



Calmness Guide

Brief practices to support children and families during moments of fear or stress

For facilitators, volunteers, and families involved in vigils and community accompaniment

Before you begin: three things to know

These practices are designed for children and adults experiencing real—not imagined—fear. Because of this, they work differently than a standard meditation, and it is helpful to keep three ideas in mind before guiding someone:

- 1 Keep your eyes open and use the body as an anchor.** For someone who has experienced trauma, closing their eyes or trying to "clear their mind" can trigger difficult memories rather than provide calm. What works best is something physical and tangible: a hand, a foot, or an object they can touch.
- 2 Follow the child's pace, not your own.** If someone looks uncomfortable, pauses, or wants to stop, it is okay to stop. No practice should feel forced.
- 3 You don't have to do them all.** Even a single practice, guided calmly and well, is helpful. Choose the one that best fits the moment and the group.

These practices draw on the guidance of Milou Haskin, MHC, MA—a psychotherapist specializing in trauma and attachment—and the Plum Village mindfulness tradition; they have been adapted here for our community, using our own examples.

The Practices

1 My Friend Breathes with me

Helps younger children feel their breath in a tangible way, using a stuffed animal or knitted toy they already have.

1. Ask the child to lie on their back (if there is space) or sit comfortably.
2. Place the toy on their belly.
3. Ask them to breathe slowly through their nose and watch how their friend "goes up" as the air comes in.
4. As they exhale through their mouth, the friend slowly "goes down"—as if they were rocking it to sleep.
5. Repeat five to eight times, without rushing.



2 Little Hands Moving Back and Forth

For children who prefer to keep their eyes wide open and need something visible that moves.

1. Bring your palms together in front of your chest.
2. As you inhale, slowly separate your hands, as if opening a window.
3. As you exhale, slowly bring your hands back together.
4. You can imagine your hands are waves ebbing and flowing at the seashore.
5. Repeat the movement for six to eight breaths.

3 Mountain Shoulders

Releases tension built up in the shoulders and neck—areas where the body often holds onto fear.

1. As you inhale, lift your shoulders toward your ears, like a growing mountain.
2. Hold for a second.
3. As you exhale, let your shoulders drop suddenly, feeling them release.
4. Repeat four to six times.

4 Squeeze and Release

A simple way to feel the difference between tension and calm in the body.

1. Ask the child to clench their fists tightly, as if gripping something with all their might.
2. Count to five while holding the squeeze.
3. Release suddenly and ask them to notice how their hands feel now—loose and warm.
4. This can be repeated with the feet, arms, or by shrugging the shoulders.

5 Calm Humming

The sound and vibration in the chest help calm the body, even without words.

1. Invite the group to take a breath and, as they exhale, make a soft, long sound like “mmmm” or “vvvv.”
2. They can place a hand on their chest to feel the vibration.
3. Repeat three to five times, letting everyone find their own tone.



6 Butterfly Touch

A gentle, repetitive movement that helps one feel accompanied, even when alone.

1. Cross your arms over your chest, as if giving yourself a hug.
2. With your hands resting on your shoulders or arms, tap gently and alternately—left and right—like the fluttering wings of a butterfly.
3. Continue the movement while breathing slowly, for half a minute or longer.

7 Calming Stones

A short practice using four small objects—small stones, buttons, or anything that fits in the palm of your hand—designed for slightly older children.

Each object represents something we all carry within us, even if we don't always feel it:

1. The first is a flower: as you hold it, breathe and think of something you like or that makes you feel good.
2. The second is a mountain: as you hold it, breathe and remember that you can stand firm even when things around you are moving.
3. The third is still water: as you hold it, breathe and let your mind calm down, like water when it stops moving.
4. The fourth is the sky: as you hold it, breathe and feel that there is plenty of space for you, with nothing crowding you.

If the group already has any of the knitted friends, they can hold one throughout the practice instead of the stones—the object then represents all four things at once.

A space for those providing support, too

These practices are not just for children. The volunteers, facilitators, and families who sustain the vigil, the clinic or any interaction with the community week after week also carry the weight of what they see and hear. Any of these exercises—especially “Mountain Shoulders” or “Calm Humming”—can be done in a group, before or after a shift, as a quick way to care for the caregiver.

This document will continue to grow as we keep learning alongside our mental health partners. If a practice doesn't work for a particular group, or if someone finds one that works better, it is worth noting and sharing it.