



ACTIVITY: 'HIGH NOON BALLOONS'

- TIME:** 1–5 minutes
- SIZE:** Individual activity, but most fun when done by whole class
- SPACE:** For students to move around
- RESOURCES:** Marking pens, four inflatable balloons per student, pens, paper

The aim is to place students in a pressured situation where they will eventually lose control.

The result should be discussion about the need to regulate emotions, speak helpfully to ourselves, and prioritise commitments in order to minimise feelings of stress.

1. Hand out balloons (four per student).
2. Give students one minute to list on paper four things they often feel are beyond their control (e.g. deadlines, family commitments, corporate greed, mobile phone bills).
3. Have them number these four potential stressors from: 1 (most difficult to control) to 4 (most within control).
4. Have students write one stressor and the corresponding rating number (1–4) on each balloon.
5. Now comes the tricky part: students must try to blow up their four balloons and keep them all aloft – but they must do this one at a time. Number 1 balloon will be easy: students simply inflate it and throw it up into the air, but they must keep hitting it up with one hand while they inflate the Number 2 balloon and tie it off, then launch it. Then they must keep two balloons off the ground while they inflate the Number 3 balloon, and so on.
6. Students who let their balloons hit the floor must retire from the playing area to let students with their balloons still aloft have more room.
7. The activity ends when the last student finally loses control and his/her balloons touch the floor.



DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

- What thoughts, feelings and physical symptoms did you experience during the exercise (e.g. racing heart, excitement, anger, frustration, giggling)?
- Did these seem voluntary or involuntary? Why do you think that was?
- What were you saying to yourself during the activity? Was this self-talk helpful or unhelpful?
- What strategies did successful players (i.e. those who got the most balloons inflated and/or kept them off the ground the longest) employ? Did these involve overcoming instinctive emotional reactions and using thinking skills? If so, what were they?
- In what way is this activity similar to real life? What are some strategies that people use to keep all their 'balloons' in the air?
- Brainstorm some important lessons you learned from this activity (e.g. know your limitations, and accept that perhaps you can only handle two or three 'balloons' at a time!).
- Discuss the importance of 1) regulating kneejerk emotional reactions, 2) helpful self-talk to assist in regulating emotions, and 3) prioritising tasks in our lives.