

Unit 4C: The Fight or Flight Response



Vocabulary:

Cortisol - A hormone that helps the body respond to stress.

Fight or Flight Stress Response - A chemical response to stress from a threatening situation, which readies one either to resist forcibly or to run away.

Teacher's Notes:

How To Begin and End Each Lesson

Begin With a Breath Brake

Instruct students to stand at attention, repeat the hand motions and the mantra, **Power Peace Purpose**, and end with a bow. Ask students to take several breaths to clear their minds and prepare to watch the video.

Teacher Statement:



The Breath Brake helps us clear our minds, relax and focus. Focused breathing stops the flow of stress chemicals from the brain. You can close your eyes if you want to. Follow along:

- ★ *Breathe in through your nose, slowly and deeply. Think of each breath as a wave as it gently raises, holds, and then slowly lowers your body.*
- ★ *Hold it for three seconds.*
- ★ *Breathe out slowly and steadily from your mouth while you feel your body gently relax.*
- ★ *Breathe in and visualize that you are breathing in a powerful light.*
- ★ *Breathe out and imagine you are blowing out any darkness.*
- ★ *Breathe in, hold for 3 seconds, then breathe out. Repeat as needed.*

*Remember when you breathe, you are helping others who need your light. **Power Peace Purpose.***

There are thousands of children around the world who spend a lot of time in the hospital. Sometimes, they feel very lonely. When you join the Heroes Circle, it makes them feel better. When you do your power breathing you are also teaching your family and friends around you. You are an amazing teacher and a good friend!

End with Power Peace Purpose:

Recite and review the Power Peace Purpose mantra with students at the end of each day's lesson. Then, the students bow.



The Breath Brake helps you restore your power, brings you to a place of peace, and enables you to understand your purpose.

Unit 4C: The Fight or Flight Response

Day 1: WATCH



Focus: Social Awareness

Students will watch a video about the brain's fight or flight stress response.

Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Observe how the brain processes feelings and activates the body's stress response.
- Describe how the brain's release of cortisol affects the body and the mind.
- Practice the Breath Brake and repeat the **Power Peace Purpose** mantra.

Time Requirement:

15 minutes



Materials Needed:

Video - [HeroesCircle.org/SupportMaterials4](https://www.heroescircle.org/supportmaterials4)

Lesson Process:

1 Begin with a Breath Brake:

Begin the lesson with the mantra **Power Peace Purpose**. Students bow. Lead students through a Breath Brake.

2 Introduce key concepts:



Today we will watch a video about the brain's fight or flight stress response. Pay attention to what happens in the brain and body when we experience stress.

3 Show the video:

Show the video – [HeroesCircle.org/SupportMaterials4](https://www.heroescircle.org/supportmaterials4)

4 Talk about key concepts:

When we experience stress, the brain sends messages to the adrenal glands to release cortisol throughout the body. Cortisol can affect breathing and heart rate, tighten muscles, and get the body ready for fight or flight action. That's the body's natural way of responding to stress. The video showed how we could override that natural response with a Breath Brake.

Use the following talking points to discuss as a class, in small groups, or student pairs:

- What happens in the body when the brain releases cortisol? Responses may include:
 - The heart beats faster, the muscles tense up or tighten, and breathing speeds up.
- Describe how the brain's fight or flight stress response works. Responses may include:
 - The brain releases cortisol which prepares the body for fight or flight to avoid danger.
 - The brain senses fear, anger, or danger and automatically releases hormones that prepare the body to manage what's happening.
- What are some feelings that trigger the fight or flight stress response? Responses may include:
 - Feelings of fear, shame, guilt, worry, anxiety, and anger, among other feelings.



5 End with Power Peace Purpose mantra:

Power Peace Purpose. Then, students bow.

Day 2: THINK



Focus: Responsible Decision Making

Students will be encouraged to think and talk about the brain's fight or flight stress response.

Time Requirement:

15 minutes



Materials Needed: N/A

Learning Objectives: In this lesson, students will:

- Identify what kind of experiences activate the fight or flight response.
- Describe how the fight or flight stress response prepares the body to respond.
- Practice the Breath Brake and recite the **Power Peace Purpose** mantra.

Lesson Process:

1 Begin with a Breath Brake:

Begin with the mantra **Power Peace Purpose**. Students bow. Lead students through a Breath Brake.

2 Review key concepts:



Think about the video that we watched yesterday about the brain's fight or flight stress response. We learned that it is a natural response, but we can override it and take back control.

Ask students to share what they learned or remember from the video.

3 Think about key concepts:

Today we will talk more about the fight or flight response, what kinds of experiences activate it, and how or why the brain prepares the body to respond to stress in the ways that it does.



*Think about Sensei Richard's example of encountering a tiger while walking down the street. That would automatically activate most people's stress response. You'd feel a fast heartbeat, and your muscles might feel tight. That's your body telling you that you may be in danger, and you should get ready to run or fight. Most people encounter many stressful experiences in a day – taking a test, arguing with others, or feeling overwhelmed about everything they have to do. What are some situations that trigger your stress response? **[Pause for student answers.]***

When your fight or flight stress response is activated repeatedly, it is no longer helpful in preparing you for fight or flight. Constant stress can affect your physical and mental health.

4 Talk about key concepts:

Use the following talking points to encourage discussion as a class, in small groups, or partner pairs:

- What are some feelings that might activate the fight or flight stress response?
Responses may include:
 - Feeling worried, fearful, angry, nervous, or guilty can activate the stress response.
- How does feeling stressed change your ability to think clearly and make good decisions?
Responses may include:
 - Stress makes it hard for you to think and decide. You may just react instead of thinking.
 - You may just automatically respond without thinking about your options.
- When you feel something trigger your stress response, what's the first and most important decision you can make? Responses may include:
 - Take a Breath Brake. It can stop the stress hormones, so you can relax and feel calm.
- How can your decision to take a Breath Brake affect you, others, and the whole school?
 - It can relax your mind and body so you can think clearly and make good decisions.

5 End with Power Peace Purpose:

Power Peace Purpose. Then, students bow.

Unit 4C: The Fight or Flight Response

Day 3: DISCUSS

Focus: Relationship Skills

Students will engage in discussions about the brain's fight or flight response.

Learning Objectives:

In this lesson, students will:

- Identify how stress can impact relationships and affect communication.
- Describe how the Breath Brake can help you think clearly to avoid stressful conflicts.
- Practice the Breath Brake and repeat the **Power Peace Purpose** mantra.

Time Requirement:

15 minutes



Materials Needed: N/A

Lesson Process:

1 Begin with a Breath Brake:

Begin with the mantra **Power Peace Purpose**. Then, students bow.
Lead students through a Breath Brake.

2 Review key concepts:



What were some of the important messages we learned from the video or our conversations yesterday about stressful situations and the fight or flight stress response? What were some of the examples of situations that might trigger a fight or flight stress response besides facing a tiger?

Ask students to describe what they remember and give examples.

3 Discuss key concepts:



Today, we will discuss how we can avoid or control our response to a stressful situation. We all face stressful situations that trigger our fight or flight response. Remember, we can override that natural response with a Breath Brake. As a powerful martial artist, you control your response. Let's think about stressful situations we've encountered with other people, such as arguing with a friend, getting yelled at by a teacher, dealing with an annoying sibling, or worrying about being bullied.

Use the following talking points to encourage discussion as a class, in small groups, or in pairs:

- **How could taking control of your stress response prevent a conflict with someone?**

Responses may include:

- Taking control of your response can let you see the whole situation and respond thoughtfully rather than make the situation worse.
- With control, you can avoid a quick reaction that could worsen things.

- **When stress takes over, it's hard to communicate with others. What could help?**

Responses may include:

- Taking a Breath Brake.
- Giving yourself some space, away from others, until you calm down.
- Asking a friend or adult to help you communicate with the person.

4 End with Power Peace Purpose:

Power Peace Purpose. Then, students bow.

Day 4: APPLY

Focus: Self-Management

Students will work independently to apply the concepts from the video to a self-reflective activity about the brain's fight or flight response.

Learning Objectives: In this lesson, students will:

- Identify a personal experience with fear, including feelings, thoughts, and body responses.
- Describe a trigger for the fear response and how the Breath Brake can help.
- Practice the Breath Brake and recite the **Power Peace Purpose** mantra.

Time Requirement:

15 minutes



Materials Needed:

ACTIVITY SHEET - 4C:
FEAR AND FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Lesson Process:

1 Begin with a Breath Brake:

Begin with the mantra **Power Peace Purpose**. Students bow. Lead students through a Breath Brake.

2 Review key concepts:



We have been talking about the brain's fight or flight stress response and how stress can affect decisions, relationships, and communication with others. Remember, you can take control of your brain and override your natural fight or flight stress response with a Breath Brake. Then you can handle stressful situations with a clear mind, a relaxed body, and the power within you.

3 Personalize key concepts:

Today we will use what we've learned and apply it to our personal experiences with fear and the fight or flight stress response. In the video, Sensei Richard used the example of encountering a tiger. Think about some scary situations you might face.



Encourage students to identify situations that evoke fear and activate the brain's fight or flight response. Use the following talking points to encourage discussion as a class, in small groups, or pairs:

- Describe an experience you've had with fear. What did you learn about your fear or your stress response? Responses will vary.
- What personal goal could help you better manage your fear and your stress response? Responses will vary.
- As a powerful martial artist, you have a specific set of skills that help you take control of your stress response. What are those strengths or skills? Responses may include: the Breath Brake, the Power Peace Purpose mantra, the Power of Pull, self-care, positive self-talk, Heroes Circle support, mindfulness.

4 Apply key concepts:

Distribute the ACTIVITY SHEET - 4C: FEAR AND FIGHT OR FLIGHT. Ask students to work independently to complete the activity sheet about their experience with fear and stress.

5 End with Power Peace Purpose:

Power Peace Purpose. Then, students bow.

Activity Sheet - 4C: FEAR AND FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Name _____ Date _____

WARNING! Stress Response – ACTIVATED!

My Fear Experience

My fear trigger: _____

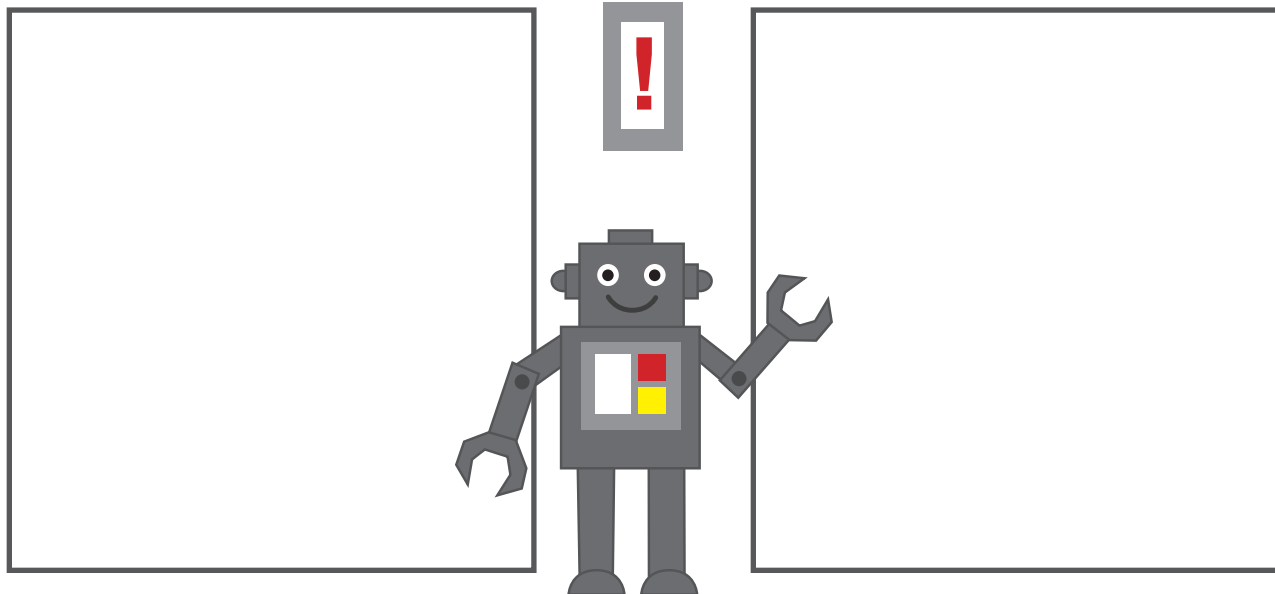
My body response (check all that apply):

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body is tense | <input type="checkbox"/> Breathing difficulty |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscles tighten | <input type="checkbox"/> Butterflies in stomach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart races | <input type="checkbox"/> Clench my jaw and/or fists |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fidgeting fingers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tapping feet | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

The message my body is trying to tell me is: (Ex: You are in danger!)

My fear face looks like this:

My calm face looks like this:



Activate System Override. Take a Breath Brake.

Then what are my choices?

1. I could _____

2. Or I could _____

Day 5: SHARE



Focus: Self-Awareness

Students will share their learning about fear and the fight or flight stress response.

Learning Objectives: In this lesson, students will:

- Share a personal experience with fear and the fight or flight stress response.
- Identify two strategies for managing the fear response in their personal experience.
- Practice the Breath Brake and repeat the **Power Peace Purpose** mantra.

Time Requirement:

15 minutes



Materials Needed:

ACTIVITY SHEET - 4C: FEAR AND FIGHT OR FLIGHT

Lesson Process:

1 Begin with a Breath Brake:

Begin with the mantra **Power Peace Purpose**. Students bow. Lead students through a Breath Brake.

2 Review key concepts:



We have been talking about the brain's fight or flight stress response, what triggers it, feelings associated with stress, and how the Breath Brake can override the natural response so you can take back control and respond with calm and focus. Yesterday, you focused on the feeling of fear and how that can activate your stress response.

3 Share the learning:



Today we will review your responses to the activity sheet to learn more about how you experience fear and the fight or flight stress response. You will identify details about your fear experience, how you feel the stress in your body, and two ways of managing the stressful experience after overriding the fight or flight response by taking a Breath Brake.

Ask students to reflect on their completed activity sheet, ACTIVITY SHEET - 4C: FEAR AND FIGHT OR FLIGHT. Ask for a few volunteers to share their positive statements with the class.

Use the following talking points to encourage discussion as a class, in small groups, or in student pairs:



- What did you learn about how you experience fear? Responses will vary.
- How can awareness of your body and brain's stress response help you? Responses will vary.
- What are most important to remember about the fight or flight stress response? Responses will vary.

4 Summarize key concepts:



This week we learned about the brain's natural fight or flight stress response, which is the brain's attempt to control our response. We learned that you control your brain. You can take back control and override that automatic response with a Breath Brake. We also talked about your personal experience with fear and stress. As we move forward in our learning as martial artists, let's practice using the techniques we've learned and building on them.

5 End with Power Peace Purpose:

Power Peace Purpose. Then, students bow.