Encourage leaders to use a variety of motions (body percussion, small gestures).



Sensory Bin Exploration

Ages: 3+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To provide rich tactile input through material manipulation for grounding and calming, supporting *relevant* sensory integration.
- To encourage *repetitive*, mindful exploration of textures, fostering *rewarding* self-regulation and *respectful* sensory engagement.

Materials/Set-up:

- Large bin or shallow container (e.g., plastic storage bin, sensory table)
- Various textured materials (choose 1-3 types per bin):
 - Dry rice, beans, pasta, lentils
 - Sand, kinetic sand
 - Water beads (ensure safety/supervision for younger children)
 - Smooth stones, pebbles
 - Leaves, small sticks, pinecones
 - Cotton balls, pom-poms, fabric scraps
- Tools for exploration:
 - Scoops, spoons, small cups, bowls
 - Funnels
 - Small toy animals or figures (optional, for imaginative play)

Directions:

1. Prepare the Space: Set up the sensory bin(s) on a table or on the floor. Ensure the area is clean and easily accessible for students.
2. Introduce Exploration: Explain to students that they will be exploring different textures and materials with their hands. "Today, we're going to use our hands to discover all sorts of interesting things in our sensory bin. There's no right or wrong way to play, just explore and see how it feels!"
3. Encourage Sensory Engagement: Invite students to begin exploring the materials.
 - Guide them to simply put their hands into the bin and feel the textures. "How does the sand feel between your fingers? Is it smooth or rough?"
 - Encourage actions like scooping, pouring, sifting, burying hands, or gently arranging the materials. "Can you scoop the rice into a cup? What sound does it make when you pour it?"
 - Emphasize the sensory experience over creating a specific product.

ADDRESSING TRAUMA THROUGH THE ARTS

4. Facilitate Calm & Focus: Observe students and gently redirect if they become overstimulated or disengaged. The repetitive nature of scooping and pouring is often naturally calming. Encourage deep breaths if needed.
5. Clean Up: Guide students to carefully return all materials to the bin and clean up any spills.



Textured Collage/Rubbing Art

Ages: 5+

Type of Art: Visual Art

Goals:

- To provide *rewarding*, rich tactile and proprioceptive input through textured rubbing for grounding and sensory integration.
- To encourage *repetitive* exploration of textures and creative expression, supporting *relevant* sensory processing and *respectful* artistic choice.

Materials/Set-up:

- Various textured surfaces (gather a collection):
 - Natural: Leaves (with prominent veins), bark, rough stones, feathers, pinecones, corrugated cardboard
 - Household: Lace, mesh, bubble wrap, sandpaper, coins, keys, graters (use with caution/supervision), textured fabric scraps
- Paper (thinner paper works best for rubbings, e.g., printer paper, tracing paper)
- Crayons (peel off paper wrappers for easier side-rubbing)
- Scissors
- Glue stick or liquid glue
- Larger sheet of paper or cardboard for the collage base

Directions:

1. Introduce Texture Exploration: Discuss textures (smooth, bumpy, rough, soft). Explain students will "collect" textures using crayons for unique artwork.
2. Demonstrate Rubbing Art: Show how to place paper over a textured object. Demonstrate holding a crayon on its side and rubbing firmly to reveal the texture. Encourage experimenting with colors and objects.
3. Texture Collection: Distribute paper and crayons. Provide various textured surfaces. Instruct students to create several rubbings, feeling the texture as they rub.
4. Cut and Arrange for Collage: Students cut out interesting textured shapes from their rubbings. Provide collage base paper. Invite them to arrange pieces, considering how textures look together.
5. Glue the Collage: Once satisfied, students glue their textured pieces onto the collage base.

Adaptation Tips:

- Variety of Textures: Offer a wide range of textures to maximize sensory input.
- Supervision: For younger children, pre-cut some textured materials or supervise closely during cutting.
- Process Over Product: Emphasize the sensory experience of rubbing and feeling the textures over creating a perfect picture.



Passing the Clap

Art Form: Drama

Age Range: 5 +

Goals:

- To support regulation by engaging the body in a rhythmic and repetitive movement that help calm the nervous system.
- To foster relationship and co-regulation, as students rely on one another for timing and connection.
- To create predictable structure *repetition*, helping the brain build pathways for focus, attention, and motor control.

Materials:

- None required
- Optional: open space for safe movement, drum or metronome for tempo (if adding rhythm support)

Directions:

1. Circle Formation

Students stand in a circle, close enough to make eye contact and clap easily with the person beside them.

2. Modeling

Demonstrate turning to a partner, establishing eye contact, and clapping together once. That person turns to their neighbor and repeats the motion.

3. Practice

Slowly pass the clap around the circle, encouraging students to focus on timing and connection. It's okay if it takes a few tries—mistakes are part of the learning!

4. Challenge & Flow

Once the group gets the hang of it, try to keep the clap moving without verbal cues or pauses. Celebrate moments when the group gets into a flow.

5. Variations

- Double Clap = Reverse: A double clap signals the group to send the clap in the opposite direction.
- Sound or Emotion: Add a vocal sound or an expressive face to each clap to deepen creativity and emotional expression.
- Silent Round: Try the whole activity without speaking or laughing—just listening with the body.

- Movement Add-on: Step into the circle and back while clapping to integrate simple movement.

Reflection Prompts:

- How did it feel when the clap flowed smoothly?
- What helped you stay focused?
- Did you feel connected to your classmates during this activity?
- What was challenging, and how did you overcome it?