



Content developed by

from Nemours

Learning Goals

- Nervous feelings alert you to “get ready!” to do your best.
- You can cope with nervous feelings and face new situations.

Print Out Before Class

Bring copies for everyone:

- *Stand Strong* handout
- *Power Thoughts* handout
- *Tips From Michael Phelps* handout

Lesson 4: What To Do When You're Nervous

TEACHER NOTE

When kids know they are capable and prepared, they can be ready for a challenge — whether it's a test, a class presentation, or a competition. Encourage kids to work hard to learn things, practice skills often, and ask for help from parents, teachers, and coaches.

Calming strategies (such as Four Calm Breaths from lesson 3) and confidence-builders (like the skills in today's lesson) can help kids when they're nervous.

QUICK TIPS

- *Nervous feelings are normal when kids face something new or challenging. These feelings signal, “This is important. Get ready!”*
- *Kids need to cope with nervous feelings so they can face normal challenges.*
- *Being prepared by studying or practicing is the best way to feel more confident and less nervous.*
- *Stand Strong and Power Thoughts can help kids use confidence to push through nervous feelings.*

START THE DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever felt nervous?

Instructor: All italicized text is intended as notes to teachers. All other text may be read out loud to your class.

Raise your hand if you've ever felt nervous.

Show of hands.

Me too! Everyone feels nervous at times.

Today we're going to talk about what to do when you're nervous.





Take It Home!

In this lesson, we encourage students to stand strong and think power thoughts any time they feel nervous. Kids will take home the *Stand Strong, Power Thoughts*, and *Tips From Michael Phelps* handouts.

Resources

KidsHealth:

- Worry Less in 3 Steps
- When Tests Make You Nervous

(Lesson 4: [What To Do When You're Nervous](#), continued)

First, let's brainstorm — when do kids feel nervous? Can you think of some examples?

Have kids raise their hands to call out answers:

- take a test
- give a report in front of the class
- try out for a team
- sports competition
- stand up for yourself or someone else
- talk to new people
- do something difficult for the first time
- sing at the school talent show

It's normal to feel nervous when we face something new or difficult. That's especially true when we don't know exactly what to expect, if it seems like a big moment, or if we feel pressure to do well.

Have you noticed how your body reacts when you're nervous? What have you noticed about how your body feels when you're nervous?

Have kids raise their hands to call out answers:

- heart beats faster
- breathe faster
- sweaty palms
- face feels warm
- mouth feels dry
- voice gets shaky or stutters
- shaky hands or knees
- butterflies in stomach



(Lesson 4: [What To Do When You're Nervous](#), continued)

This body reaction has a name. It's called the fight-or-flight response. This automatic reaction is the body's way to get ready in case you need to fight off or run away from danger.

We feel it whenever we're nervous, afraid, or stressed — even in situations when there's no real danger.

You know it's not actually dangerous to give an answer in class, take a test, give a presentation, sing, or read out loud. There's nothing we need to fight or run away from. But we still may feel nervous or afraid.

What we are afraid of is usually something like making a mistake, feeling embarrassed, giving the wrong answer, or forgetting the words to a song. Even though these things aren't actually dangerous, they do feel really important. That explains why you feel nervous.

When you're nervous, there may be a part of you that wants to run away from the situation — or just avoid it altogether. Remember "fight or flight"? That's the flight part.

But there's probably another part of you that wants to learn how to handle the situation. You want to go ahead and try out for the team even though you're afraid you might not make it. You want to go ahead and sing your song in the talent show, even if you feel scared. You want to go ahead and give the class presentation you worked hard on, even though you're nervous.

Part of you might want to back away from the situation that makes you feel nervous and the other part of you wants to go ahead.

Can you think of a situation like this that you've faced? Can you think of a time when you pushed through nervous feelings to go ahead?

Raise your hand if you've ever felt nervous but found the courage to go ahead anyway.

Pause for show of hands.

You probably had to use your courage and stay calm to go ahead when you felt nervous. Raise your hand if you felt good about what you did afterward.

Pause for a show of hands.

2. How to be less nervous: study, practice, prepare.

The best way to be less nervous about something — like a test or a competition — is to be prepared. If you try hard when you learn and study, you'll be more prepared. You'll feel a lot more confident and a lot less nervous.

If you feel nervous about tests, you can get ready by studying. Ask a teacher to show you the best ways to study. If sports, competitions, try-outs, or recitals get you nervous, practice! When you feel ready, you'll be a lot less nervous.





(Lesson 4: [What To Do When You're Nervous](#), continued)

3. A little nervous feeling can be good.

Just enough nervous feeling can boost your energy to help you do well. So don't wait for nervous feelings to go away before you act. They will fade away naturally **after** you face the challenge and take the action you need to take.

When you are nervous, notice that feeling. Use the energy of the nervous feelings to stay alert, positive, and ready. Take a confident step to go ahead and do what you need to do, even if your knees are shaky!

4. Let's try it.

Here are two other things to do when you're nervous. The first is a confident body posture called Stand Strong. Let's all try it.

Have the kids stand up.

Stand up tall. Plant both feet on the ground, a little bit apart. Hands on hips. Shoulders back. Head high, facing straight ahead.

Imagine you're showing off the big emblem on a superhero shirt you're wearing. Breathe in and out. Let yourself feel strong and confident. Feel your courage.

When we put our body in a confident posture, our mind gets the message, "I can do this."

You can try Stand Strong before you take a test, give a book report, or have a try-out.

Give the handout Power Thoughts.

Now, we'll talk about Power Thoughts.

We don't always notice what we're thinking. But if we do notice, we can learn to guide ourselves toward thoughts that help us do well.

Let's look at the handout.

Who can find an example of something that could help you feel more confident?

Let them answer.



(Lesson 4: [What To Do When You're Nervous](#), continued)

Can you spot some examples of thoughts that could make you more nervous?

It's good to pay attention to what we're thinking. We can learn to think more "Yes, I can!" thoughts that give us the confidence we need.

5. What have we learned?

- Nervous feelings are normal. They tell us to get prepared for something new or challenging. Nervous feelings are there to tell us "It's important to me that this goes well."
- Just enough nervous feeling can boost your energy to help you do well. As long as what's making you nervous isn't actually dangerous, you can take action even though you feel nervous. Use the energy of nervous feelings to take a courageous step forward.
- The best way to keep nervous feelings under control is to get prepared ahead of time. Study, practice, and try hard. Ask for help if you want to get better. When you are prepared, you feel more confident and less nervous.
- Putting our body in a confident posture can help us feel more confident. We learned that what we think matters too. We can guide ourselves to think more confident thoughts.
- Then, put all these together — get prepared, stand strong, and think confident thoughts!

6. Take the next step.

Pass out the Stand Strong and Tips From Michael Phelps handouts.

Take home these handouts to remind you of what we learned today. Practice Standing Strong. Remind yourself to think plenty of Power Thoughts.

Michael Phelps knows better than most people how to calm his nerves so he can feel powerful and win races. The last handout has advice from Michael to help you feel strong and confident.