



BUILDING RESILIENCE

PUTTING *EVERYDAY GESTURES* TO WORK IN YOUR CLASSROOM

OUTCOMES

After engaging in this activity, participants will:

- Develop responses that comfort, listen to, inspire, collaborate with, and celebrate students
- Incorporate the five everyday gestures into their daily interactions with students and others
- Develop and implement a daily reflective teaching practice for ongoing implementation of the five everyday gestures

HOW TO USE THIS ACTIVITY

- In a group setting, such as a staff meeting, or on your own
- For professional development

TIME:

- 45-60 minutes

OVERVIEW

Studies show that an essential ingredient for a child's resilience, particularly a child who has been exposed to violence and traumatic stress, is a relationship between the child and a consistent, caring adult who sees their challenges with compassion, believes in them, and celebrates their accomplishments. Supportive and caring adults can help kids better cope with adversity and the effects of trauma. With these five gestures, YOU can make that difference:

The Five Gestures That Can Heal:

- **Comfort**
- **Listen**
- **Inspire**
- **Collaborate**
- **Celebrate**



Comfort: When comforting students—with or without words—your actions can go a long way. Stay calm and patient to help students feel safe and secure. Lower your voice, come down to eye level, and keep your tone measured and nonjudgmental. In ways like these, you can show compassion, provide reassurance, and demonstrate a commitment to being there for your students. Creating a safer environment is one of the most valuable elements of the Comfort gesture that helps children re-establish a sense of security, stability, and connectedness.

In the classroom, the **Comfort** gesture might look like this:

- Provides predictability with routines and easily transitions into new things, makes your classroom a nurturing and warm environment, and offers activities that give students the option to reflect
- Identifies trauma triggers and makes accommodations to help the student feel secure, when possible

In the classroom, the **Comfort** gesture might sound like this:

- “Are you feeling nervous or anxious about something? I’m here, if you want to talk about it.”
- “It looks like you’re having a hard time. How can I help?”



Listen: Practice active listening (i.e. listening to understand, rather than listening to respond) with students as much as possible. For all students, especially those who have been exposed to traumatic stress and violence, a patient and receptive adult who listens can help them feel safe and valued. Listening attentively to students shows we care and that their thoughts and feelings matter. Teaching them to listen actively helps model good communication and see other’s perspectives.

In the classroom, the **Listen** gesture might look like this:

- Creates a positive classroom climate by establishing rules and norms that support respectful listening
- Creates processes that allow all students a chance to share and be heard
- Shows you’re curious and interested
- Removes distractions
- Demonstrates active listening with your whole body

In the classroom, the **Listen** gesture might sound like this:

- “Tell me more about how you’re feeling.”
- “I’m here to listen whenever you’d like to talk.”
- “Did you mean (this)? I want to make sure I understand you.”



Inspire: Many of us became educators because we believe in possibilities. Motivate and encourage students, recognize their potential, believe in who they are and who they can be. Caring adults can have an immense impact on students’ lives and help them to actually reverse the negative physiological responses to traumatic stress that can occur. Identify the strengths and natural talents you observe in your classroom. Offer a word of encouragement. A little inspiration goes a long way towards healing.

In the classroom, the **Inspire** gesture might look like this:

- Demonstrates a belief in your students’ potential through your words and actions
- Encourages your students to dream big and set goals
- Helps students to be open minded to new ideas

In the classroom, the **Inspire** gesture might sound like this:

- “Who would you be if you could be anyone in the world?”
- “I’ve heard so many great ideas today!”



Collaborate: Encouraging students to collaborate and work together towards a common goal will help them in all aspects of their future. Students who have been exposed to trauma and violence may need help building trust with their fellow students as well as adults in their lives. Fostering an environment of collaboration in the classroom can give students a sense of connection and belonging, as well as pride.

In the classroom, the **Collaborate** gesture might look like this:

- Shows students how to work with others
- Teaches problem-solving skills and emphasizes the process, not just the outcome
- Encourages students to ask for help

In the classroom, the **Collaborate** gesture might sound like this:

- “Do you need help? Maybe someone in the class has some new ideas?”
- “How could we work together to solve this problem?”



Celebrate: Use “put ups” not “put downs” to celebrate students’ achievements, affirm who they are as individuals, support the development of their self-identity, and remind them that they are valued. Acknowledge milestones and everyday accomplishments like completing an assignment or task, contributing in class, or meeting new friends.

In the classroom, the **Celebrate** gesture might look like this:

- Calls out students’ talents and strengths
- Greets students by their preferred name and learns the correct pronunciation
- Recognizes and applauds students’ efforts
- Honors students’ cultural traditions, values, and rituals

In the classroom, the **Celebrate** gesture might sound like this:

- “You’re such a talented writer.”
- “I am proud of you for studying so hard for the exam.”
- “You’re so funny. You’ve got a great sense of humor.”

MATERIALS

One copy per participant of each of the five .pdf handouts for the everyday gestures from the [Changing Minds](#) website:

- [Comfort](#)
- [Listen](#)
- [Inspire](#)
- [Collaborate](#)
- [Celebrate](#)
- Marker, chalk, interactive white board, or a large piece of paper
- Reflective teaching journal
- Pre-cut slips of blank paper (enough for each participant to contribute five “scenarios” – one for each of the five gestures; see “Everyday gestures Role Play” at the end of this activity)
- A hat, bag, or other container for collecting and drawing the slips

PROCEDURE

1. Allow participants 10-15 minutes to review all five of the handouts. Or, as a time-saving option, ask participants to review the five handouts ahead of time.
2. Engage participants in a critical thinking activity by asking the questions below in one of three following ways:
 - Pose the questions to the whole group and facilitate a wider discussion.
 - Divide participants into pairs and instruct them to devise answers together and report to the whole group.
 - Allow participants time to reflect on the questions individually and write down their responses in their journals.
 - Why did you become an educator? Who was a teacher or other adult that made a difference in your life?
 - Reflect inwardly on a time life’s difficulties made it hard to do your job as a teacher.
 - What are some difficulties your students are dealing with at home or in their community that may show up in the classroom?
3. Next, divide participants into groups of 2-4.
4. Ask the whole group to vote on which of the five everyday gestures they’d like most to investigate. Write the tally on the board, on a large piece of paper:

Celebrate	Comfort	Listen	Collaborate	Inspire

5. Starting with the gesture that has the highest number of votes, direct participants to review the section under “Environment-Related Tips” titled “At School” within their small groups. (Optionally, consider asking participants to also review the appropriate “Age-Related Tips” for your school’s age group(s)). Discuss in your small group the following:
 - What are some ways to accomplish the tips listed in your own classroom?
 - Are there any of these tips that you’re practicing already?
 - Which of these tips could you easily add into your teaching practice right away?
6. Continuing in your small group, distribute the small blank strips of paper so that each participant has at least one slip.
 - Think of a brief scenario, situation, or example of an interaction with a student where this gesture might be called for.
 - Write the situation down on your slip of paper.
 - Group members may write down a response individually, or collaborate to complete responses that represent the same number of people that are in the group. For example, a group of three should produce three completed slips.
7. Allow participants 15–20 minutes to complete the discussion and produce their slips. Collect all the slips from all groups.
8. Ask for two volunteers to role play one of the situations. One volunteer will draw a slip, and role play as the student in the situation. The other volunteer will role play as the teacher. Allow about 2 minutes for the role play. Time permitting, role play 2–4 of the situations as time permits.
9. Be sure to applaud the volunteers’ performance(s)! Then, ask the whole group to debrief after each situation:
 - What went well?
 - What could have gone better?
 - Drawing from the tips listed for this gesture, what, if any, suggestions do you have for the “teacher” in this role play that may have made a difference in the outcome?
 - Thank the volunteers with another round of applause.
10. Time permitting, repeat this process for the other four gestures/handouts by next highest number of votes, and so on, until all five gestures have been considered and debriefed.
11. Participants may wish to use their reflective teaching journals to further implement the five everyday gestures into their daily teaching practice. A suggestion follows:

- Set daily goals for implementing the everyday gestures you've just practiced. At the close of each teaching day, assess your progress in a ten-minute daily reflection. Ask yourself the following questions, and record your responses in your journal:
 - What went well today?
 - What didn't go as well as you hoped? What, if anything, could you have done differently? Would that have changed the outcome?
 - What happened that was unexpected? How did you handle that?
 - Is there anyone in your class(es) who you are particularly concerned about? Why? What can you do about that?
 - What are your goals for tomorrow?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on using the Everyday gestures with students, please visit:

- [Everyday Gestures](#) - Find more suggestions and strategies for putting Everyday Gestures into use.
- [Additional Everyday Gestures Resources](#) - Delve deeper into the science behind Everyday Gestures, with research and videos about childhood trauma.
- [Changing Minds Module](#) - Discover promising practices that help children impacted by trauma to heal and thrive.
- [Changing Minds Educator Activity](#) - Oxygen Mask: Creating a Plan to Take Care of Yourself
- [Changing Minds Student Activity](#) - Recognizing Resilience: Helping Students Understand the Amazing Teen Brain

EVERYDAY GESTURES ROLE PLAY
