



On your marks

It is often a good idea to start off a session with children using some simple warm-up games that involve physical exercise. It can help children focus better for any teaching later and is particularly important if they have been sitting passively for a while in church beforehand; or perhaps you need this as an activity that allows others to join your meeting if they arrive at different times.

In Primary Schools some teachers have been using particular exercises called 'Brain Gym'™, which are designed to help children integrate the two halves of their brains, enabling them to be better equipped to benefit from whatever lesson that follows.

Different exercises encourage different types of learning. These exercises are often introduced as a story-game. What follows is some Bible Brain Gym linked to Bible truths and you could try these as a 5 to 10 minute warm-up.

Get set

No particular equipment is necessary just some energy and enthusiasm!

Go!

1. Lift high the cross

Interestingly, one way to integrate left and right hand parts of the brain is to do a number of exercises that create cross-shapes or movements. Explore a range of ways that a cross can be made and expressed with the body:

- Cross arms out in front of the body in an X shape
- Cross fingers in front of the face in an X shape
- Cross over the right hand to touch the left elbow and then the left hand to touch the right elbow
- Cross over the right hand to the left hip and then the left hand to the right hip
- Cross over the left hand to the right knee and then the right hand to the left knee
- Touch the left earlobe with the right hand and then cross the left hand to the right ear lobe

Repeat these movements fairly briskly

- Repeat them in a sitting position, including a new one of crossing over the right elbow to touch the left knee and then the left elbow to touch the right knee
- Repeat some of these movements sitting cross-legged on the floor
- Repeat some of these movements lying on your back with your hands crossed behind your head and from this position touch different parts of the body with your elbows, making sure it is always opposite-to-opposite

- Repeat some of these movements with your eyes closed!

2. God's eternal love

Another recommended crossover movement is to make use of the mathematical symbol for eternity which is an 8 on its side...sometimes called a 'lazy 8'. You could accompany the making of this sign in the ways described below with the words 'God's love lasts for ever'.

- Extend your right hand and with your index finger trace the eternity symbol in a large circuit out in front of your body. Follow it with your eyes, but do not move your head.
- Repeat this but using the left hand
- Repeat this shape making it larger or smaller
- Follow an imaginary eternity symbol that you 'see', first close then far away, but without moving your head. Do this again with your eyes shut.
- Swing both arms together in this eternity shape in front of the body making it as big as possible
- Trace the shape with your fingers in the air in various places within your field of vision.
- Lean your head on to your left shoulder, extend your right arm out and make the shape
- Repeat this, leaning your head on your right shoulder

3. Reflecting God's character

There are various mirroring activities that are linked to these forms of warm-up exercises.

Extend each arm out in front of the body pointing forwards. Simultaneously trace with the index fingers a particular shape on either side of the centre line of your body, as you stand erect and still:

- Trace a square as the shape of the Bible
- Trace a triangle as the symbol of the Trinity
- Trace a circle as a symbol of God's unchanging faithfulness
- Trace a star of Bethlehem as a reminder of God coming as Jesus
- Trace a heart shape as a reminder of God's love for the world

Repeat these shapes but changing the direction in which you draw them

You might like to try this but involving all your limbs! Lie on the floor on your back with your feet and arms pointing up into the air and then try tracing the shapes mentioned above simultaneously with each limb.

4. Inspired by God

Good breathing is always recommended in warm-up exercises. Ideally you should always breathe from your belly; this allows your lungs to inflate to their maximum. Practise doing this:

Breathe in through the nose, counting 1, 2, 3.

Hold the breath in, counting 1, 2, 3



and then let the air out through your mouth, counting 1, 2, 3.

Many Christians use such breathing techniques in conjunction with a simple prayer in order to still and centre themselves. Why not add a simple prayer of your own, such as:

Here...I...am (1, 2, 3)... while you breathe in
You...and...me (1, 2, 3)... holding your breath
God...is...here (1, 2, 3)... while breathing out
Or maybe: Thank...You...Lord; You...Are...Here; Help...Us...Now

5. Putting on God's Armour

Some of the recommended exercises are akin to those used by athletes before a race. Why not link them to the verses in Ephesians chapter 6 about putting on the armour of God.

Standing up straight, cross over your left hand to your right shoulder and then your right hand to your left shoulder, as you put on the **breastplate of righteousness** (your body armour of being put right with God). Repeat this several times. Now fix it into position, by holding your thumb and middle finger just over the soft tissue under the clavicle on your chest, left and right of the sternum. In Brain Gym TM, these are known as 'brain buttons'. Hold this for a short while and then with the other hand repeat this hold.

Now reach across your left hand to your right hip and then your right hand to your left hip, as you fix on the **belt of truth**. Repeat this several times

Still standing, now bend forward slightly and put out your right leg in front of you bending the knee slightly, while the other leg should be straight but with its foot at 90 degrees to the other leg. Push forward with the leading knee and crook your right arm to demonstrate holding the **sword of the Spirit**

Repeat this action but reversing everything, so the left arm is crooked, holding this time the **shield of faith**

Stand up straight again and with both hands put your imaginary **helmet of salvation** over your head, fixing it in position with your finger and thumb on your forehead just above your eyes. Repeat this several times and then hold the finger and thumb in position for a short while, over what are known as your positive points

Finally sit down and rest one ankle across one knee. Place your fingertips onto your calf muscles below the rested knee and press up and down between there and the ankle. At the same time flex the foot of this rested leg. This is belting up the **shoes of the gospel of peace**. Put on your other shoe by repeating this, but sitting with your other ankle rested on the other knee.

6. Is anyone thirsty?



Another important 'discovery' in recent years is how vital it is that we drink water regularly in order to keep us alert and open to learn new things. Jesus offers us living water (John 7) that will well up in us to eternal life (John 4). Every now and again in your exercises introduce the words 'Jesus said, is anyone thirsty?', to which the response is to mime drinking a glass of water slowly and deliberately.

7. Lord, help me to speak and help me to listen

You could turn these two important prayers into an action warm up as well.

As you say 'help me to speak', you should simulate a very big, wide yawn (an energy yawn).

As you say 'help me to listen', reach up your hands to your ears and with index finger and thumb work from the top of the ear to the bottom unrolling the flesh at the edge of the earlobes, massaging the ear as you go.

8. The Lord's Prayer

Finally, why not bring some of these actions and a few new ones together by linking them up to the words of the Lord's Prayer. By doing this you also slow the prayer down and make each line more meaningful.

Our Father... in heaven

Belly breathe in, counting, 1, 2, 3 for the first two words; then pause and count silently, 1, 2, 3; before saying the next two words, as you breathe out, 1, 2, 3

Hallowed be your name

As you say these words, sit or kneel crossing your ankles in front or behind you. In addition, stretch out each arm in front of you, crossing hands at the wrist. Now link up the fingers and then bring the clasped hands back underneath towards your chin. Hold this for a while

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Reach out both arms in front of you and with your index fingers simultaneously trace the shape of a circle in the air either side of the centre of your body (=Your will be done on earth) and then trace the shape of a triangle (=as it is in heaven)

Give us this day our daily bread

Imitate the slow and deliberate drinking of a glass of water

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

Stand with feet apart and swing both arms linked together to touch first your left and then your right knees, several times

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

Stand upright and still again. Hold your left shoulder with your right hand, while you then slowly move your head from one side to the other. Repeat this action, but this time holding your right



shoulder with your left hand

For yours is the kingdom

Lift your right arm upwards above your head and hold on to it with your left arm folded around the back of your head

The power and the glory

Repeat this action but with your left arm held high and your right arm holding on to it around the back of your head

For ever and ever

With one arm extended out in front, trace with your index finger the mathematical shape for eternity (a lazy 8) across the front of your body, following it with your eyes but not moving your head

Amen

Bring both hands together in front of your face with all fingertips and thumbs touching those on the opposite hand, to create a structure like an open, upturned basket. Hold this for a few moments.

Have fun!