SENSORY CIRCUITS

THE WHY

I am sure that most of us will easily be able to think of children in our groups who like to fidget, run, throw things around and can crash into people. Sometimes those behaviours can be mis-understood as disruptive poor choices - but what if they are actually a beautiful example of how we are fearfully and wonderfully made?

Our senses play a huge role in helping us to keep our cool and stay in a just right state - 'regulated'. All children and young people need regular movement and touch experiences to support their regulation and healthy sensory development - without it, incredibly, their body will seek it out to help it feel calm and safe!! Running around, spinning, throwing, crashing into people or objects, fidgeting and even biting can all be sensory seeking behaviours and a sign that a child's body is dysregulated and is seeking sensory input.

Sensory circuits are a tool to help ensure children's bodies get the sensory input that they need and can be a brilliant way of helping them to feel calm and safe.

THE WHAT

Sensory Circuits are short, structured sequences of physical activities that are designed to help regulate children's developing sensory systems. They were first created by an occupational therapist called Jane Horwood as a way of supporting children's sensory regulation and helping them to stay in a 'just right' state. They work by giving children's 'fizzy' bodies the movement and touch experiences that they regularly need with the aim of reducing the need for them to seek it out in ways that might be less helpful.

As volunteers or children's ministers in churches, most of us will not be trained as occupational therapists or teachers or qualified and able to offer physical therapy. However, I believe that there is rich learning in this intervention tool that we can tap into as we seek to create spaces where every child feels safe and calm.

With that in mind, the Wonderful Me! Sensory Circuits Tool seeks to draw on the wisdom and learning of the original programme in a way that is simple, practical and hopefully, accessible for all of us. Most of the activities need very little equipment - lots just need a roll of masking tape to mark out a course. For any that do need equipment, I've tried to limit it to things that I think lots of churches may have - the main exception is probably the scooter boards - though these are so much fun, if you don't have any they would be worth adding to your wish list!

THE HOW

There are 3 stages to a sensory circuit and the key thing to remember is that they need to be completed in the right order to help feed the fidgets and calm and soothe the nervous system.

1. MOVE

We start with big, whole body movements to get fizzy bodies moving - or even wake up more sleepy ones!

2. FOCUS

Stage 2 encourages a bit of concentration as they are all activities that use balance and movement planning.

3. CALM

We end with activites that seek to calm the nervous system through deep pressure or heavy muscle work ... think squeeze, pull, push.

The 'pick'n'mix' style activities in the Wonderful Me! Sensory Circuits resource are all colour coded - pink for 'Move' activities, orange for 'Focus' activities and green for 'Calm' activities.

To create your sensory circuit, simply choose 1 or 2 activities (depending on the time you have) from each stage. You could stick them up on the wall - or stick them to the floor- so that children can work their way around the circuit. You might find it helpful to use masking tape to mark out a route.

Most of the activities are quite straightforward - with the exception of some of the 'Calm' breathing activities. These are all taken from the Wonderful Me! Breathe resource where you can find full instructions of each breathing activity. It's free to download and available in the resources section of the Wonderful Me! website.

You'll find 9 activity suggestions for each section to get you started - with lots more ideas available online ... just search 'Sensory Circuits'. You'll also find a blank template for each section so you can add any ideas you find.

WHEN TO USE SENSORY CIRCUITS

To be honest, there isn't a clear cut answer to that as it will depend on quite a few different factors including ... the number of children you have and the space available, the needs of the children in your group and the structure of your sessions.

Sensory circuits can be quite settling and soothing for fizzy bodies and so they can work well as starter activites. If children tend to drip into your sessions at slightly different times, you could have a sensory trail marked out for them to follow as they enter the room, with a leader there to greet them and support them through it.
Lots of the activity suggestions can be completed by multiple children at the same time so you could use a sensory circuit as a group 'warm up' activity together..
Alternatively, you could try a carousel approach, splitting the children into small groups, with either a couple of options for each stage or simply multiple spaces for the same activity - just remember to work through the stages in order: Move - Focus - Calm.

If you have children in your groups who find it particularly challenging to regulate their sensory systems and who can be sensory seeking, having a sensory circuit marked out may be a useful 1:1 support tool when they need a movement break.

A NOTE ON SCOOTER BOARDS

If your budget allows, scooter boards are a great tool to have in your equipment cupboard. I've included an activity suggestion in the 'Move' section that uses them but, given that they are a bit pricey - I thought I would add in a few extra suggestions to help you get your money's worth! As a bonus, they all work great as sensory circuit activites!!!

Body Bowling

Lie on the scooter board on your tummy and wheel yourself towards some skittles - seeing how many you can knock over.

Fishing

Working in teams, 1 person at a time wheels out on their tummy to collect a 'fish' from the 'pond' in the centre. At the end of the time, the team with the most fish wins.

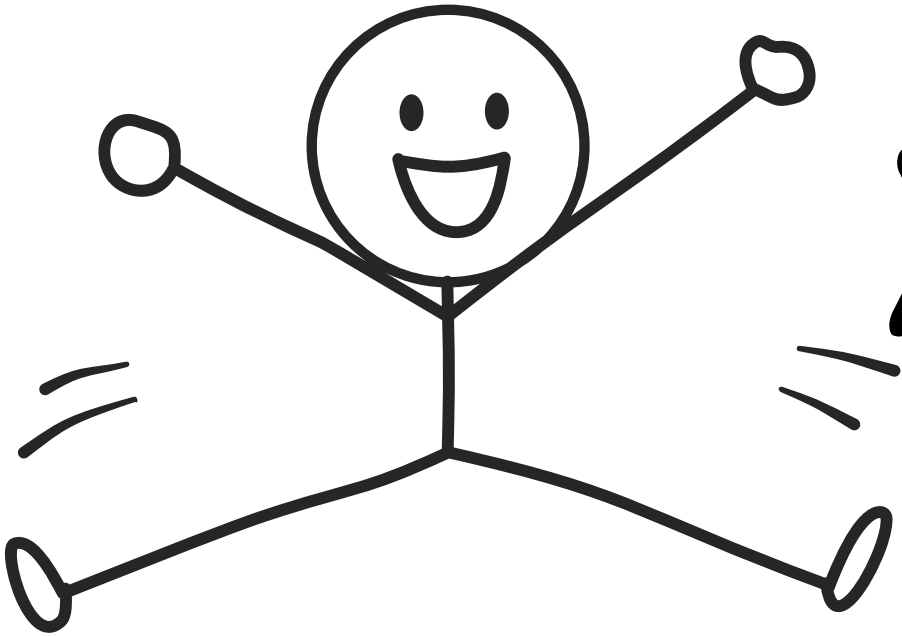
Sorting Races

Teams start with a bucket of different coloured balls and have to take 1 ball at a time and put it into the correct coloured hoop. Or line up 5 or 6 cones for each team with players scooting 1 at a time to balance a ball on the top of a cone.

As with any activity, please follow your church safeguarding and health and safety processes when completing any sensory circuit. If you are using scooter boards, you should consider using bicycle helmets.

10 star jumps

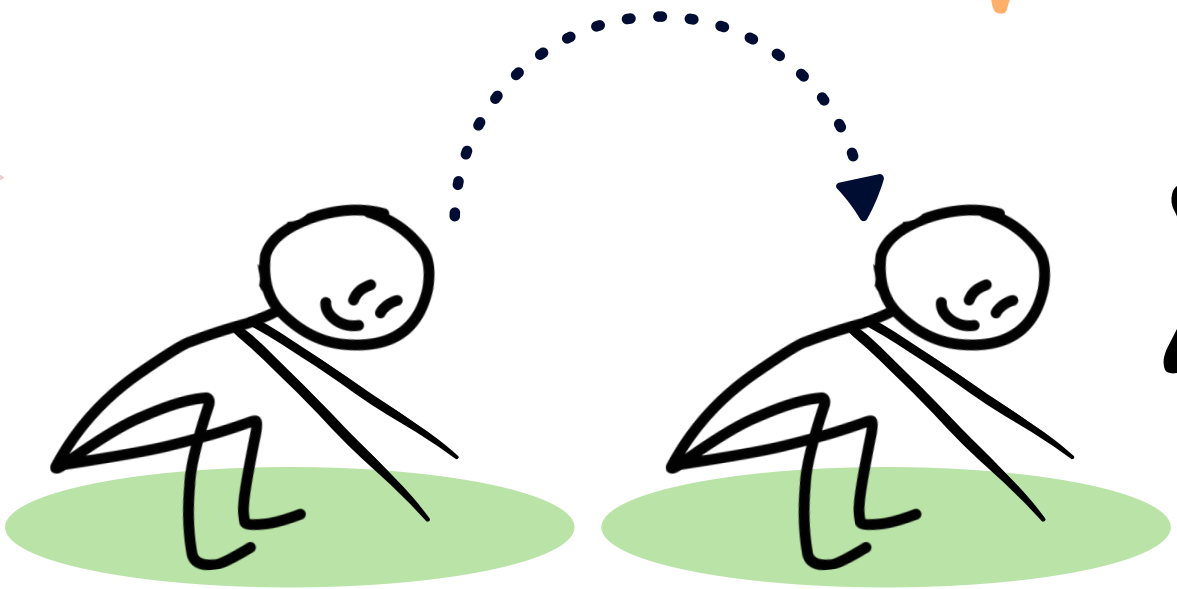
MOVE



X 10

10 frog jumps

MOVE



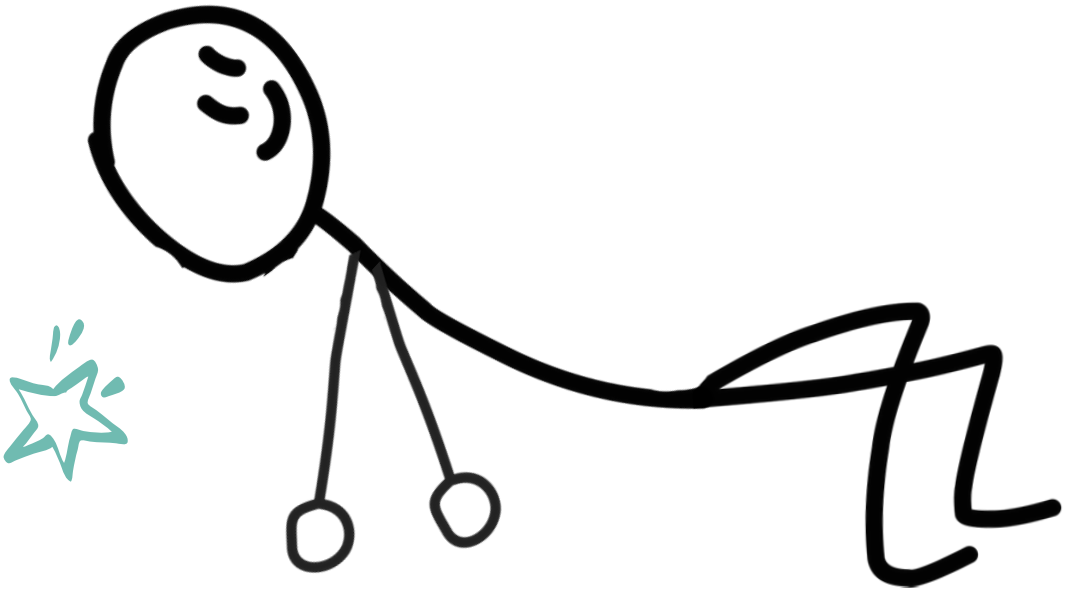
X 10



Wonderful me!

Crab Walk

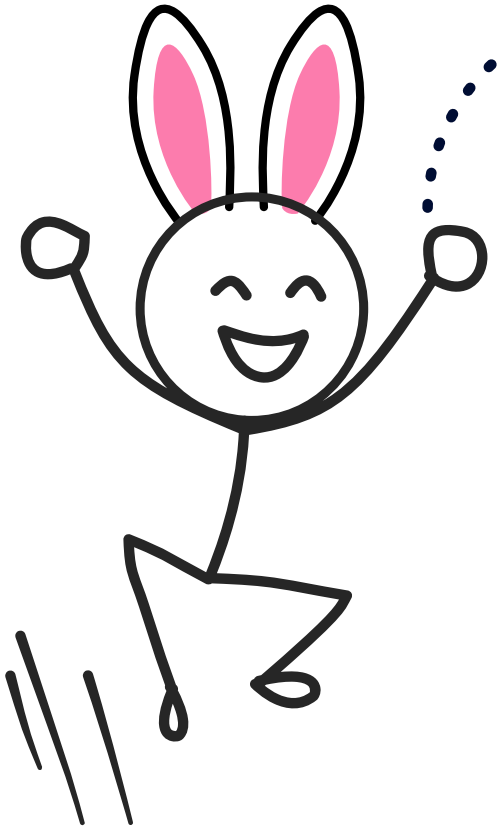
MOVE





10 bunny hops

MOVE

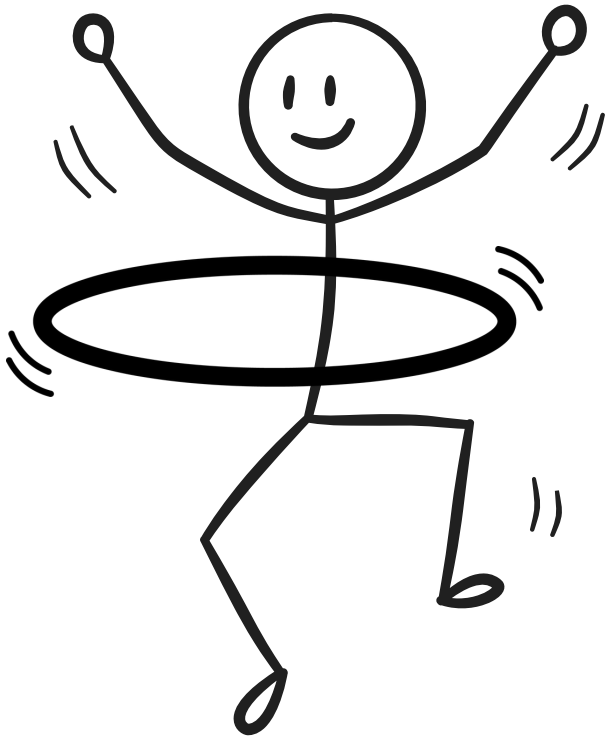


X 10



Hoola-hoop (and count to 10)

MOVE



Skip



MOVE

Run on the spot very fast (and count to 10)

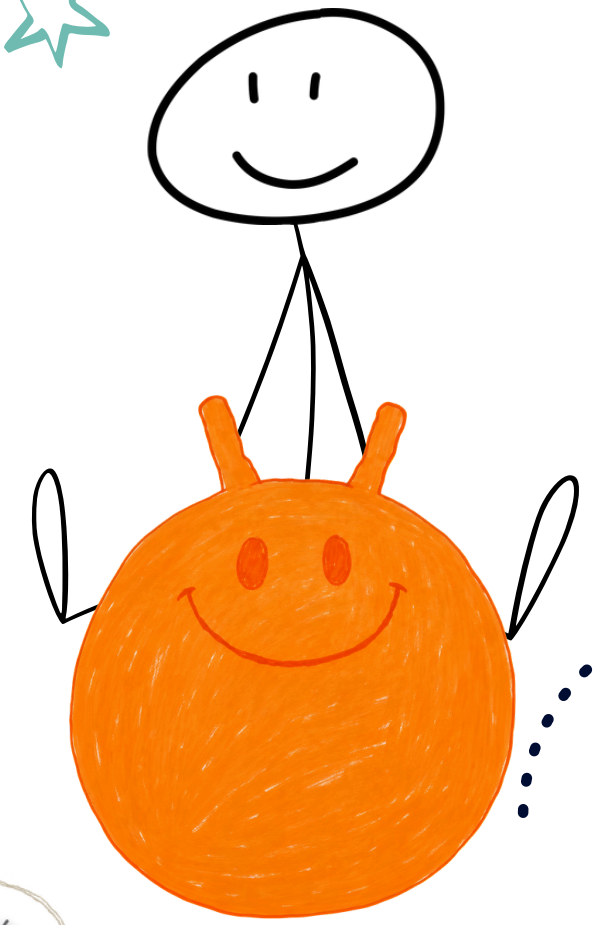
MOVE

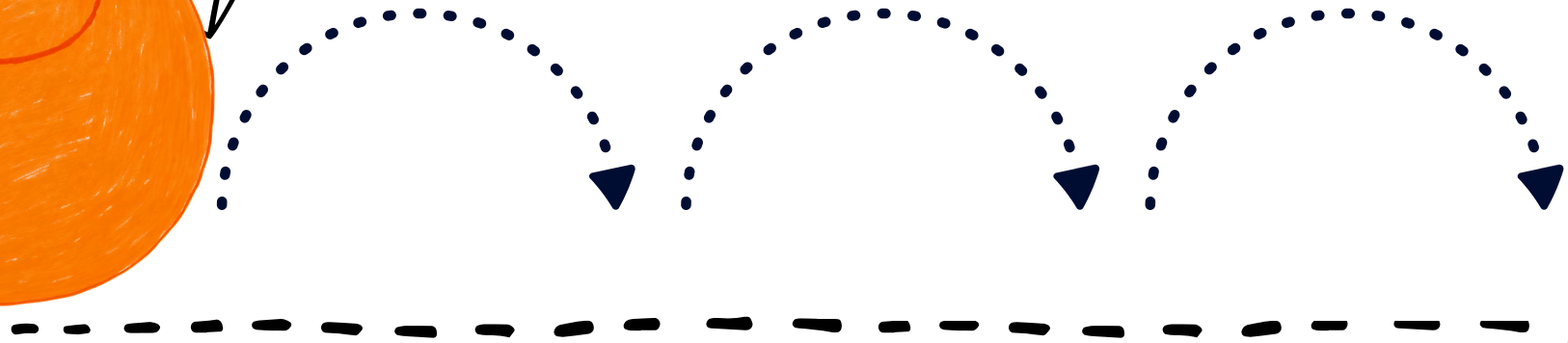


Wonderful me!

Bounce on a space hopper

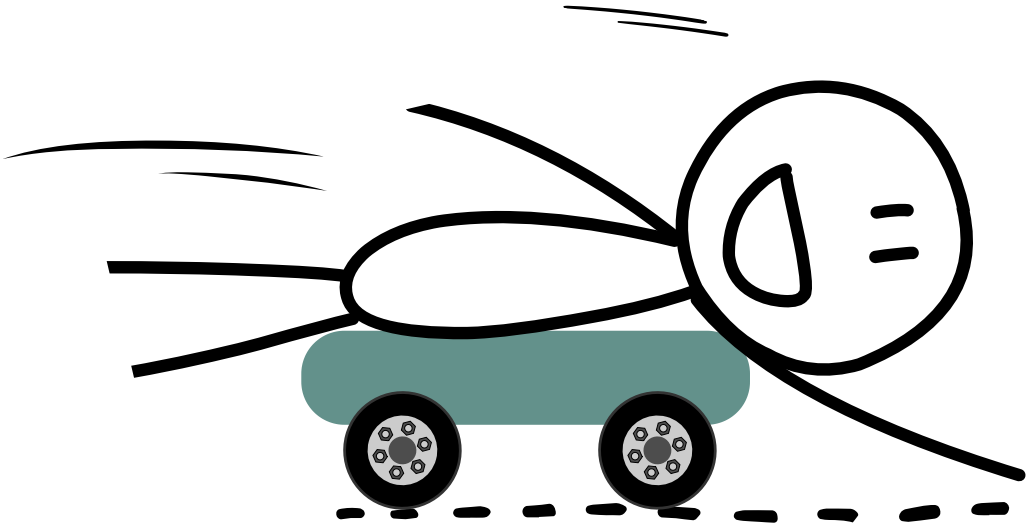
MOVE





Scooterboard on your tummy along the line

MOVE



Wonderful me!

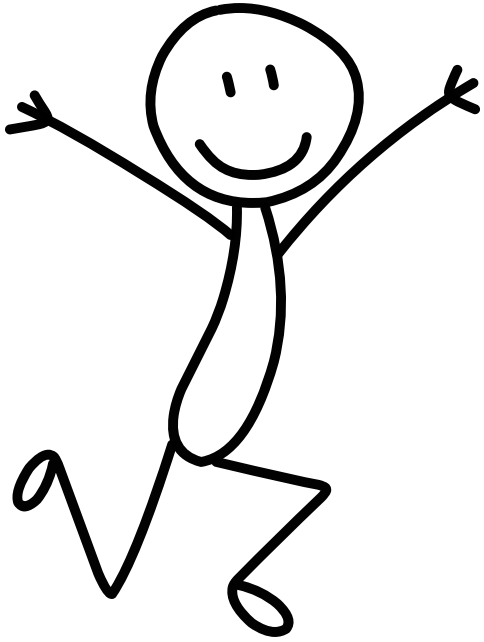
MOVE

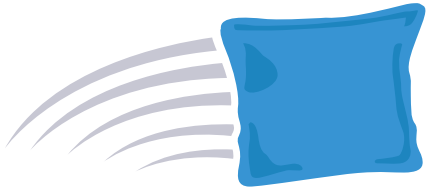




Throw a beanbag into a hoop

FOCUS







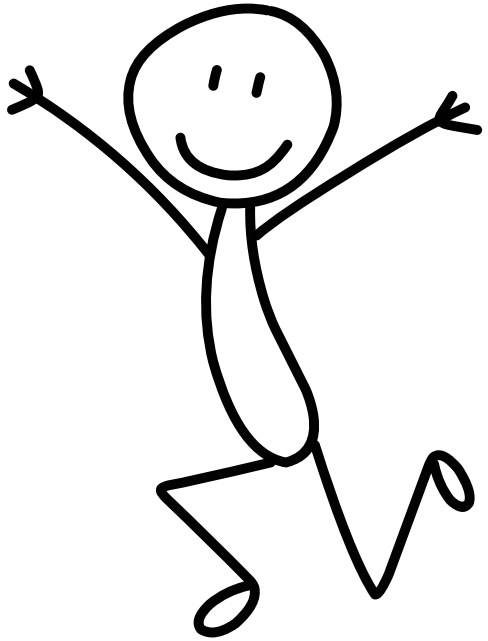
Make a paper ball and throw it into the bin

FOCUS

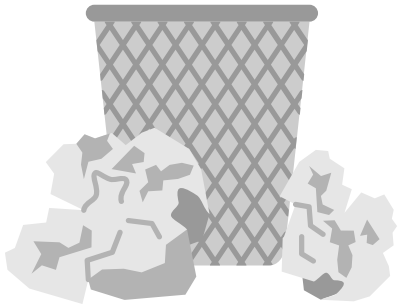












Wonderful me!

Follow the line

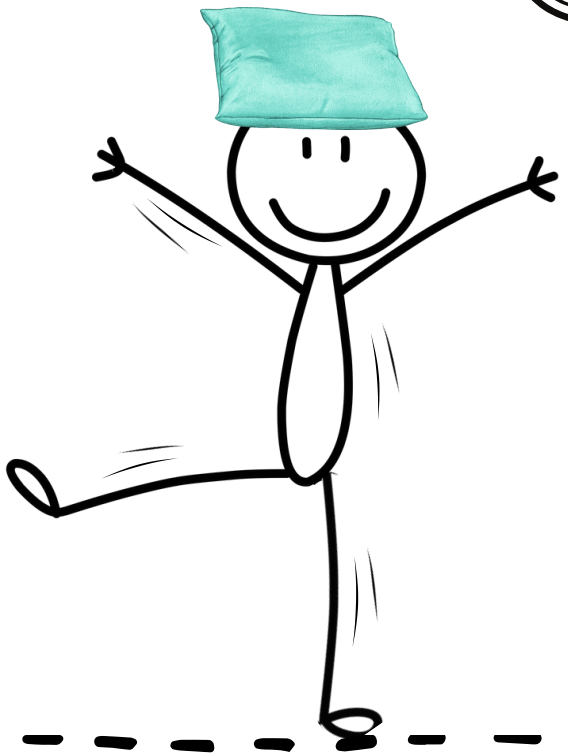
FOCUS



Wonderful me!

Balance a beanbag on your head

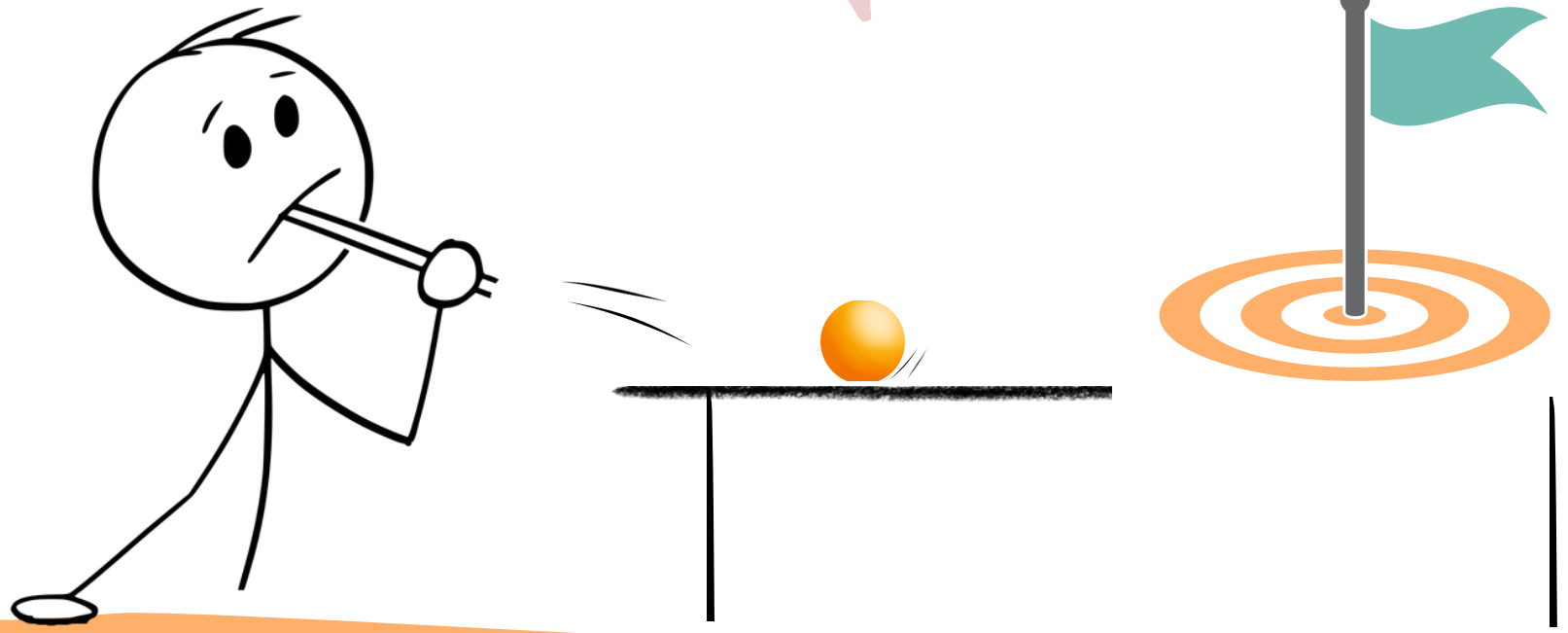
FOCUS



Wonderful me!

Blow the pingpong ball onto the target

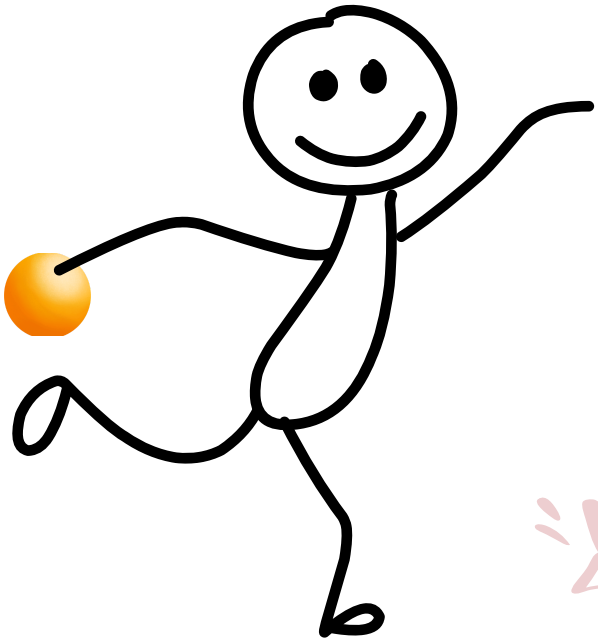
FOCUS

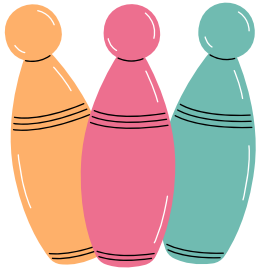


Wonderful me!

Knock down the skittles with the ball

FOCUS



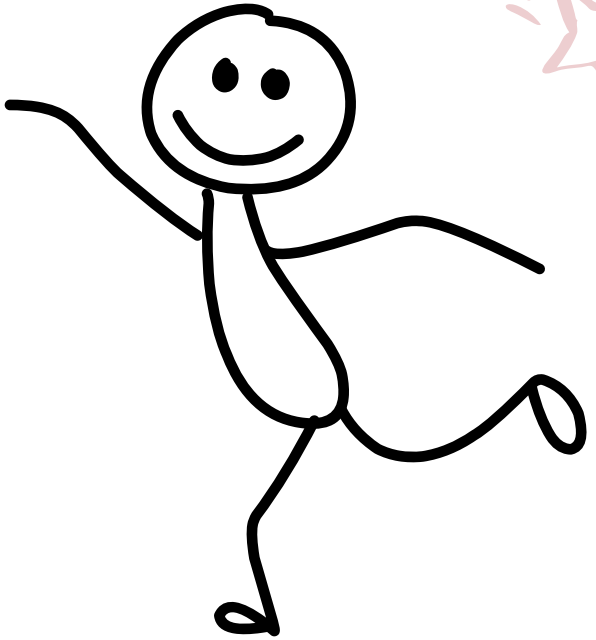


Knock down the cans with the beanbag

FOCUS







Balance on 1 leg and count to 10

FOCUS



Balancing on 1 leg, throw and catch a balloon

FOCUS

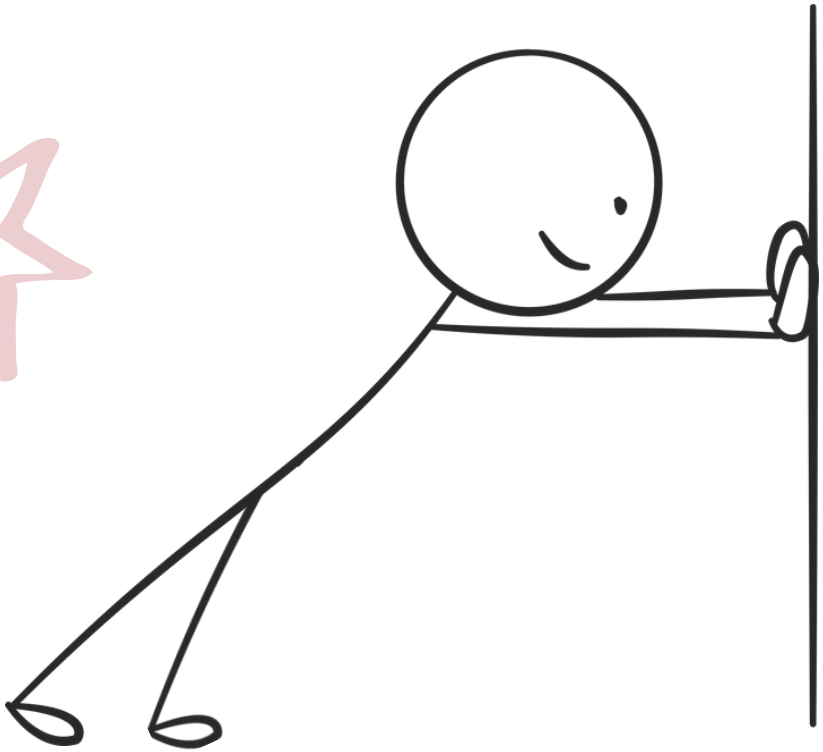


FOCUS



10 wall press-ups

CALM

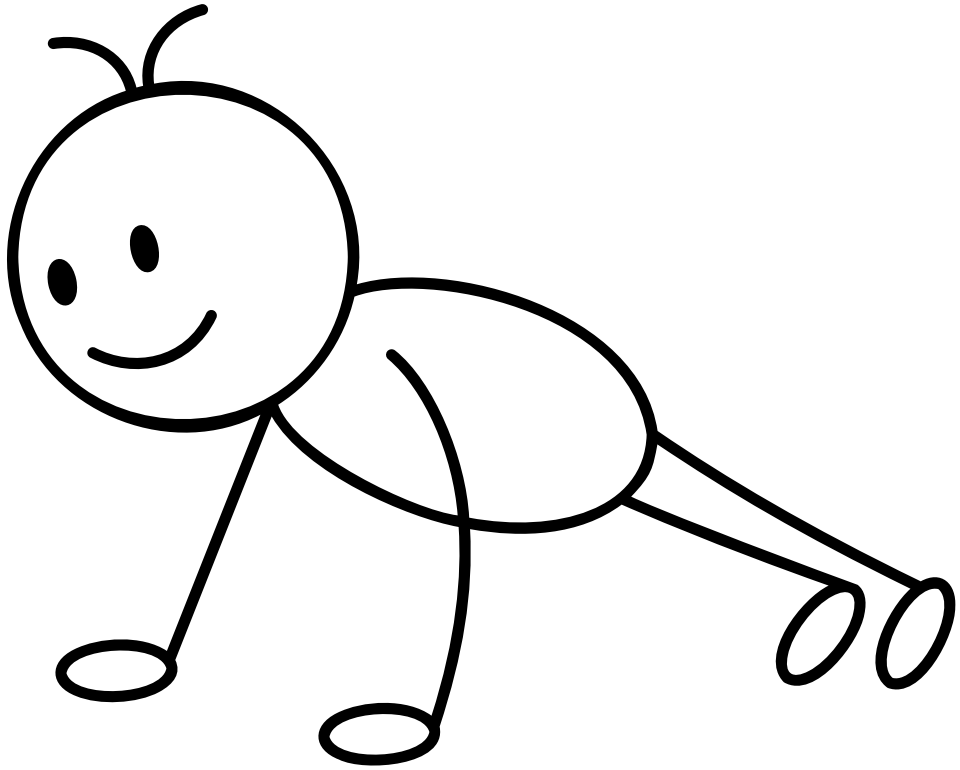


X 10

Wonderful me!

Plank for 10 seconds

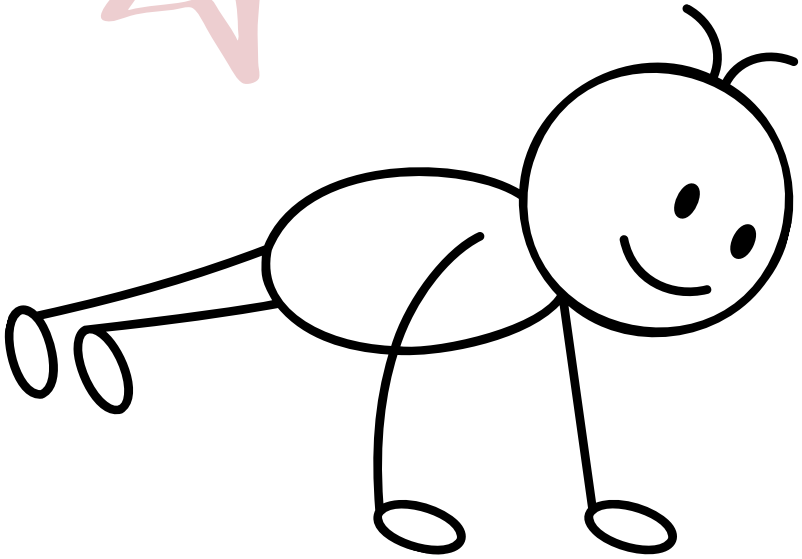
CALM

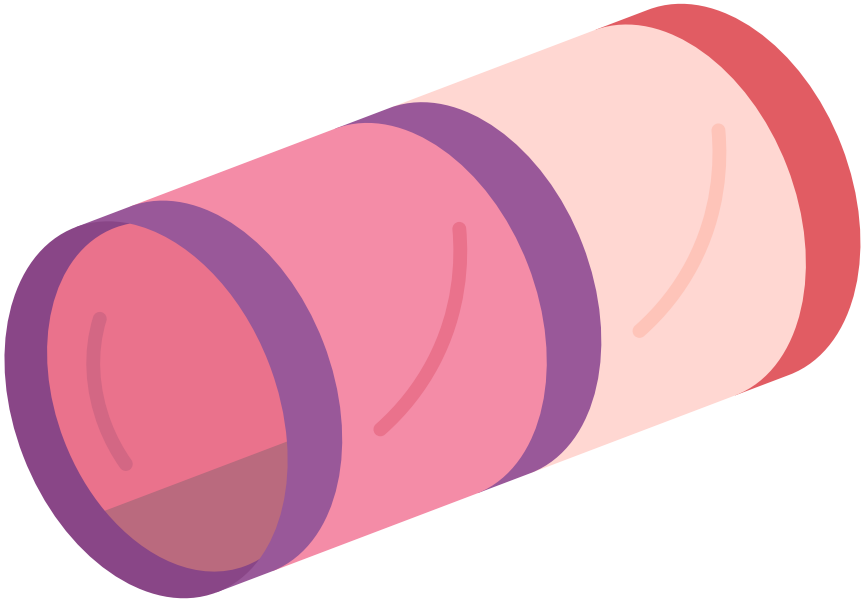


Wonderful me!

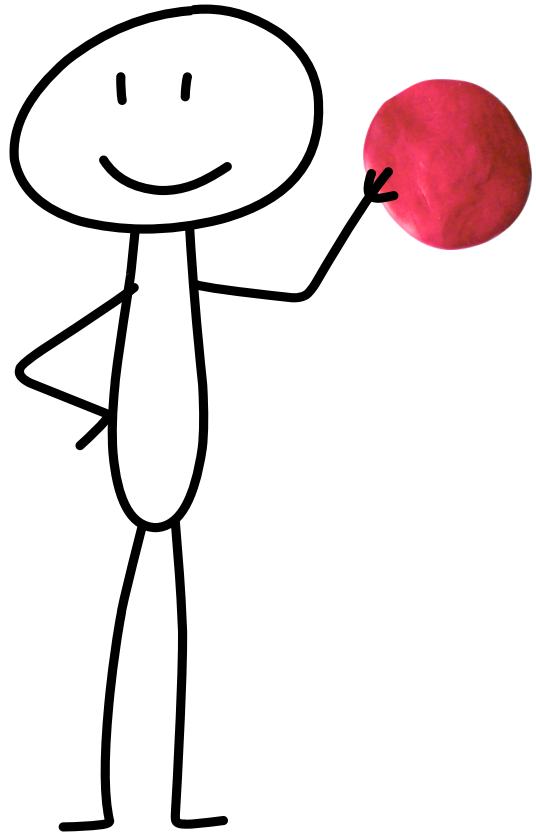
Crawl through a tunnel

CALM



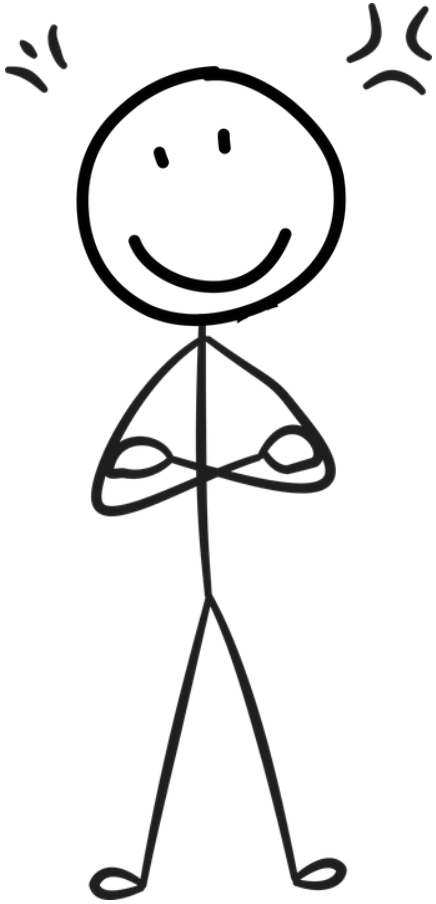


Make a playdough person





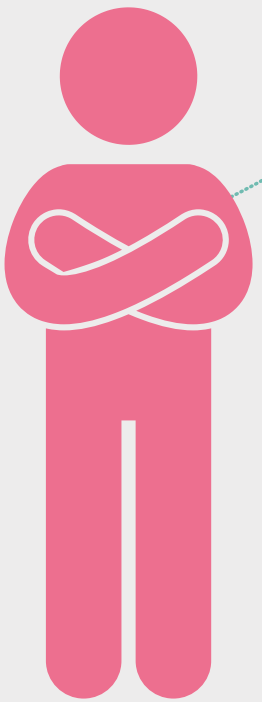
Give yourself a big bear hug





Butterfly Breathing

CALM



X 3

Teddy bear Breathing

CALM



X 3

Wonderful me!

Rainbow Breathing

CALM



X 3

Wonderful me!

Finger Breathing

CALM



Wonderful me!

CALM

