

Tai Chi for Jeremiah School Students



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Purpose

- The purpose of this program was to create a fun, simple way to incorporate movement breaks into the daily schedule at Jeremiah School.
 - The program can be completed in its entirety in less than 20 minutes.
 - Selected movements can be used within a class period as short movement breaks (approximately five minutes).

Benefits

- Tai Chi has been shown to improve working memory, attention, motor planning, mental flexibility, and/or self-control in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).¹
- Tai Chi has provides opportunities to practice coordinating breathing with slow, easy movements. These are important skills for learning new habits, succeeding in everyday activities, and in decreasing stress levels.²
- Tai Chi also addresses physical capabilities that are important in daily activities such as: balance, motor planning, crossing midline, flexibility, muscle strength, and cardiopulmonary fitness.³

¹ Chan, A., Sze, S., Siu, N., Lau, E., & Cheung, M. (2013). A Chinese Mind-Body Exercise Improves Self-Control of Children with Autism: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *PLOS one*, 8, (7).

² Sabel, R. & Gallagher, B. (2014) We-wi ("Without Effort"): Using Tai Chi Chuan to Promote Occupational Performance. *OT Practice* 19, (7), 16-19.

³ Better Health Channel, State of Victoria. (1999). Tai chi – health benefits. Retrieved from: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/tai-chi-health-benefits?viewAsPdf=true>

Routine

The Tai Chi program is provided below in a listed format, including the warm-up exercises. The following pages will be dedicated to step-by-step instructions of each pose.

- **Warm-up**
 - Deep Breathing and Movement
 - Trunk Rotations
 - Deep Breathing and Blowing Out Candles
 - Neck Swivels
 - Hand to the Opposite Knee
 - Puppet Arms

- **Routine**
 - Pushing the Waters
 - Swimming
 - Train
 - Flying Like a Bird
 - Breathing in the Ball
 - Move the Beach Ball
 - High Five
 - Push and Pull
 - Puppet Arms

Warm-Up

- **Deep Breathing and Movement**
 - Stand with feet shoulder width apart
 - Inhale through the nose for a count of three seconds
 - Exhale through the mouth for a count of five seconds
 - As you exhale, shake the entire body (like a dog shaking water off of his fur)
 - Repeat for five reps

Warm-Up

- **Trunk Rotations**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Begin to rotate the trunk at the hips from side to side
- As rotation begins, allow the arms to go limp
 - The arms should slap against the trunk during each rotation
 - To help with the movement, pretend the arms are drum sticks and the trunk is a drum. The student is playing drums with his/her arms.
- Repeat for 10 reps (five on each side)

Warm-Up

- **Deep Breathing and Blowing Out Candles**
 - Stand with feet shoulder width apart
 - Inhale through the nose for three seconds
 - As you inhale, slowly begin place the arms straight ahead and at shoulder height (this gives the student a cue as to where to blow his/her breath)
 - Begin to exhale through the mouth using pursed lips (as if trying to whistle)
 - Verbally cue the student to blow as if “blowing out 100 candles”
 - Repeat for five reps

Warm-Up

- **Neck Swivels**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Bend the neck as if the right ear is trying to touch the right shoulder
- Slowly begin to roll the neck from the right shoulder, straight down, to the left shoulder
- Once the left shoulder is reached, repeat going to the right side
- CAUTION: This movement must be performed slowly
 - Quick movements in the region of the neck increase the risk of injury
 - Verbally cue the student to move as if he/she rolling his/her head up and down a ramp
- Repeat for 10 reps (five on each side)

Warm-Up

- **Hand to the Opposite Knee**
 - Stand with feet shoulder width apart
 - Raise the right arm straight overhead
 - Raise the left knee to waist level (Pretending to step over a large log)
 - As the knee is being raised, begin to lower the right arm across the body so that the right hand meets the left knee in the middle of the body
 - Return to the starting position
 - Repeat the same movement, this time with the left arm and the right knee
 - Repeat for 10 reps (five on each side)

Warm-Up

- **Puppet Arms**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Inhale through the nose slowly for three seconds
- As you inhale, slowly raise the arms as if they are on puppet strings
 - The arms should go above shoulder height during the movement and continue through the duration of the inhale
- Hold the breath for one second
- Exhale slowly using pursed lips for at least five seconds
- As you exhale, slowly lower the arms as if they are on puppet strings
- Repeat for five reps

Routine⁴

- **Pushing the Waters**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Rotate the trunk to the right side
- Stretch both arms out, placing the right arm at waist height and the left arm at shoulder height
- Slowly begin to rotate the trunk to the left side
- Once the trunk reaches the left side, reverse the position of the hands
 - Place the left arm at waist height and the right arm at shoulder height
- Rotate back to the starting position
- Repeat for 10 reps (five on each side)
 - Remind the students to continue to inhale through the nose and exhale through pursed lips

⁴ Note on breathing patterns during the routine – Unless otherwise stated, inhales should occur during the starting position, or when returning to the starting position. Exhales should occur when weight is being shifted forward through the movements. Inhales occur through the nose. Exhales occur through pursed lips.

Routine

- **Swimming**

- Begin by stepping the left foot out at a 45 degree angle
- Slightly bend the hip and knee of the right leg, putting most of the body weight onto the right leg
- Touch the palms together and place your hands directly in front of your chest
 - This is the starting position
- Slowly begin to shift bodyweight onto the left foot
 - This should cause you to lean forward slightly
- As the bodyweight is being shifted, begin to push the arms out from the chest
- As the arms are fully extended, begin to push them out and back, all while keeping the bodyweight on the left foot
 - The total movement of the arms should resemble a breaststroke (i.e. swimming)
- As the arm movement is completed, slowly shift the bodyweight back to the right foot
- As bodyweight is being shifted, return the palms together in front of the chest
 - This should return you to the starting position
- Complete the movement for five repetitions then switch to the right side
 - The movement is the same on the right side, except you will need to step the right foot out at a 45 degree angle

Routine

- **Train**

- Begin by stepping the left foot out at a 45 degree angle
- Slightly bend the hip and knee of the right leg, putting most of the body weight onto the right leg
- Face the palms together and bring them to your chest, this time leaving 6 inches between the hands
 - This is the starting position
- Slowly begin to shift bodyweight onto the left foot
 - This should cause you to lean forward slightly
- As you begin to shift the weight forward, slightly extend both arms, keeping the palms facing each other during this time
 - This is not a full extension as in the last movement
 - Only extend the arms slightly
- Keeping the arms in this fixed position, the goal is to draw a large imaginary circle with the hands (i.e. a train wheel)
 - This will be done by bending the left knee as weight is placed on it and extending the left knee when weight is shifted to the right leg
- Completing this cycle will return you to the starting position
- Complete this movement for five repetitions then switch to the right side
 - The movement is the same on the right side, except you will need to step the right foot out at a 45 degree angle

Routine

- **Flying like a Bird**

- Begin by stepping the left foot out at a 45 degree angle
- Slightly bend the hip and knee of the right leg, putting most of the body weight onto the right leg
- Bring your hands to your face and place them together so they make a circle (fingertip to fingertip)
 - This is the starting position
- Slowly begin to shift bodyweight onto the left foot
- As bodyweight is being shifted, slowly move the arms behind the body
 - The position should resemble that of a hawk diving out of the sky (i.e. wings behind the body)
- With all the bodyweight shifted forward, hold the position for at least one second
- Slowly begin to shift the weight back to the right foot, returning the hands to the starting position
- Complete this movement for five repetitions then switch to the right side
 - The movement is the same on the right side, except you will need to step the right foot out at a 45 degree angle

Routine

- **Breathing in the Ball**

- Begin by stepping the left foot out at a 45 degree angle
- Slightly bend the hip and knee of the right leg, putting most of the body weight onto the right leg
- Bring your hands to your face and place them together so they make a circle (fingertip to fingertip)
 - This is the starting position
- Slowly begin to shift bodyweight into the left foot
- As bodyweight is being shifted, exhale through pursed lips for the duration of the forward shift (i.e. blowing the ball away)
 - The hands should stay in the same position throughout the movement, but when exhaling the arms should reach forward
 - The exhale should last at least five seconds
- Slowly begin to shift the bodyweight back into the right foot
- As bodyweight is being shifted, inhale through the nose (i.e. breathing the ball back)
 - The hands should stay in the same position throughout the movement, but when inhaling the arms should return to the starting position
 - The inhale should last at least three seconds
- Complete this movement for five repetitions then switch to the right side
 - The movement is the same on the right side, except you will need to step the right foot out at a 45 degree angle

Routine

- **Move the Beach Ball**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Rotate the trunk to the right side
- Place the right arm at waist height and the left arm at shoulder height
 - In this position, pretend to hold a large beach ball
- Begin to slowly rotate from the right side to the left side
- Once the rotation has reached the left side, switch the position of the arms
 - Place the left arm at waist height and the right arm at shoulder height
- Slowly rotate back to the right side
 - Remember to switch arm positioning during each rotation
- Complete this movement for a total of 10 repetitions (five on each side)

Routine

- **High Five**

- Begin by stepping the left foot out at a 45 degree angle
- Slightly bend the hip and knee of the right leg, putting most of the body weight onto the right leg
- Position the arms so that the left arm is fully extended at shoulder height and the right arm is pulled back with the hand near the face
 - This is the starting position
- Slowly begin to shift bodyweight into the left foot
- As bodyweight is being shifted, begin to slowly pull the left arm back towards the face while pushing the right arm straight away from the body
 - This should look as if you are giving someone a “straight center” high five
- Slowly begin to shift bodyweight back into the right foot
- As bodyweight is being shifted, begin to slowly return the arms to the starting position
 - During the entire movement you want to move both arms at the same time
- Complete this movement for five repetitions then switch to the right side
 - The movement is the same on the right side, except you will need to step the right foot out at a 45 degree angle

Routine

- **Push and Pull**

- Begin by stepping the left foot out at a 45 degree angle
- Slightly bend the hip and knee of the right leg, putting most of the body weight onto the right leg
- Bring the arms to chest height and place hands as if resting on a shopping cart
 - This is the starting position
- Slowly begin to shift weight into the left foot
- As weight is being shifted, slowly push both arms away from the body (i.e. pushing the cart away)
 - Hold this position for at least one second
- Slowly begin to shift weight back into the right foot
- As weight is being shifted, slowly pull both arms back towards the chest (i.e. pulling the cart towards you)
- Return to the starting position
- Complete this movement for five repetitions then switch to the right side
 - The movement is the same on the right side, except you will need to step the right foot out at a 45 degree angle

Routine

- **Puppet Arms**

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Inhale through the nose slowly for three seconds
- As you inhale, slowly raise the arms as if they are on puppet strings
 - The arms should go above shoulder height during the movement and continue through the duration of the inhale
- Hold the breath for one second
- Exhale slowly using pursed lips for at least five seconds
- As you exhale, slowly lower the arms as if they are on puppet strings
- Repeat for five reps

Link to Instructional Video

- **A link for the step-by-step instructional video is provided below:**
 - Search on YouTube: “Tai Chi for Kids – Jeremiah School Program”
 - <https://youtu.be/4NI4HkixcdI>