



Transformative Life Skills (TLS) Curriculum

Unit 2. Physical and Emotional Awareness



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.



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Unit 2: Physical and Emotional Awareness

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Unit 2: Physical and Emotional Awareness

Unit Overview

Self-awareness is the capacity to notice yourself, including your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. In order to manage stress, you first must become aware of its presence; thus self-awareness is an important first step for stress management. In this unit, we will build awareness of our bodies, breath, emotions, and thought patterns, and learn how they are all connected. We will also learn tools for focusing the mind and managing stressful emotions.

How many of us are aware of what we are doing, when we are doing it, all the time? So often we spend our time thinking about other things, not really aware of the movements of our body, how we are breathing, or how we feel. Building awareness of what you are doing, thinking, and feeling in the present moment is a powerful skill that affects all aspects of your life.

Being aware of your body and its signals can help you stay healthy and safe. Being aware of your breath can help you to manage your emotions. Being aware of your thought patterns can help you understand yourself better and keep a positive outlook. Having greater awareness of all of these aspects of yourself can help you build self-confidence, self-control, and emotional balance. By developing self-awareness you can enhance your focus and clarity of mind, your ability to reach your goals, and your overall well-being.

Unit Objectives

- Define self-awareness and how it relates to stress management
- Develop awareness of physical sensations, feelings and thoughts
- Build understanding that thoughts and feeling come and go
- Learn centering practices that promote self-awareness
- Understand the difference between action and reaction
- Increase focus, attention and balance

State Content Standards

- 7.5.N Participate in school and community activities that promote fitness and health.
- 5.3.M Analyze situations when it is important to seek help with stress, loss, an unrealistic body image, and depression.
- 5.1.P Apply a decision-making process to a personal health issue or problem

Curriculum Lesson Plans Key

Text for Unit 2 lesson plans include:

1. Overview and lesson plan information
2. Narrative text—scripts for each lesson’s section and mindful movement, breathing, or meditation instruction
3. Commentary for instructors reference

Narrative Scripts

Instructor narratives to students are shown in shaded boxes, per the example shown below.

The bolded “**Say:**” text introduces this formatting, and the following shaded boxes indicate when text is “live script” for student instruction. When text is parenthesized, this indicates a brief lesson plan comment, and is not read to students—per the “(Pause.)” shown in the example, below.

Text blocks outside the shaded boxes are instructor reference and lesson plan commentary—not script that is read to students.

EXAMPLE:

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 2. Lesson 2.1 Understanding Self-awareness

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students will be introduced to the **Standing Backbend Pose**. Physically, this pose:

- Energizes and invigorates.
- Helps to maintain flexibility in the upper back
- Opens the chest to facilitate deeper breathing

Lesson Objectives

Main Activities

- Students will explore what it means to be self-aware.
- Students will practice noticing body sensations 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: Self-awareness is the ability to notice your own body, thoughts, feelings, and actions. If you want to manage your emotions, increase your self-control, or change bad habits, being aware of yourself is the first step.

In school you usually learn to focus on what your teachers tell you or have you read, or you focus on your friends. But you seldom are taught to focus inside, and build awareness of yourself.

Activation Question 2.1

Say: Why do you think having self-awareness is important?

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

Say: While we do yoga today, we'll stop once in a while to notice how we feel, to build self-awareness.

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)

Say: Part of self-awareness is being able to notice how you feel. Take a moment to notice how you're feeling right now: if you have a lot of energy and you want to get moving, or if you feel low-energy and feel like sitting still.

- If you feel high-energy, raise a “thumbs-up” in the air. Keep it raised so I can see.
- If you feel low-energy, raise a “thumbs-down” in the air.

- If there are more thumbs-ups than thumbs-downs, do

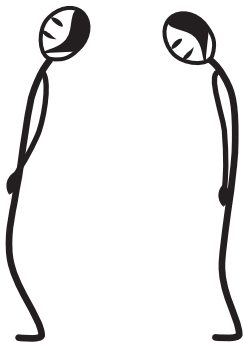
Option A: Standing Shoulder Movements.

- If there were more thumbs-downs, do

Option B: Seated Robin pose.

Then proceed with the rest of the Mindful Movement. Modifying the sequence according to how students are feeling models the behavior of listening to signals from the body and making healthy choices for oneself.

Option A—Standing Shoulder Movements



Say: Okay, looks like most people want to get moving! Let's stand up then.

Stand in **Mountain Pose**, but with your feet a little further apart than normal and your knees a little bent. If it feels okay to you, you can do this movement with your hands clasped together behind your back.

Or if not, you can rest your hands on the front of your thighs.

- When you breathe in, draw your shoulders back, lifting your upper chest toward the ceiling.
- When you breathe out, let your shoulders round forward.

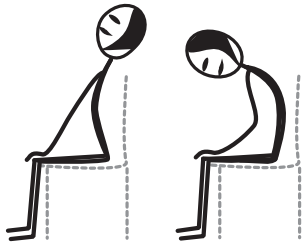
Continue to the rhythm of your own breath:

- Inhale shoulders back,
- Exhale shoulders forward.

We're warming up the shoulders and back here—can you notice them getting warmer or more flexible?

Allow students to repeat 3 more times. Then proceed to **Mountain Pose**.

Option B—Seated Robin Pose



Say: Okay let's start sitting down with a small movement.

You can make it bigger as you feel comfortable.

As you're ready, on an inhale, draw the shoulders back.

When you exhale, bring the shoulders forward and the chin down.

Guide students while they try a few rounds.

If you need more energy, try taking bigger inhales. If you want more of a stretch here, when you breathe in take the shoulders back and lift the center of your chest, maybe looking up. And when you breathe out round the back, pulling the belly in and letting the head drop forward.

We're warming up the shoulders and back here—can you notice them getting warmer or more flexible?

Try a few more rounds at your own pace.

Pause while students repeat about 3 times.

Good. Hopefully that gave you a little more energy. Let's all stand up in **Mountain Pose**.

Mountain



Say: Find a comfortable way to stand with your feet hip-width distance apart.

If it feels comfortable, press your hands together at your chest, and either close your eyes or look down at the place where your hands meet.

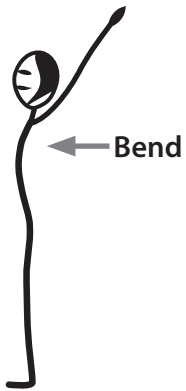
-- As you breathe in, feel the center of your chest lift gently upward.

-- As you breathe out, feel your feet planted firmly on the floor.

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.

Standing Backbend — Pose of the Day



Say: The **pose of the day is Standing Backbend**. In backward bending poses, it's important to be very aware of how your body feels and only go as far as is comfortable for you. Doing standing backbend as a movement has been helping prepare us to hold the pose a little bit longer. This pose teaches us to pay attention to what our body tells us, so we stay safe.

Now place your hands together at your chest.

- As you breathe in, feel your upper chest rise up toward your thumbs.
- As you breathe out pull your belly in a little and bring your shoulders back.

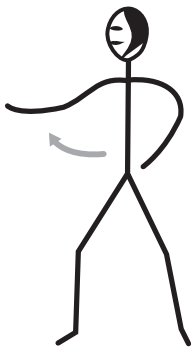
Keep breathing and trying to lift your upper chest toward your hands. Now either keep your hands at your chest, or if you'd like, raise your arms high above your head and slightly back. See if you can hold this pose for three deep breaths.

If you feel any crunching in your lower back, come out of the bend a little and pull the belly in, so that you feel the bend more in your upper back.

- 2 more breaths.
- Last one.
- Breathe in and lift yourself out of the backbend, standing tall.
- Breathe out, hands to the chest.

Is your heart beating any faster? How are you breathing?

Trunk Twists



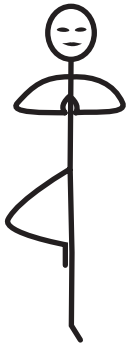
Say: Now you can shake out your arms and bring your feet a little farther apart. We'll start to twist the upper body from side to side. Experiment with letting your arms just relax and swing as you twist. Feel the air brush past your hands.

Pause to allow students to feel the twists.

Now let your twists get smaller and smaller until you are still.

Come back to **Mountain Pose** with your palms together at your chest and take a few breaths, noticing how your body feels.

Have another student lead 3 breaths.

Tree

Say: For our final pose we'll try balancing in Tree.

In order to balance, we have to be aware of what's going on in our bodies. If you pick one spot that isn't moving to focus your eyes on, it keeps you from getting distracted and helps you focus inward. 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. Keep breathing. If you'd like, bring your hands to your chest. Notice if you can stand up a little straighter here.

Have another student lead 3 breaths.

When finished, lead students through Tree pose on the other side. Encourage students to notice their chest lifted and the standing foot planted firmly on the ground. End in **Mountain Pose** with 3 breaths.

Proceed to the Mindful Breathing section.

Mindful Breathing — Chest and Belly Breathing (3 minutes)

Say: Notice the rhythm of your breath right now. Your breath will have a different rhythm at different times.

Pause to allow students to notice their breath.

As you notice your breath, let each breath get a little deeper.

Pause.

Close your eyes if it feels okay, or just look down at your desk. Allow your breath to fill up your lungs completely, and then empty them completely.

Pause to let them breathe deeply for a few rounds.

Continue to make full, complete inhaleds and full, complete exhaleds. Notice if you are still sitting up straight, or if you forgot about your posture. If you'd like, place a hand on your upper chest. Can you feel your chest move as you breathe?

Pause.

Now, place your hand on your belly if that feels okay. Do you notice your belly moving as you breathe? Try to relax the muscles around your belly and breathe deeply to allow it to expand as you breathe in.

Pause.

—Continued next page—

Mindful Breathing, Continued

Say: Now let both hands rest on your lap or on your desk. Without using your hands, can you notice different parts of your body moving as you breathe?

Pause.

Maybe you feel your belly and chest moving. Maybe you can even notice some movement in your shoulders. Maybe even the ribs in your back move—the ribs go all the way around from the front to the back.

Just notice.

Pause.

Whatever you feel is just fine—that's just how you are breathing in this moment.

You've done a great job. Return to breathing normally. Open your eyes and notice how you feel.

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: Do you feel like you're more aware of your body after doing yoga?
If so, why do you think that is?

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.