MINDFULNESS FOR EDUCATORS

As an educator, it’s important for you to incorporate mindfulness into your day as a means of reducing stress and burnout in order to take care of yourself. Mindfulness will allow you to understand yourself and your emotions better. Here are a few mindful techniques for you to try.

• It is a known fact that teachers teach better when they give themselves permission to think before answering a question.
• Try waiting three seconds after you ask a question before you call on anyone to answer. This will give students time to think how they would like to answer and will give you time before you respond. Each time you do your three-second wait time, use it to mindfully take a nice deep breath. If you’re standing, notice the weight of your feet on the ground.
• Allow your awareness to broaden so that you can take in the entire class. Notice each student as they raise their hands and choose one you may not often call. As the student answers, listen mindfully and spend time considering it.

Here are three more simple mindful practices to try:

• Practice mindfulness between tasks: stretch, take a deep breath or go for a walk
• Place a small note or picture on your desk to remind you to be mindful
• Journaling: write something you are grateful for each day

Parents can equally benefit from the mindful process.

Children look to their parents for recognition, love and security. How you speak or treat your child is of extreme importance. Take time to appreciate what’s good in your life. Plenty of evidence suggests that actively practicing gratitude makes you feel better and has a positive impact on your health, relationships and quality of work. Parents, try one of these exercises and see if it makes a difference between you and your child(ren). These exercises can be utilized with any age group.

1. Make positive statements: Every time you say something negative to your child, follow up with three positive comments.
2. Enjoy family meals together: It’s important to share a meal with your family. During the meal, go around the table and have each person share something positive that happened to them that day, or something positive they did for someone.
3. Catch your child doing something good: Each week write your child a note telling him or her how proud you are of them for something they did during the week.
4. Practice smiling more often: Research has shown, smiling more often increases a bond with your child(ren) and lowers stress.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines mindfulness as:

“The practice of being aware of your body, mind and feelings in the present moment, the thought to create a feeling of calm.” Scientific research has illustrated the positive effects of mindfulness on one’s mental health and well-being. It has been proven that mindfulness improves attention, reduces stress, and results in better emotional regulation and an improved capacity for compassion and empathy. This description of mindfulness, along with its positive effects, can go hand in hand with LAUSD’s focus on Social Emotional Learning.

—Daniel J. Siegel

STOP & BREATHE
PAUSE & THINK
SMILE & RESPOND

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TIBETAN SINGING BOWL

Singing bowls historically come from Western Asia. When struck or rubbed with a wooden mallet, the metal bowl produces a pleasing vibration sound. Often, deep breathing is initiated simultaneously with the completion of the singing bowl experience. This exercise allows students to experience the use of the bowl and develop breathing techniques as a way to relax their mind and bodies and control their emotions. The bowl can be used to start the morning by sounding the singing bowl and breathing. Alternatively, it can be used at any time during the day.

- **Elementary Classes:** Students can strike the side of the bowl to get the sound.
- **Secondary Classes:** Students can make the bowl sing by moving the wooden mallet in a circular fashion around the edge of the bowl.

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” — Jon Kabat-Zinn

BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Breathing techniques can go hand in hand with the singing bowl. Breathing is a wonderful mindfulness tool that children of all ages can utilize throughout their life, during times of frustration, anger or disappointment. Focusing on one’s breathing can become a calming process.

- **Elementary Classes:** Sit in a chair or on the floor “smell the roses and blow out the candle”
- **Secondary Classes:** Stand with your feet wide apart and your arms dangling in front of you. As you breathe in deeply through your nose, raise your arms up high above your head. Then, slowly swing your arms down again as you breathe out through your mouth.

“Life is hard but always keep your head up. Breathing helps me come back to reality.” — Eighth-grader

TALKING STICKS

The talking stick is used as a symbol of respect for the thoughts and feelings of each individual in the group. The person holding the talking stick is the only one who speaks. Everyone focuses their attention towards the one with the talking stick and listens. The concept of taking turns, sharing, and listening to one another stems from the Native American tradition. The talking stick is used in our Share & Care groups, where group members can safely share their feelings. The Chief of a tribe would first use the talking stick to speak, then the talking stick was passed for others to share. Talking sticks give everyone the chance to speak in an orderly fashion, to pass it on if they have nothing to say, and to listen to others.

- **Elementary or Secondary Classes:** Break the class into groups. Have each group make their own talking stick out of paper rolls or a medium/large stick or dowel. Decorate it with yarn, construction paper, feathers, fabric, ribbons glue and beads.
- **On occasion, have the group come together and use their talking stick when sharing or discussing the lesson plan.

For older students, another mindful art directive is to have them make a journal. At the end of the day, ask students to take a few minutes to write or draw an experience that stood out to them. It could be a positive experience that made them feel really good inside or a negative experience that upset them. This helps to express feelings and release emotions rather than keep them inside.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Here are a number of ways you can incorporate mindfulness into your classroom, at any grade level.

MINDFUL ART

The process of drawing and expressing one’s feelings on paper using markers, paint, etc., is a mindful experience and can be incorporated into many other mindful activities. For example, if you begin a class exercise using the singing bowl, ask your students to take a moment and think; what were they feeling before the singing bowl and after? Then have them draw how they felt before and after on paper. You can use the same directive with breathing, the talking stick and other mindful exercises in both elementary and secondary schools.

For information about our school-based art therapy program, call 210-423-3506 or email shareandcare@cshs.org