

SUPPORTING YOUR STUDENTS' MENTAL HEALTH

HOW TO TEACH YOUR STUDENTS HABITS OF SELF CARE



INTRODUCTION

Have you been struggling with today's conversations around mental health, and how best to support your students' overall well-being? Are you seeking to incorporate learning activities that instill social and emotional literacy? If you're interested in this and more, explore this Toolkit of chapters from bestselling Routledge Eye On Education titles. We hope they help you help your students through this school year and beyond!

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Cool Down and Focus 8

*From **Everyday SEL in Middle School** by Carla Tantillo Philibert.*

Changing the Way We Think About Mental Health 18

*From **Education Write Now** by Joe Mazza and Jeff Zoul.*

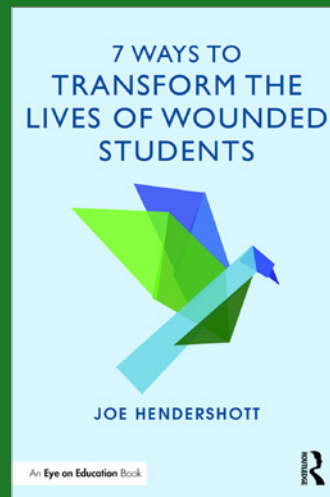
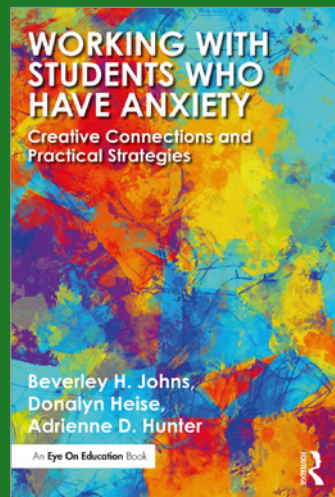
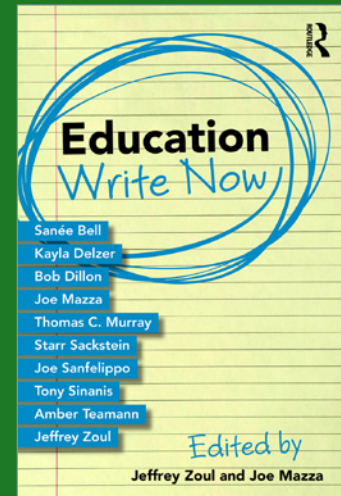
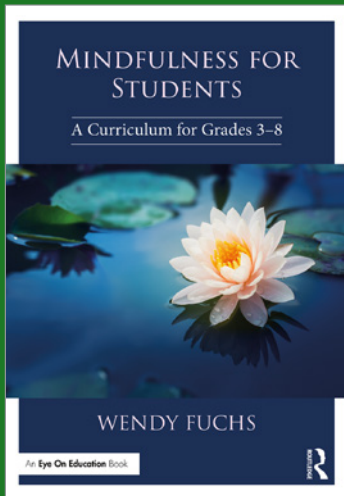
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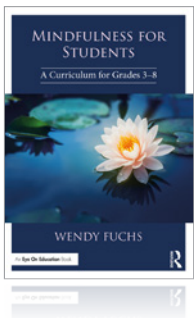
*From **Working with Students Who Have Anxiety**
by Beverley H. Johns, Donalyn Heise and Adrienne D. Hunter.*

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*From **7 Ways to Transform the Lives of Wounded Students**
by Joe Hendershott.*

FOR MORE ON THIS TOPIC, SEE THESE TITLES





The following is excerpted from *Mindfulness for Students* by Wendy Fuchs.

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CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will learn that they can build the skill of being grateful. Activating their background knowledge about the effects of stress on the mind and body, students will learn about the positive effect gratitude has on the mind and body. They will list people, places, and objects they are grateful for as a mechanism for regulating stress. Students will learn the formal practice of Focus on Gratitude. Objective: Students will describe how being grateful can improve one's mood, perspective and overall well-being.

TIME

25 minutes (Grades 3– 5)

35 minutes (Grades 6– 8)

MATERIALS

Script: Gratitude Practice

Infographic: What Good is Gratitude?

Gratitude Practice Certificate

Chart paper/ markers

Pencils/ notebook paper

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THE TEACHER

In this lesson, students will learn that it is possible to change your thinking and mood by focusing on people, places, and things that you are grateful for. Often students believe that life happens to them and that they have no control over how they think or respond to stressful situations. This lesson teaches students to focus intentionally on feeling grateful as a way to formally practice changing one's thoughts.

The human brain naturally focuses on the negative aspects of our experiences. This is called the Negativity Bias. Dr. Rick Hanson provides a great description of this natural inclination of the brain in his book, *Buddha's Brain* (2009). He also has a blog that covers topics ranging from dealing with difficult emotions, to creating more joy, and even contains quizzes for you to reflect on your own life (see www.rickhanson.net/blog).

Dating back to caveman days when our survival depended on avoiding danger, it makes sense that our brains hyper-focused on any potential harm or danger. Fast forward to today, we have that same part of our brain, but are not frequently in life or death situations where we have to scan the environment for hungry tigers or bears. However, our brains are still on high alert to other modern-day threats to our well-being, like making a speech in front of the class, confronting an angry friend, earning a bad grade on a test, or losing a championship game. These "threats" to our well-being activates that same response in our downstairs brain that tells our mind and body that we are not safe. It is important for students to understand how the human brain works in its default mode, but also understand that as human beings, we have the capacity to override, or at least choose how to respond to, the information our

brain receives. By attending to how the brain reacts to perceived threats, the mind can begin to deal with the real or perceived threats more calmly and effectively.

There is a great deal of recent research on the positive effects of mindfulness which can greatly increase your background knowledge for this lesson, as well as the next lesson and practice on Kindness toward Self and Others. Now more than ever, neuroscience is providing scientific evidence of what were previously anecdotal reports. Through brain scans and other cutting edge technology, scientists are learning more and more about the different parts of the brain and the potential positive effects of mindfulness practices on the various functions of the brain. The American Mindfulness Research Association (AMRA) has a website dedicated to sharing mindfulness research. David Black authored a chapter in the Handbook on Mindfulness: Theory, Research and Practice that reviews the state of research on mindfulness training for youth (2015).

LESSON 4: FOCUS ON GRATITUDE

STEP 1—ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Review the body scan lesson and discuss any questions or comments students have about the body scan practice.

STEP 2—INTRODUCE NEW CONCEPTS

Focus on Gratitude

Introduce the new concept and practice: Focus on Gratitude. Share some of the facts from the list or the Gratitude Infographic below to help students understand the rationale for strategy. Here are a few other fun facts about the positive effects of gratitude.

1. One study showed that people who wrote down what they were grateful for each day were in better health and felt happier than people who just wrote down daily events or neutral things.
2. People who say thank you, or tell someone they are grateful for them, have an increase in “happy effects” and a decrease in depressive symptoms.
3. One researcher implemented a gratitude curriculum for children aged 8–11 years old; these students had more appreciation and positive emotions than the students who did not receive the lessons.
4. Gratitude has been shown to have a positive impact on teenagers’ behavior, GPA, and higher levels of general happiness.
5. Gratitude can help you manage stress better.
6. If you haven’t been very grateful, you can start now. Gratitude is an attitude you can learn and practice.

Negativity Bias

Introduce the natural tendency for the human brain to focus more on negative events and thoughts. Discuss why this is (survival/fight/flight response). Be sure to reiterate

that it is not something to feel bad about, but rather understand and work with this natural propensity of the downstairs brain.

Say, *“When we understand that our brain has this habit, we can work to acknowledge it, and even shift the focus to more positive thoughts, events, etc. One way we can shift our awareness is to intentionally think about things we are grateful to have in our lives.”*

Ask students take 3 minutes to write down everything they are grateful for. This can be material possessions, people, pets, places, etc. There is no need to shape or limit what students write down during this exercise.

If individual students struggle, you can offer a few suggestions, but really this is a time for students to determine what they are grateful for. Some students have very challenging lives and may not feel grateful for their family, home, belongings, etc. If students have a hard time identifying things on a personal level, you might encourage them to consider less personal things to be grateful for (e.g. safe school to attend, Play Station or phone, clean water to drink, etc.) The purpose of this practice is to cultivate a sense of gratitude. The actual people, places or objects students choose are less important.

STEP 3—DISCUSS

Have students share what they wrote and honor what they share. The act of sharing one’s ideas with the group is a way to build community and connection. As the teacher, you can provide a positive example of respecting diverse views and experiences by allowing students to express themselves in these types of small-group/whole-class discussions. Students can learn a great deal about their peers and find connections or commonalities with people they would not ordinarily talk to. Acknowledge that each of us has things to be grateful for, and we can choose to focus our attention on gratitude rather than wait until something good happens.

STEP 4—PRACTICE

Say, *“Let’s practice Strategy #3: Gratitude Practice.”* Use the script verbatim, modify it to fit your own voice/word choice, or play the audio recording.

STEP 5—GENERALIZE

Say, *“When you focus on one or more things that you are grateful for, you are setting yourself up to feel happier and more connected to your life.”*

SCRIPT FOR GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Sit in a comfortable seated, upright position. Close your eyes or lower your gaze. Bring your awareness to your breath, and take a few moments to settle into this moment, right here, right now.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

Turning your attention toward people, places or things you are grateful for. You might picture someone or something in particular that you are grateful for. Really focus on the feeling you feel inside when you think about being grateful for this person or pet or object. You can bring to mind what you appreciate about this person. Are they kind, helpful, funny? Do they take care of you? Maybe you can remember a specific time or place. Or, you may simply feel a general sense of gratitude for having this person, pet or object in your life.

(Pause for 1 minute)

Continue to focus on just one person or thing, or you may choose to think about other people, places and things you are grateful for. Just take a few moments to focus on who or what you are truly thankful for in your life. You can focus on just one thing, or more than one thing. The purpose of this practice is to cultivate the feeling of gratitude in your mind, body and heart.

(Pause for 30 seconds)

If you find yourself lost in thought or thinking about something else, you can notice this and begin again with your focus on gratitude, bringing to mind a person or pet, a special place or object that you appreciate in your life.

(Pause for 1 minute)

Take a few nice slow deep breaths, and when you are ready, slowly open your eyes. Bring your awareness back to your surroundings, back into this room. Throughout your day, take a breath, pause, and think about the things you are grateful for. Remember, feeling grateful can make your mind and body feel calm and happy. Have a great day.

SELF ACTIVITIES: COOL DOWN AND FOCUS

Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*



The following is excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School* by Carla Tantillo Philibert.

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The activities in this chapter are written for middle school classrooms, with modifications suggested throughout for students with exceptionalities. These activities are designed to be included in your classroom POP Chart in the “SELF: Cool Down and Focus” quadrant.

Although practiced in a group setting, these SELF: Cool Down and Focus activities are designed to engage students as individuals and positively shift their energy through relaxation, mindfulness, and reflection.

After each activity has been taught, it should be added to the POP Chart, so that students can utilize it during their morning check-in routine, if they request a break while in your class, or if you feel you need to positively shift the energy of the group.

TITLE: WRITE AND RIP

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the “Why” of the activity: Today, we are practicing **Write and Rip** to help us **release negative feelings** so that we can be present, focused, and Ready to Learn.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart, Scratch paper, Recycling bin or garbage can, Clock or timer

Time: 5 minutes

Let’s move on to today’s Social-Emotional Learning activity, Write and Rip.

We are practicing Write and Rip because it helps us learn Self-Awareness and understand how emotions affect our mind and bodies. It gives us a strategy to let go of any tension or stress that may be bothering us physically or emotionally. To begin, pause for a moment, close your eyes, and scan your body. Notice if there is any part of your body where you may be holding stress, such as your shoulders or your stomach. Is there something stressful that is making your shoulders tight or your stomach hurt? Is there anything on your mind today that you need to let go of? Like something you are worried about or something that makes you sad?

We’re going to practice Write and Rip by writing our negative thoughts and worries on a piece of scratch paper, then ripping them up and tossing them into the recycle bin. You have the length of one song during which to write. You may also draw, if it is easier for you to express your emotions by drawing. [\[Teacher moves recycling bin to the center of the room and demonstrates writing while the music plays, stops the music and rips up the page.\]](#) By ripping up and tossing our worries in the trash, this helps us let go of stress and negativity and helps us be in control of our emotions and Be Ready to Learn. Please know that no one will see what you write, even me. You may write in English, Spanish, Polish, or any language in which you feel comfortable expressing yourself. All pages are ripped up and put in the recycle bin.

Before we begin, I need to find a student who is demonstrating Be the Solution behavior by sitting up tall, with two feet flat on the floor, hands folded, and respecting their neighbor’s personal space, who can restate the activity in her own words.

[\[Teacher calls on student demonstrating the expectations. Student restates activity.\]](#)

SELF ACTIVITIES: COOL DOWN AND FOCUS

Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

Thank you, [student name]. Room [x], do we see any potential problems with implementing this activity? [Teacher calls on one or two students to discuss potential pitfalls.]

Thank you, [student names]. So, now that we know where the problems may occur, how can we Be the Solution? What Agreements do we need to make for the activity to be physically and emotionally safe for all? What are the consequences if the Agreements are broken?

We have time for [x number of] students to share their thoughts. Before we share, let's remember to listen intently to others, accept others' opinions and be careful not to interrupt our classmates.

[Teacher calls on students and writes the Agreements and consequences on the board. This is also the perfect time for the teacher to suggest modifications to the activity for students with limited physical mobility, students with self-esteem challenges, students who are deaf and hard of hearing, English language learners, and students with exceptionalities.]

Thank you, [student names]. Now that we have our Agreements and consequences on the board, let's Check for Understanding. Please raise your right hand in the air. A "high five" hand tells me you understand the activity, our Agreements, and the consequences if the Agreements are broken, and you are all set to begin. Two fingers in the air, or a peace sign, tells me that you have a question or comment that needs to be addressed before we begin. A fist in the air tells me that you are unsure and you are not ready to begin, which is OK. It is important that we have created a physically and emotionally safe classroom environment for our activity to take place.

[Teacher observes the room and responds appropriately to student needs by answering questions, restating activity, building consensus, etc.]

Thank you, Room [x], for sharing your thoughts respectfully and thoughtfully. I witnessed students actively listening to their peers. Well done! Now, please get out your pencils and a piece of scratch paper. Once we are done ripping up our papers, I will place the recycle bin behind my desk, so that you are reassured that the contents of the bin will not be tampered with. When I say "Begin" I will turn on the music. You will have the length of one song to write or draw any negative emotions or worries you may have. When the song is over, we will all rip up our papers and toss them in the recycle bin.

[Teacher makes sure every student has scratch paper and a writing utensil. Teacher begins music and the students begin to write. It is recommended that the teacher also participates in the activity to model appropriate strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety. When the song concludes, the teacher stops the music and asks all the students to rip up their pages. Teacher prompts the students row by row to walk up to the recycling bin to toss their pages. Once the last row is done, it is nice if the teacher can place the recycle bin behind her desk, or tie off the garbage bag, so that the students are reassured that the contents of the bin will not be tampered with.]

Great job, Room [x]! I am impressed with your behavioral choices. I witnessed students developing emotional awareness and learning a new way to let go of negative emotions. I witnessed students Self-Regulating and making positive decisions about their behavior. I also witnessed students honoring the Agreements. Thank you!

SELF ACTIVITIES: COOL DOWN AND FOCUS

Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

[Student name], you did an excellent job managing your behavior during the activity and respecting your neighbor's personal space. Can you please create a card for Write and Rip to add to our POP Chart? [Student walks to POP Chart, writes the name of the activity on a sentence strip, and adds it to the pocket chart.]

That way, our class has another strategy to help us be Ready to Learn any time we need to let go of negative thoughts or feelings. Remember, Room [x], we can also practice Write and Rip at home, any time we feel stress in our bodies or our minds.

While [student name] is adding Write and Rip to our POP Chart, we have time for [x number of] students to share their emotions and feelings with a one-word check-in.

Again, I am looking for students who are sitting up tall, with two feet flat on the floor, hands folded, and respecting their neighbor's personal space, who can share one word with our class. [Teacher calls on students to share one word such as "Relaxed" or "Calm."]

TITLE: STILL POINT

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the "Why" of the activity: Today, we will be practicing Still Point. This activity is a great way to **support ourselves in a challenging situation**. This activity has two parts. The first is to help us find a calm, relaxed state. The second is to create a simple way for us to find that relaxed state or Still Point, any time we are stressed, worried, or need to Be In the Zone.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart

Time: 2 minutes

First: We are going to find a cooling, relaxing breath by curling our tongues and sip-ping air through them, like a straw. Let's all inhale now to the count of 3 [teacher models inhalation] and exhale through our noses to the count of 3 [teacher models exhalation].

Then: We are going to find this cooling breath again. This time, when we are breathing and feeling relaxed, we are going to cross our middle and index fingers together [teacher demonstrates]. Let's practice this together, inhaling through our "straw" to the count of 3 [teacher models inhalation] and exhaling through our noses to the count of 3 [teacher models exhalation]. Now that we are relaxed, calm, and have found our Still Point, let's cross our fingers [teacher demonstrates].

Next: We are going to practice this strategy again. By finding a relaxing state and crossing our fingers, we are training our bodies to find that peaceful, relaxed state – or Still Point – every time our fingers are crossed.

Let's practice it again! Inhaling through our "straw" to the count of 3 [teacher models inhalation] and exhaling through our noses to the count of 3 [teacher models exhalation]. Now that we are relaxed, calm, and have found our Still Point, let's cross our fingers [teacher demonstrates].

Last: I need to find students who are demonstrating our Be the Solution behavior by sitting up tall, with two feet flat on the floor, hands folded, and respecting their neighbor's personal space, who can share examples of different times they could use

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Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

this strategy throughout the day. We have time for [x number of] students to share their thoughts. Before we share, let's remember to listen intently to others, accept others' opinions, and be careful not to interrupt our classmates. [Teacher calls on students demonstrating the expectations. Teacher writes examples on board.]

Thank you, [student names]. Room [x], are there any other times, maybe at home, when you are taking a test, during recess or over the weekend, when this strategy would also be useful? How can you find your Still Point in other tough situations? [Teacher calls on an additional one or two students to share and writes their ideas on the board.]

Thank you, [student names]. So, now that we know when stressful situations may occur, we can Be the Solution and find our Still Points so we can remain cool, relaxed and focused.

Teacher Tip: Continue to practice Still Point throughout the day to reinforce and model the concept for your students. Remind students to "find their Still Points" if they encounter a tough problem on a test or find themselves dealing with stress and anxiety at home. This activity is great for state testing, but should be practiced well before then, to give the students a solid foundation for implementation.

TITLE: READY TO LEARN BREATH

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the "Why" of the activity: Today, we are practicing Ready to Learn Breath. We can use Ready to Learn Breath when we are feeling overwhelmed or upset, or any time our class needs to Be In the Zone and focus. This **activity is a positive way to check in, focus,** and get our minds Ready to Learn.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart

Time: 3 minutes

First: Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Just follow your breath as it moves in and out. Try not to change the speed or rhythm of your breath. Leave it just as it is. As you continue to breathe, notice if you feel anything in your body. If you do, don't worry about changing it. Just notice what you are feeling and breathe in and breathe out.

There is no right way or wrong way. Just breathe.

Then: Listen for a sound far away. Choose one sound outside of your classroom to focus on. Focus all of your attention on that sound. Breathe it in, and breathe it out for the next five breaths [teacher softly counts to 5].

Next: Leave that noise behind and focus your attention on a sound that is closer to you. A noise inside the classroom, such as the buzz of a computer or the hum of an overhead light. Listen only to one sound, nothing else. Breathe it in, and breathe it out for the next five breaths [teacher softly counts to 5].

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Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

Last: Leave both sounds behind and focus only on the soft, quiet sound of your own breathing. For the next five breaths observe only the sound of your breathing, tune out everything else [teacher softly counts to 5].

Now clear your mind. Before you open your eyes, check in with how you are feeling. Has your breath changed? What do you need to do to be Ready to Learn for the rest of the school day? Before we move on, repeat this statement three times in your mind, "I give myself permission not to be perfect. The most important thing is that I try my best." [Teacher repeats statement softly three times.]

Finally, as we close our Ready to Learn Breath today, picture yourself being focused, relaxed, and Ready to Learn.

In the next three breaths, open your eyes. Identify three items that look familiar, such as a chair, a pencil, or a book. Once you have found your three items, sit with your hands folded and your eyes on me, your teacher. This formally concludes our Ready to Learn Breath. However, we can decide as a class to use this strategy any time throughout the week when we need help self-regulating, working as a team, or focusing for a test. We will now transition to [x] activity.

TITLE: READY TO LEARN BREATH

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the "Why" of the activity: Today, we are practicing Equal Breath. We can use Equal Breath when we are feeling confused, hyper, or upset. This activity is a positive way to check in, focus, and prepare our minds to be Ready to Learn.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart

Time: 3 minutes

First: Begin seated and place your feet flat on the floor, roll your shoulders back and lengthen your spine.

Then: Notice the pattern of your natural breath. Notice the inhalations and the exhalations. Which is longer? Which is deeper?

Next: With your next breath, you make your inhalation and exhalation the same length. Let's start with the count of 4. Slowly count to 4 as you inhale. [Teacher slowly counts aloud] 1 – 2 – 3 – 4. Now, also count to 4 as you exhale. The exercise is to match the length of your inhalation and exhalation.

Last: Continue breathing this way for several minutes. You may experiment with changing the number you count to, just make sure your inhalation and exhalation stay the same length.

TITLE: NAME IT AND DOODLE IT!

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the "Why" of the activity: Today, we are practicing Name It and Doodle It! This activity helps us **identify, name, and understand our emotions** so that we can be present and Ready to Learn.

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Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart, Notebook or scratch paper, Pens and pencils, Clock or timer

Time: 5 minutes

First: The teacher reads the feelings and emotions Happy, Relaxed, Energetic, Excited, Tired, Bored, Worried, Vulnerable, Hungry, Sad, Scared, and Angry listed on the POP Chart.

Then: The teacher cues the students: “Close your eyes and take three deep breaths. Notice what you are feeling in your body. Notice what thoughts are in your mind. [Teacher waits while students take three breaths.] Open your eyes and write down a feeling or emotion that you are experiencing. It can be one from the POP Chart, or one that is not listed. There is no correct or incorrect feeling or emotion for this activity.”

Next: The teacher instructs the students: “For the next 4 minutes you are going to doodle, write or draw something that expresses what you are feeling. There is no right or wrong way to complete your story or picture. The only requirement is that you write or draw for the entire 4 minutes. Get your pencils ready – take a breath – and begin!” [Teacher sets the timer for 4 minutes and writes “Start Time:” and “Stop Time:” on the board.]

Last: The teacher stops the timer and asks students to put their pencils down. The teacher asks the students to take five breaths and examine what they doodled. The teacher then cues the students to: “Notice what you are feeling in the body and in the mind. Do you feel any different after you took time to name and doodle what you are experiencing in the body and mind? Can you think of times when stopping to name and doodle your feelings and emotions might help you feel in control or make positive choices about your behavior?”

Teacher Tip: Think of where you would like your students to store their drawings. Perhaps they keep all their drawings in a notebook, folder, or binder? If time permits, you can also ask the students to share their drawings with a partner. This is a great way to facilitate peer-to-peer communication and to help students manage vulnerability. This activity fuses perfectly with the morning check-in routine. It is also a great solution for students who finish their work early or are easily distracted and need a productive way to channel excess energy.

TITLE: HOLDING WHO I AM

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the “Why” of the activity: Today, we are practicing Holding Who I Am. This activity helps us understand ourselves by **understanding, identifying, naming, and accepting our strengths and our challenges**. The activity helps us learn to be compassion-ate and kind to ourselves, just as we are compassionate and kind to others.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart, Notebook or scratch paper, Pens and pencils, Clock or timer

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Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

Time: 5 minutes

First: Students trace one hand on a blank sheet of paper.

Then: To begin, ask the students to take a mindfulness minute of silent reflection before writing or drawing all of their strengths inside the hand using “I” statements, such as “I am a good sibling,” “I try my best in school,” or “I am kind to others.”

Next: Around the outside of the hand, the students write the challenges they are working on such as, “I will control my behavior during recess,” “I will keep my eyes on my own paper during my spelling test,” or “I will be kind to my little brother.”

Last: When their papers are complete, the students take five deep breaths to study and absorb what they wrote. At this point, they may opt to add a few additional sentences or pictures to their hands.

Teacher Tip: If time permits, instruct the students to share their drawings with a partner. This is a great way to facilitate peer-to-peer communication and to help students manage vulnerability. Additionally, think of where you would like your students to store their drawings. The students can keep all their drawings in a notebook, folder, or binder. Or, if there is space in your room, laminate the students’ hands and hang them from a clothesline overhead.

TITLE: OWNING MY STORY JOURNAL

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the “Why” of the activity: The author Brene Brown wrote: “Owning our story and loving ourselves through that process is the bravest thing we will ever do.” Today, we are practicing the Owning My Story Journal to help us learn to be compassionate with ourselves and **bravely accept our strengths as well as our challenges**. As we create our stories, it is important to remember that these stories do not define us, they simply help us own the experiences that make us who we are. For instance, if Ruthie fails a math test, it does not mean she is a failure. Ruthie’s story is what she learned from failing the math test. Failing is a step in learning. As Albert Einstein said, “You never fail until you stop trying.”

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart, Notebook or scratch paper, Pens and pencils, Clock or timer

Time: 5 minutes

[Teacher chooses topic and writes prompt on board.]

Today, I am telling my story of _____.

- Trusting my gut
- Failing
- Being grateful
- Being happy
- Solution Teamwork
- Losing
- Being kind and compassionate to myself
- Being kind and compassionate to others
- Feeling misunderstood
- Forgiveness

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Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

- Humility
- Being vulnerable
- Managing anger
- Winning gracefully
- Losing gracefully
- Keeping my cool in a tough situation
- Being strong
- Trying my best
- Being creative
- Taking a risk
- Being fair
- Following through
- Being honest
- Over-sharing
- Keeping my word
- Being enough
- Communicating
- Finding my voice
- Listening to my body
- Letting go
- Doing the right thing

First: Ask the students to take 30 seconds of silent reflection before beginning by folding their papers in half. Students will have 1 minute to jot down key words and ideas for their story on the top half of their paper. Students may opt to create a storyboard instead.

Then: On the bottom half of their papers, students will have 5 minutes to tell their story. They can write, draw, or create a cartoon.

Next: Once their stories are complete, students will take five deep breaths and read over their story. At this point, they may choose to make edits or changes to their stories, drawings, or cartoons.

Last: On the back of their papers, ask students to write out and sign the sentence below:

I give myself permission not to be perfect. The most important thing I can do each day is try my best. Signed, _____ Date _____

Teacher Tip: If your class has a relationship with a younger grade, facilitating an experience for your students to share their stories is a great way to help them manage vulnerability, engage in community-building, and demonstrate leadership. (What positive modeling for the younger students!) Additionally, think of where you would like your students to store their stories and drawings. The students can keep them all in a notebook, folder, or binder. Or, perhaps share their stories with parents and caregivers during parent teacher conferences? For students with exceptionalities who have difficulty expressing themselves through writing, provide them with the option to sculpt with molding clay. Or, if time permits, teachers and aides can also circulate the classroom and help students label items in their drawing and record keywords.

SELF ACTIVITIES: COOL DOWN AND FOCUS

Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

TITLE: COOL DOWN BREATH

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the “Why” of the activity: Today, we will be practicing Cool Down Breath. This activity is a great way to **support ourselves in a challenging situation**. We can practice it at home, at school, or any time we are stressed or worried. All we need is an everyday object, such as a pencil, eraser, or key, to place in our hand.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart, Everyday object (pen, pencil, key, eraser), Clock or timer

Time: 2 minutes

First: We are going to find a small object, such as a pencil, eraser, or key, and place it in the palm of our hand [teacher models].

Then: We are going to find a cooling, relaxing breath by curling our tongues and sipping air through them, like a straw. Let’s all inhale now to the count of 3 [teacher models inhalation] and exhale through our noses to the count of 3 [teacher models exhalation].

Next: We are going to breathe easily and close our eyes. Without moving the object in our hands, we are simply going to notice what we feel. Notice if the object feels heavy or light. Notice if the object feels rough or smooth. For the next minute of mindfulness, we are simply going to breathe in and out, focusing on the feeling of the object in our hands. If our minds wander to other thoughts, let’s gently guide it back to the feeling of the object. I will start the timer. Our minute begins now [teacher starts and stops timer]. Nicely done, Room [x]!

Last: I need to find students who are demonstrating our Be the Solution behavior by sitting up tall, with two feet flat on the floor, hands folded, and respecting their neighbor’s personal space, who can share examples of different times they could use this strategy throughout the day, at school or at home. We have time for [x number of] students to share their thoughts. Before we share, let’s remember to listen intently to our peers, accept others’ opinions, and be careful not to interrupt our classmates. [Teacher calls on students demonstrating the expectations. Teacher writes examples on board.]

Thank you, [student names]. Room [x], are there any other times, maybe at home, when you are taking a test, during recess, or over the weekend, when this strategy would also be useful? How can we use this strategy to help us make a positive choice in a tough situation or release stress when we are about to take a test? [Teacher asks one or two students to share and writes their ideas on the board.]

Thank you, [student names]. So, next time we are in a tough or stressful situation, we can use our Cool Down Breath to Be the Solution and remain cool, relaxed, and focused.

Teacher Tip: Practice Cool Down Breath continually throughout the week. Remind students to “take some Cool Down Breaths” if they encounter a tough problem on a test or find themselves in a difficult situation on the playground. This activity is great for state testing week, but should be practiced well before then, to give students a solid foundation for implementation. To supplement the activity, bring textured objects from home or, as a connection to your science curriculum, ask students to bring in objects found in nature.

SELF ACTIVITIES: COOL DOWN AND FOCUS

Excerpted from *Everyday SEL in Middle School*

TITLE: MEMORY MINUTE

✓ Extended Script Activity

Provide students with the “Why” of the activity: Today, we will be practicing Memory Minute to help us **cool down and focus** when we are taking a test or having a difficult time remembering information. Memory Minute helps us release stress so that we can be focused, present and In the Zone.

Supplies: Sentence strip to add the activity to the POP Chart Clock or timer

Time: 2 minutes

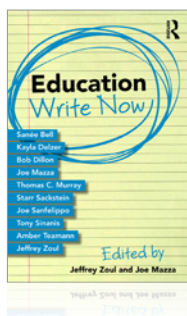
First: Make sure your room is quiet and that all screens are turned off or not visible. Instruct the students to show you Be the Solution behavior by sitting up tall, with their feet flat on the floor, and their hands folded on their desks. Cue the students to roll their shoulders back three times, respecting their neighbor’s personal space.

Then: Instruct the students to visualize a blank sheet of paper and to clear their minds of all thoughts.

Next: Set the timer for 1 minute, and instruct the students to remain quiet. Tap a chime or softly clap twice to signal the beginning of Memory Minute. For 1 minute everyone, including the teacher, is quiet and focused.

Last: At the end of the minute, tap a chime or softly clap twice to signal the ending of Memory Minute.

This chapter is dedicated to Amy Bleuel, founder of Project Semicolon. Amy died in 2017.



The following is excerpted from *Education Write Now* by Joe Mazza and Jeff Zoul.

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Anyone who has flown in an airplane has heard their flight attendant run through the preflight safety checks, including demonstrating what to do if the oxygen masks fall from the ceiling in the event the cabin's oxygen levels fall to a certain level.

But what if we followed these instructions when we thought about how we help students struggling with mental health issues? As adults, do we model the way for students in this area? How many conversations are we having with our colleagues about real-life challenges, and things that are rooted outside of the school setting? Are we afraid others will judge us or overlook us for opportunities based on certain stigmas? Have we come to grips with our own day-to-day challenges? Do we practice what we preach to school-aged children? Or do we pretend it doesn't exist, hoping nothing bad will ever happen to anyone we know? As I inch closer to 40 years on this Earth, I'm continuously surprised at how American society enables mental health concerns to spread—that is the silent crisis of my generation, and one that reminds me how much room we have to grow as people.

We, at least, discuss the problems with students, and work to provide support. For students, we offer social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculums, counselors, themed events and cross-curricular opportunities to break the ice on these conversations. We expect there to be challenges as students develop, and allocate resources to support them the best we can.

But what if “the best we can” isn't (and has never been) good enough? What if educators were brave enough to model the way, to open up about how they and others handle the day-to-day challenges of life? If we could model how life is inevitably messy, would students benefit from this perspective during the most important phases of their development? Let's take a look in the mirror as a nation when it comes to mental health.

THE CURRENT STATE OF MENTAL HEALTH (EYE-POPPING STATS)

One in five adults today (or 43.8 million adults) battle mental health challenges everyday. And most don't have it tattooed on their forehead so others can even tell, let alone respond with support. The National Center for Health Statistics recently reported the U.S. hit its highest suicide rate in 30 years, with significant increases for Native Americans, people ages 45 to 64, especially white women, as well as girls between 10 and 14. The only demographic groups that did not see a rise in suicides were black men and people over 75.

To put these statistics in perspective, let's picture a large elementary-sized school and staff.

These 2017 statistics (NAMI) translate to:

- A staff of 60 with 12 adults who struggle with mental health challenges;
- A school with 600 students equates to 120 students who already do or someday will struggle with their mental health challenges.

These are the facts the best we have them today. We can't continue hoping and praying things will change unless we make a much bigger investment in our children's well-being in and out of school. But in the meantime, we have to do everything we can to limit potential tragedy by taking a proactive approach at home and at school.

PART I — LOW-TECH MIRRORING

If you've presenting to a group, you might have used a cord to connect your computer to a big screen so an entire room can view and/ or interact. Today's technologies allow us to simply skip the cord, and mirror the content wirelessly using a process called "mirroring."

Now, taking the same premise of the teacher sharing something on their personal computer with the class, what if we looked at mirroring in a different way—through the lens of an adult committed to working *for* kids, being more open about day-to-day health and well-being challenges. In 20 years, I've seen plenty of teachers be very open and upfront about physical education, dieting and weight management—but on the topic of mental health and well-being, it is rarely exposed as a conversational topic among not only students but adults. As one of my personal mentors (whom I still haven't been fortunate to hear speak live) Brene Brown asks us, do we have the courage to be vulnerable? Can we, as educators, parents, adult role models in the lives of kids, openly discuss the shit show that is hidden behind our publicly perfect life, resume, digital footprint, etc.? Can we be real with our students, at a time when they need to see they are not the only ones who are struggling with the day-to-day trials and tribulations of life?

If you believe in the Whole Child, you don't need to be convinced; we can't teach students without addressing their social-emotional needs. A once a week health class where the content is not developmentally and/or culturally appropriate doesn't count. We can do better. We must.

PART II—ON-DEMAND PROGRAMMING THE NEW "CURRENT EVENTS"?

Back in my own K–12 student days, I can recall many teachers asking me to bring in a "current events" article relating to our class discussions at various times during middle and high school. This was in the 80s and 90s, back before the World Wide Web and, of course, before social media and media marketplaces like Netflix were at our disposal.

NETFLIX

Today, most kids and adults have heard of Netflix. Since its inception in 1997, the 8-billion-dollar company has grown to become a top 50 app, website and download, now drawing over 98 million users. As a parent of four (oldest is 5), I already see how, with many on-demand programming options and alter- natives, my kids will have Netflix or something like it in their lives for the foreseeable future. My wife and I model (with our own ubiquitous use) Netflix for movies, do-it-yourself (DIY) resources and a few shows we like to watch during the year. For the kids, Netflix provides access to thousands of shows, movies, special segments and other age-appropriate and inappropriate options—which we as parents can customize in advance or in real time. Right now, our kids (5, 3, 1, 1) are watching little if anything that "requires" parental supervision, but as our oldest (Mark) grows up, we know the moments when we may need to intervene are right around the corner.

One Netflix show we've been watching with our oldest is called *The Hunt*, where animals in the wild are captured hunting, gathering food and prey. One of the takeaways from our viewing of this program is that predators fail many more times than they succeed. We've learned about an awful lot of sharks, cheetahs, eagles and snakes

through watching their actions caught on high-definition cameras, highlighted by the narration of Sir David Attenborough, a well-known naturalist in the UK.

Full disclosure—my wife and I didn't preview the episodes and we actually thought one of the recent episodes would cause him nightmares; the one where multiple snakes take on the predator role in chase of prey, an iguana. The edited footage was really well done.

However, all it has done is further fuel his desire to learn more about them, and during our last trip to PetSmart, he asked to adopt a ball python, which has (in month three as I write this) become a daily occurrence. His pleas to mom and dad have been met by an overwhelming blend of "Are you crazy!?", "We already have a dog" and "No way, I'm afraid of those things." Honestly, at 5, Mark doesn't understand what it takes to adopt a pet and care for it, or understand what it needs to survive and thrive away from a natural habitat—all solid reasons for us to say no to the snake at this time.

So now the ball (python, ha!) is in our court as parents, and as educators. Should our fears about certain things (like snakes) shut down a passion and a pre-loaded context for learning within our kids? For our students?

Even though both my wife and I have always been deathly afraid of snakes, it's hard to say no to your kids when they want to learn more about something, gain a new perspective on science and biology and engage in something that gets them away from a flickering screen. Let's look at some recent data on how today's teens are spending their leisure time.

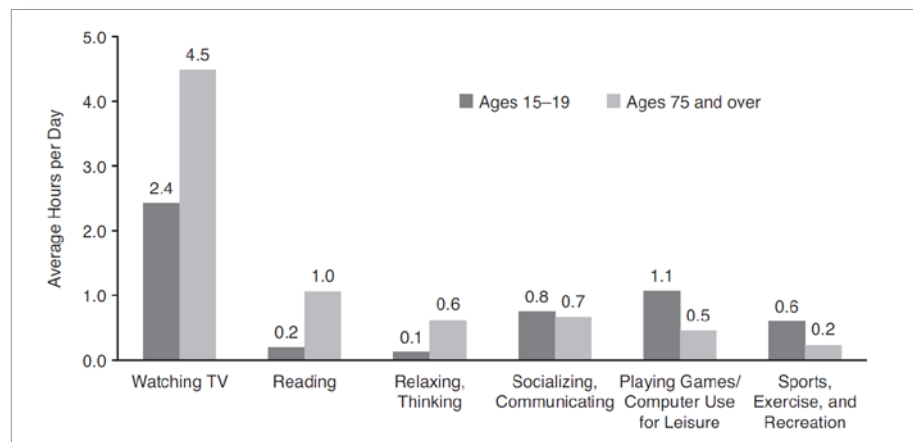


Figure 1 • Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, American Time Use Survey, Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/leisure.htm>

Studies show we're spending more time bingeing shows on Netflix than socializing with other human beings today. I share this because I believe it is the wake-up call schools and families need to start addressing the issue head-on and thinking more deeply and collaboratively, when we are tempted to warn parents to hide certain content and material from students.

So it's not even close. Today's youth are spending more time watching shows than anything else. What if we tapped into some of that content, and used (local) pop culture more as the compass for our day-to-day teaching, but especially for complicated, oftentimes delicate, content and contexts?

THE VIRAL NETFLIX SERIES ON TEEN SUICIDE

The hottest show on Netflix in 2017 was *13 Reasons Why*, in which a new high school student named Hannah takes her own life. Two weeks after her tragic death, a classmate named Clay finds a mysterious box on his porch. Inside the box are recordings made by Hannah—on whom Clay had a crush—in which she explains the 13 reasons why she chose to commit suicide. If Clay decides to listen to the recordings, he will find out if and how he made the list. The intricate and heart-wrenching tale is told through Clay's and Hannah's dual narratives. The Netflix production (originally a 2007 novel by Jay Asher) produced by Selena Gomez, has become the all-time #1 most watched and tweeted about series by school-aged kids.

With shows like *13 Reasons Why* being “binge-watched” across teenage demographics, mental health-related show plots are mainstream enough now that they even warrant a special Netflix rating, “RP18,” which means someone under the age of 18 should view the series with the supervision of a parent or guardian. Good intentions? Sure. Realistic? Hardly. How many teenagers watch shows with their parents? This is where parents and educators have an opportunity to set the table for further dialogue in natural, non-judgmental ways. But this is not what's currently happening. We're doing everything we can to blame others, write beautifully sad form letters home to families when something bad happens and pray it doesn't get any worse. As a father of young children, I'm out to find others not willing to sit on their hands, and one day suffer the fate of a lost child like _____.

I wasn't joking about the form letters. Somehow in 2017 we still think, as educational leaders, that this one-way communication will (1) fly, and (2) help anyone feel better about the situation. I've spoken with many school leaders across the country who “addressed” the ten-part series following with a form letter sent to parents and the community like the one used in the example below:

May 17, 2017

Dear Families,

I am writing to inform you about a new Netflix series titled 13 Reasons Why and its possible impact on our students. 13 Reasons Why is gaining popularity and we have concerns that the series may increase thoughts of suicide among students.

The show is based on a novel and the story of 17-year-old girl who takes her own life. She leaves behind 13 recordings explaining the reasons why she chose to commit suicide. While the show brings up the importance of talking about suicidal thoughts, it portrays situations where youth are dealing with serious issues, from bullying to sexual assault, without getting support from adults.

Denver Public Schools teaches the Signs of Suicide (SOS) curriculum in sixth and ninth grade across the district. The SOS curriculum focuses on supporting students to identify warning signs of depression or thoughts of suicide and make a report to a trusted adult for support. Our school psychologist, school nurses, social workers and counselors are trained in suicide prevention and supports and, unlike some of the adults in 13 Reasons Why, take all reports seriously.

You may wish to discuss the series, or thoughts of suicide, with your child. Talk to your child about what they can do if they have a friend that is expressing thoughts

about hurting themselves. As we discuss in the SOS curriculum, teach your child to acknowledge if they have a problem, be caring and tell an adult. Remind your child that there is help available if they ever feel sad or depressed. Be sure your child has the hotline numbers listed below.

Please consider the age and developmental stage of your child before allowing them to watch the show. We do not recommend that children with a history of suicidal thoughts, depression or mental health concerns watch 13 Reasons Why. If you do allow your child to watch this series, we recommend you watch it with them and discuss it afterwards.

If your child has warning signs of depression or suicide, don't be afraid to ask if they have thought about suicide. Raising the issue of suicide does not increase the risk. Instead, it decreases the risk by providing an opportunity for help.

If your child is in need of assistance, please reach out to your school mental health staff.

Helpful Resources:

- *Colorado Crisis and Support Line at 844-493-8255, or Text TALK to 38255*
- *National Suicide Hotline at 800-273-8255 Safe2Tell at 877-542-7233*
- *Trevor Project Hotline for Suicide Prevention for LGBTQ youth 866-488-7386*
- *Talking Points for Parents: www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/preventing-youth-suicide/13-reasons-why-netflix-series-considerations-for-educators*

Since May, I've confirmed with several educators from different states that the same form letter was sent home and/or posted on school/district websites as the virality and reach of the series rose to new record heights.

In 12 years as a school principal and assistant principal, I've never found that a form letter provided a transformational approach to small or large school issues. Form letters aren't meant to solve anything, but they can buy time for the real work to be planned and orchestrated, while communicating facts to the community. They take hours to write, edit, proof, revise, approve and distribute out to the community. At the end of the day, our largest chunks of time are better spent pulling people together who want to dig deeper, and draft strategies based upon what we know about mental health, Netflix, school culture, teenagers and our current school structure. We need to leverage the human capital that exists within the organization to best meet the needs of our community. And if we've been as proactive about staff and student well-being and mental health as we have been about staff and student physical education, this team is most likely already meeting regularly, anticipating risks and opportunities and leading the change necessary through listening, empathy, innovation and empowerment. This team is already working towards promoting mental health awareness by raising the emotional capacity and self-awareness of staff and students. We know that a critical component to a mentally healthy community is high levels of self-awareness and healthy relationships.

Adults at home and at school have a responsibility to tap into what we already know is happening. 13 Reasons Why is a widely popular show that puts mental health on

the front burner and our most at-risk subgroups are likely watching every single episode. To that end why would we choose not to bring these “current events” to our classrooms, social skills groups, dinner tables and other more intimate gatherings?

We know what Netflix brings to the table. It is a means of ongoing and relatable content, and perhaps a platform parents and educators can leverage to break the ice on critical conversations vs. trying to steer kids and families away from the content “to protect them.”

Change will take us out of our comfort zone, but this work is complicated and without shortcuts. Think deeper next time you go for that form letter and personalize the experience for students, staff and family members. Families and educators must “mirror” and “model” their own thoughts, ideas and early assumptions and not hold back the authentic dialogue that occurs while we process what we see in the media, and on-demand networks like Netflix. The power of family–community partnerships lies in melding the distinct areas of a child’s day, and the hundreds of thoughts that the world around them prompts. This is the area where I’m not convinced we are collectively rowing in the same direction, and the consequences for ignoring youth suicide and the rise of mental health challenges like ADHD, anxiety, depression, bi-polar, and a whole list of others, is deplorable and negligent on the part of parents and educators. It is not the parents’ job. It is not the teachers’ job. It is our job in working for kids.

WE GET A REDO

There will be a second season of *13 Reasons Why* airing in 2018. How will this school district and others leverage the on-screen happenings in the classroom, or will it choose to send another form letter home to parents to warn them about explicit content? The content included in the first season may have caught parents and educators off guard, but will we revisit our approach with knowledge of a looming second season? Now is the time to be having these discussions locally and globally. The “current events” will be there. Where will we be if and when our number is called? Every adult with a relationship with the child needs to be empathetic, be vigilant and, most importantly, work with others regardless of his/ her role.

A FEW QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER FOR PARENTS OF PRETEENS/TEENS

- Have you had a “frank” conversation with your teenager about the realities of what’s in the book/movie?
- In comparison, when was the last time you took an unfiltered look at who your child is following on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, etc.? The fact that you are not tech-savvy isn’t a good excuse (anymore).
- How comfortable are you in handling your teen’s mental health, and modeling what depression or down thoughts/ feelings look like? If you struggle, do you model getting the help you need?

EDUCATORS—A FEW POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Put the oxygen mask on yourself before you help the person next to you. Working in schools is not easy work. Some years are absolutely insane in terms of the

pace, unexpected events, family issues, etc. Get yourself some help if you are having trouble meeting basic day-to-day tasks. Confide in a friend.

- Watch and listen via social media—What are students saying about the movie? Yes, this is the reason you need to join Snapchat.
- Curriculum aside, take advantage of the teachable moments that arise from current events heard on NPR or from YouTube clips. (We've been waiting for mental health to become a front burner topic. How will we chip away at it differently when we know it will come up?)
- Student development of ideas. As educators, we must listen most, with a goal to create a culture where talking about tough topics, i.e. mental health, is considered a norm.
- Staff development ideas. Read the book and/or watch the movie. Host a Voxer bookchat. Assign conversation leaders once per week for six weeks.
- Parent development. Host a powerful speaker who is a great storyteller. Screen the movie. Help start a closed Facebook group for support.
- As a leadership team, remember to document your reflections and breakthroughs, and work to make empathy- mapping part of your design process.

FOR PARENTS AND EDUCATORS

- Leadership must do what it takes to move the topic to the front burner—formal and informal leaders.
- Keep your ear to the ground. Do we have our finger on the pulse, AKA society's influence? How do you put yourself in a place to continue learning in your day to day?
- Actively network (i.e. local NAMI, #semicolonEDU, etc.).
 - SemicolonEDU Day is July 14. Educators around the world share their semicolon ; tattoos, and offer words of encouragement for others battling somewhere along the journey.
 - There is a private Facebook group aimed at support- ing educators who battle mental health challenges. Two of those #semicolonEDU members have told their own powerful stories, which can be found online with a quick Google search. My post is entitled, "Let's Stop Faking It," and it's detailed below.

https://medium.com/@Joe_Mazza/lets-stop-faking-it-5380e0aea289

Every once in a while good news breaks that makes you feel like progress is being made in this area. The tweet shared above is just that, as Madalyn Parker screenshot her mental health day emails to and from her boss. Ben Congleton (M's boss) not only got back to her within 24 hours, but responded in a way that showed he actually cared about her. If this work is about relationships as much as we say it is, then he's nailed it, and folks would take a pay cut to work with an empathetic leader.



The following is excerpted from *Working with Students Who Have Anxiety* by Beverley H. Johns, Donalyn Heise and Adrienne D. Hunter.

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“There is no one thing that works all the time.”

– Eighth-Grade Student

LIVE FROM THE CLASSROOM

Ms. Natalie, a high school teacher of students with special needs, was preparing her students for statewide assessment testing. Corey was diagnosed with high-functioning autism; he becomes nervous in social situations and exhibits test anxiety. When Corey’s individualized education program (IEP) conference (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004) was held, it was decided that he needed extended timelines because of his anxiety.

Ms. Natalie thought she had prepared him for the test. She had taught test-taking strategies, positive self-talk, vocabulary, and more. By state rule, students needing specific accommodations are tested in a separate room. Starting two weeks prior to the test, Ms. Natalie had taken Corey to the testing room for 20 minutes each day and had him do fun activities; this way Corey could meet with success and associate the room with successful experiences. She thought she had prepared Corey.

On the day of the test, Ms. Natalie was responsible for monitoring Corey and three other students not from her class. What she had failed to realize was that there would be other students in that room who also required extended timelines but not necessarily the same amount of extended time.

Ms. Natalie distributed the tests, read the required information to the students, and gave the students the test to do independently. One of the other students, Samantha, whizzed through the test, appearing to just mark any answer, and finished within 45 minutes. She turned in her test and left. Corey saw her and panicked. She was done early, and he was not even close to being done. He began to shake and sweat profusely. Ms. Natalie tried to calm him, careful not to embarrass him in front of the other students who were still working. Twenty minutes later, the other students were finished and left. Corey started crying. Ms. Natalie tried to console him, encouraging him to keep on working. He finally finished the test.

Ms. Natalie was at a disadvantage because she did not realize that there would be other students in the testing room and so had not completely prepared Corey. She realized students with a high degree of anxiety should not be in a room with other students who might finish earlier. When Corey’s next IEP came around, she was better able to communicate Corey’s needs and recommended that he be tested in a separate room with no other students in the future.

Academic and testing tasks can provoke anxiety in students who become easily frustrated and worried. One can easily imagine that the early finishers knew more and did better. For students with anxiety disorders (ADs), these feelings are amplified.

Involve students in their accommodation plan. Students benefit when accommodations are explained in advance. Out of frustration, they may become agitated and aggressive if they believe that they are no longer in control and do not understand why the teacher may be making these accommodations (Jones, Dohrn, & Dunn, 2004). Children need to perceive that they have control over events. External locus of control, where the student does not believe he or she is in control of a situation, and low self-efficacy are strongly associated with anxiety (Niditch & Varela, 2012).

Before teachers implement accommodations, the student needs to understand the accommodation. Has the student with an extended timeline been taught to manage this time? If a calculator is allowed, does the student know how to use a calculator?

This chapter provides a variety of suggested accommodations for students with anxiety. Accommodations are different from modifications. Accommodations do not change the content of the task or test. They simply provide the tools a student needs to show that he or she knows the topic. Modifications change content. There may be instances where modifications of what is taught must be made.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ATTENTIONAL BIAS

Attentional control is characteristic of students with ADs, particularly generalized ADs and social ADs (Abasi, Dolatshahi, Farazmand, Pourshahbaz, & Tamanaeefar, 2018).

Anxiety can interfere with a student's ability to focus and pay attention. Children who live with chronic stress have an attentional bias toward survival. They have difficulty with activities that require them to think sequentially and concentrate on specific content conveyed. The suppression of distraction involves the ability to stay focused on the desired materials and ignore or suppress the urge to pay attention to irrelevant material. Such distraction suppression is achieved by children who have prior experience with a similar task. They also have good scanning skills (Craig, 2016).

Lectures may be problematic for students because teachers may expect the student to attend to a talk longer than the student is capable. Lectures should be limited to short amounts of time. The teacher may want to stop every five to seven minutes and have students compare notes. This can reduce anxiety for students who are worried that they did not get all of the key points of the lecture. A clear cue such as "This is an important point" tells the student what is important and what should be written down (Johns, 2011).

Advance preparation prior to a lecture can reduce anxiety. The teacher might give the students the notes about the lecture in advance, provide the students with a graphic organizer or an outline of what will be discussed in the lecture, or provide the "big ideas" to the students. Another method is to give the students a lecture guide with the main points of the lecture in a fill-in-the-blank format. This encourages the student to pay attention to the lecture while accessing the main ideas. Because these students have difficulty with attention, the teacher should provide as many preparation activities as possible.

When a teacher is giving directions, the teacher should give one instruction at a time, give the direction as a command, and make sure certain students are paying attention when the direction is given. The teacher gives the students praise for following the direction (Kauffman & Badar, 2018). It may be helpful to give one instruction and have the student repeat it.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR MEMORY

Students with ADs may have memory problems. Their anxiety may result in inability to attend to a task or remember the main points. Maehler and Schuchardt (2009) have divided working memory into three components: the supervisory system, the

phonological loop, and the visual-spatial area. The supervisory system serves to control and regulate the occurring cognitive processes. In the supervisory area, the student has to retrieve material from long-term memory and determine when to pay attention to the task. In the phonological loop, the student has to process the information that is stored which they may do through a sub-vocal rehearsal. In the visual-spatial process, the student is focused on remembering and processing the visual and spatial information. To perform these components is very complex for students with anxiety because at any point, their attention may not be on the working memory but instead on what is worrying them.

What does this mean for accommodations for memory? It is important that a teacher have a student's attention before focusing on information. This may be accomplished by providing verbal or visual cues to assist the student in retrieving information. By focusing on a student's interest in a given area, the student will be more likely to pay attention. Music, hands-on activities, or dramatic performances of the information may assist the student in remembering the information.

Mnemonics can be a helpful tool for students. Pictures, associations, and acronyms are valuable. One mnemonic to remember the great lakes is HOMES—Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. Teachers and students can also create what is meaningful for them (Steele, 2007).

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR LANGUAGE

Children who have experienced trauma resulting in anxiety may have difficulty with spontaneous speech and limited ability to communicate. They have difficulty in spontaneous conversation and may misinterpret body language and facial cues. They may attribute negative intent to innocent feedback from others (Craig, 2016). Giving students visual cues to assist them in expressing might include practice in reading facial cues using videos and magazine pictures.

For students with receptive language problems, use familiar vocabulary when giving directions and assignments. With the generational gap, there may be words a teacher uses that students do not understand.

Necessary vocabulary for the assignments should be taught prior to the lesson. While some textbooks start the chapter with new vocabulary words, a pre-analysis of content may reveal additional words that the students may not understand.

Some students may need help with expressive language skills. Expressive language ability is necessary to answer questions when called upon. Practicing the use of words that express thoughts and feelings is beneficial. Care should be taken not to embarrass the student in front of others. Choices can be given when students are required to engage in classroom presentations, such as preparing a short video that they can edit and then present to the class rather than having them present a live performance.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR COGNITIVE INFLEXIBILITY

Cognitive inflexibility is the lack of skills to move from one activity to another without becoming upset and refusing to do so. To cope with transitions that require flexibility, children have to overcome the anxiety, gain information about the new setting, break old habits, create new coping styles, and learn new behaviors (Greene & Ollendick, 1993).

Children who have experienced trauma resulting in anxiety may have difficulty in changing the way they think about something. Perseveration of the past limits their ability to move forward. These children may be stuck in the past (Craig, 2016).

To accommodate a student who has difficulty moving from one activity or subject area to another, the teacher can use precise verbal language to facilitate transitions: “We have three minutes until our next activity,” or “Math will be over in five minutes.” Visual cues can be effective; teachers may hold up a card with a five-minute warning or ring a bell signaling a transition. However, some students may become hyper-attentive in anticipation of the prompt, being so fearful that they will miss the prompt that they cannot focus on their assignment. For these students, the most effective means of signaling a transition is to announce the remaining time in a calm, quiet voice.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR TASK COMPLETION

ANALYZE THE SPECIFIC TASK. AVOID WORKSHEET WARS.

In a functional behavioral assessment of a student with anxiety, the student refused to do makeup work. In the explanation of the behavior, the educator said, “I know he can do the work.” When asked how she knew this, she could not answer.

Teachers may erroneously assume that students can do certain tasks. Power struggles and worksheet wars can arise when teachers do not analyze the necessary skills or appearance of the assignment. In looking at a student’s unfinished work, pictures were found that blocked text, causing frustration. Sometimes, the visual image of a worksheet can be improved by providing ample white space between content, thus increasing the readability and focus.

On another assignment, the student was expected to switch directions six times on one sheet of paper. The student could not switch gears. Ask the following questions when creating a worksheet:

1. Are there distractions on the sheet that may bother the student?
2. Is the print large enough and clear enough for the student?
3. Is there enough white space on the sheet?
4. Are there too many problems or questions on one sheet?
5. Does the student understand the meaning of the instructional words?
6. Is only one set of directions used on one sheet of paper?

REQUEST THAT THE STUDENT START THE TASK

This accommodation is called “Jump Start.” Students are more likely to do an assignment if the educator requests that the student start a task rather than telling the student to get the work done. This is less stressful and prevents them becoming overwhelmed before ever getting started.

PREMACK PRINCIPLE

This is also known as “Grandma’s Law”—first eat your peas, then you get dessert. The student is requested to do a non-preferred task and then the student gets to do

the preferred task. This is a strategy that is commonly used with children with autism spectrum disorders—first you do this, and then you get to do that (Johns, 2015). This can also be an effective strategy for children with anxiety because the non-preferred tasks can be broken down into small parts. Once the non-preferred task is completed, the student can engage in a short activity that the student likes to do, such as, “If you do five math problems, you can have five minutes of computer time.” When utilizing the Premack principle, it is important that the educator know what students like to do, otherwise the strategy is ineffective.

FADING

The process of fading provides maximum cues to students at the beginning and then slowly and systematically removes those cues. This can reduce anxiety for students because it is a form of errorless learning where students are set up for success. An educator working with a visual learner to read specific words provides a picture representing the word, writes the word, and then color-codes the picture and the word. Systematically, the coloring of the picture fades away; then the picture fades away; and then the color of the print of the word fades away, leaving the printed word.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PERFECTIONISM

Children who exhibit obsessive-compulsive behaviors do not intend to irritate others. They cannot control the behaviors. They may appear to be deliberately stalling to avoid doing an assignment, but they may actually be struggling because they fear they may not get the assignment done perfectly. They may erase mistakes and keep erasing until they have a hole in their paper and then become very upset. Just telling them that their paper is okay is not enough. They are bothered by the fact they had to erase. The educator may decide to break tasks down into smaller steps and provide additional time for assignments and tests (Zimmerman, 2001).

Sometimes a student is so pleased with their progress yet becomes stressed by their perfectionism that they will not complete the assignment. The teacher can encourage the student to breathe deeply and slowly, discuss the assignment, and apply best-case and worst-case scenarios to help the student move forward. A rubric can clearly communicate expectations.

BEHAVIOR MOMENTUM

For children with obsessive-compulsive disorder, behavior momentum can be an effective strategy. This involves the utilization of two to four high-probability easy tasks for the student to do before giving them a more difficult task (Johns, 2015). The teacher gives the student an easy task, the student completes it, and the teacher praises. The teacher then gives the student another easy task, and the student is reinforced. This can continue until the student is given a more difficult task, and the student is more likely to complete it.

BACKWARD CHAINING

Backward chaining is a process where the teacher does all of the steps except the last one. The student then completes the last step, and the teacher provides praise. The student then completes the last two steps, and the teacher praises the student. The process continues until the student has completed the assignment.

PROOFREADING CHECKLISTS

Providing tools such as proofreading checklists helps students focus on what is expected for a completed task (Johns, 2016). The proofreading checklist can be something as simple as:

Proofreading Checklist

Proofreading Instructions: Use this list to check your work before you hand it in. Keep in mind that your first answers to a test question are often right. Unless you are absolutely sure that your answer is wrong, don't change your answers.

Have I put my name on my paper?

Have I read the directions?

Have I answered all the questions?

Have I checked my spelling?

Have I checked my punctuation?

Scoring rubrics clarify expectations. Teachers can explain the criteria they are looking for in an assignment and how many points each of the different criteria are worth.

For students who experience anxiety give them ongoing feedback prior to turning in an assignment. A teacher can give positive verbal or written suggestions on a draft, thus allowing students to revise before the due date. If an assignment has several parts, give the student one part at a time to reduce the worry about the assignment being perfect. This allows you to provide positive feedback at each step along the way.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR OVERSENSITIVITY WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT

Some students are hypersensitive to a wide variety of factors. The physical environment within the classroom should be calm and comfortable and exude a sense of safety for the student. Fluorescent lights, crowded shelves, a high noise level or new noises, ventilation, and more may upset the student (Sarathy, 2009). Some students with an AD prefer to sit in the back of the room, so they can see what is happening in front of them. They may become anxious and worried about what people are doing behind them.

Classrooms should have specific areas that are designated for calming the students. These are not punitive areas but areas where the students find a sense of comfort. If permitted, there might be a rocker, a bean bag chair, or a comfy rug with pillows on the floor. When possible, teachers may want to use lamps rather than the fluorescent lights.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR WORRY

Children sometimes worry about things that adults do not see as important. Let children know that they can talk privately, thus encouraging them to speak more freely. Active listening is a means of acknowledging the student's feelings. Listen with the goal of understanding. Too often, people stop listening because they are already formulating

their responses. Pauses may be appropriate to gain more information or to best formulate a response. Do not deny the child's feelings but affirm what the student is worried about. Sometimes, clarifying questions can enhance communication. Prompts such as "Is this what you mean?" and "Are you worried about?" are helpful. Instead of solving the problem, offer assistance by asking, "How can I help?"

If the student is worried about an assignment, saying the assignment is easy may not be helpful. It devalues their feelings. Acknowledge the student's thoughts with statements like "I understand you are worried, let's talk more about it."

Some students worry when they get to a difficult problem. They stop doing any of the assignment because of this one problem, perhaps failing a test as a result. A simple accommodation known as "hurdle help" can assist. Moving around the classroom, a teacher notices that a student is stuck and not proceeding with the remainder of the work; the teacher can approach the student and point out what the student has done right on the sheet and then say, "Looks like you are stuck on number five. How about if you skip it for now and go on to number six? I will then come back and we will do number five together."



The following is excerpted from *7 Ways to Transform the Lives of Wounded Students* by Joe Hendershott.

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THE IMPACT OF EMPATHY

Since one of an educator's major goals is to have high academic achievement for all students, one must look at how empathy plays into that desired outcome. Empathy or being empathic is becoming more widely studied for its potential benefits to student achievement, health, relationships, compassion, and the positive effects it can have on our school climates as well as our communities and society overall. As we continue seeking to understand how everything connects in order to educate the whole child and bring transformation to the lives of wounded students, we are discovering that social-emotional factors are an integral part of the learning process. Once a student starts to feel safe and secure in who they are in their environment, the academic aspect becomes easier for everyone. During my ongoing research on empathy, I have yet to find any studies finding that empathy has any negative impact on learning or the learning process. If such a study did exist, there are a multitude of studies and available literature that have shown the relevance of empathic connections to increased academic achievement and life success. Medical schools are even making the correlation and requiring emotional literacy training for their medical students, in an effort to help them better serve their future patients. Pink (2006) noted, "Today at Columbia, all second year medical students take a seminar in narrative medicine in addition to their hardcore science classes. There they learn to listen more empathically to the stories their patients tell and to 'read' those stories with greater acuity" (p. 113).

According to O'Conner (2013), "There have been research findings that suggest that teachers' empathy with their pupils has a positive impact on achievement and attitude to learning" (p. 25). Siegel (2010) suggested that empathic connections should be made through (a) eye contact, (b) tone of voice, (c) facial expressions, (d) body posture, (e) intensity of response, and (f) developing a supportive community. Bevel and Altrogge stated:

Programs need to focus on improving learning of every student, every teacher and every administrator, on closing the achievement gap for all learners, on developing empathy for others, on accepting differences and building on the strengths and uniqueness of each individual.

(2010, p. 55)

Small (2011) suggested, "Learning empathy involves mastering three essential skills: (1) Recognizing feelings in others, (2) learning to listen, and (3) expressing understanding" (p. 17). In order for this to happen, we must learn how to cultivate respectful relationships within our learning communities, both educator/student and student/student. Boutte (2008) proposed, "Teaching toward a more inclusive social order or teaching humanity means working toward reducing our peculiar ethno-centrism so we can appreciate humanity and its many dimensions" (p. 171). Cowan, Presbury, and Echterling suggested:

A lack of sufficient and accurate empathy early in life means that a person not only is disconnected from others but also, over time, becomes disconnected from his or her own internal experiences, which can emerge later only in conflicted and ambivalent expressions.

(2013, p. 58)

EMPATHIC CONNECTIONS

Creating cultures that are inclusive is extremely important in helping students to feel connected. Feeling a sense of connection satisfies a student's core longing to be safe and secure within themselves as well as their surroundings, thus decreasing a child's stress and allowing more receptiveness to learning. Gordon (2005) stated further, "The child who is in emotional pain from feeling excluded does not have the heart for learning. What happens to the child on the playground or at lunchtime can have a tremendous effect on the child's education" (p. 159). Gordon and Green have suggested that due to the world being more globalized, and the increased use of technology, students are developing into individualized learners. We see students who do not have a chance to interact or socialize and become more isolated as a result (2008). As Gatto (2005) observed, "The term community hardly applies to the way we interact with each other. We live in networks, not communities, and everyone I know is lonely because of that. School is a major actor in this tragedy" (p. 21). As educators, we must become intentional about providing as many opportunities as possible for students to work in groups. Group work allows for the development of social skills which can provide pathways for empathic connections between peers. Online learning offers many benefits, but it detracts from the community building necessary to creating a sense of belonging. Kiraly (2011) noted, "As educators, I would venture to suggest that 'connecting' to our students is an urgent need which all teachers must prioritize and we must be innovators here too. We need to make sure that our students are connected to each other too" (p. 14). Ultimately, it's about positioning students to interact with us as well as with each other. The benefits are well-documented in regard to learning, academic success, and healthy relationships. Positioning students to attune to the needs of others is the beginning of change towards issues like bullying and students being disengaged from their learning community.

LEARNING EMPATHY

In an era of endless curriculum standards and guidelines, finding time in the school day to address emotional literacy topics can be difficult. Seaman (2012) asserted that all teachers in every content area can find moments to incorporate compassion and empathy and still not have to adjust curriculum integrity, and Maxwell and DesRoches (2010) suggested teaching a unit on empathy as early as preschool and kindergarten. They referred to this as teaching emotional understanding so children learn their own feelings, but they try to teach children to be aware of others' feelings, too. Furthermore, Hanko (2002) said that the endeavor to teach empathy could be viewed as a developmental accomplishment for not only the children, but also the educators. He stated that this is especially true for teachers since they are "the only professionals in daily contact with all children of school age, at a time when increasingly complex emotional and social factors may impede children's learning, and frequently educationally dysfunctional teaching climates threaten to impede teachers' professional capacities" (Hanko, 2002, p. 15). Hanko concludes his article with information that teachers should glean from empathy training:

1. Develop practical strategies for making children feel safe.
2. Learn to value the child and realize that many behaviors are not personal attacks.

3. Utilize different teaching techniques and understand the difference between encouragement and praise.
4. Avoid judging students; seek strengths to build on.
5. Ask enabling questions that encourage children to think through their own solutions.
6. Understand that sometimes it is not about solving a problem but recognizing underlying issues.
7. Be aware that as educators, it is not our job to fix children's problems. Sometimes the act of caring is what pays the biggest dividends for students later in life (2002).

This is a helpful checklist as districts seek to provide their educational teams with relevant professional development training geared towards emotional literacy.

Empathy can sometimes be difficult to incorporate or teach in school environments that tend to be competitive in nature. However, making teachers and students more aware of the importance of empathy and cultivating this knowledge can create school environments that have more group cohesiveness for students and teachers alike. Moreover, this is the way in which empathy can support the goals of academic achievement (Weissbourd & Jones, 2014). For the wounded student, the implications of learning empathy extend beyond academic achievement. Empathic connections begin to build a bridge for the wounded student to experiencing the trust and relationships that may not come easily but are essential to success in life. According to Gerdes, Segal, Jackson, and Mullins (2011), the benefits of teaching empathy can be countless: The result is students with the ability to understand empathy in a more refined manner when it comes to social justice, social wellbeing, or interaction with individuals. Claypool and Molnar (2011) said, "We know that for some people, developing and having empathy is seen as a necessary aspect of being in proper relationship to others, a necessary part of reducing violence in society and pursuing social justice issues" (p. 184). Empathy is perhaps one of the most fundamentally necessary attributes in our relationships, so when it is lacking, it becomes one of the biggest stumbling blocks.

CULTIVATING EMPATHY

Creating a school environment that affords continuous opportunities to be empathic will help empathy become second nature. Weissbourd and Jones (2014) claimed, "Children develop empathy when it lives and breathes in their relationships, including their relationships with teachers" (p. 46). Be deliberate in recognizing moments to be empathic with your students or for your students to be empathic with others. Sometimes, it is as simple as acknowledging the "hard" that your student is experiencing. For instance, in regard to the child whose parents are divorcing ... acknowledge the hard: "Max, I heard your family is going through some changes. I understand change can be hard sometimes. I hope you will let me know if you need to talk or if I can help you." Obviously, this is a generalized sentiment that should be personalized for the student you are talking to. If they seem distracted, tell them you understand that. If you see tears, let them know you can arrange private space since you understand that sometimes, crying is the only thing that helps. If there is anger,

offer an outlet for expressing it. I once had a high school student come to my office struggling with some intense anger over a personal situation. He was so angry that he said he was ready to trash my office. Instead of telling him not to be angry and threatening him with consequences, thus negating his very real feelings, I told him I understood why he was angry and told him that if he really felt he needed to trash my office, I had one stipulation: Don't touch the picture of my wife. That simple empathic response mixed with a little dose of humor opened the door to trust. This student did not trash my office that day, but he did discover a safe place to deescalate so that he could get back to the business of learning.

Getting to know our students and going beyond the surface attitudes or behaviors to the circumstances that may drive those things is the beginning of empathy. And sometimes imagining where our students are coming from is very different than seeing. One of my daughters took a new teaching job this past school year in a district that has students coming from some extremely impoverished situations. Her principal arranged an invaluable experience for his newly hired teachers by loading them onto a school bus for a tour of the neighborhoods in the district where their students would be coming from. My daughter said:

I got a firsthand glimpse into some of my students' every-day lives. I gained a different perspective, realizing that some of my students would spend an hour and a half on the bus before they ever walked into my classroom, so expecting them to immediately sit down to focus would be unrealistic. I have always had the privilege of breakfast before heading to school and the availability of snacks during a break. I am sensitive to the fact that that is not the case for most of my students, and there are times they come to school hungry. I am glad my principal gave us the opportunity to have a better understanding of where they might be coming from.

I later learned from someone in my daughter's building that many kids knew that if they needed a snack or did not have lunch, Miss Hendershott had a drawer of snacks in her room. She may not appreciate that I divulged this information, but it is a perfect example of a simple gesture making a big, empathic statement of, "I see you. I care about you. I am here for you."

It is never too early to allow children the opportunity to extend and receive empathy. We witnessed a remarkable empathic interaction between our two youngest daughters, Kendi and Kemer. They are only six months apart, but one has been with us since shortly after birth and the other had just come home to our family from China when she had to have a major surgery at the age of two years old. I took Kendi to visit Mommy and Kemer in the hospital, and we were surprised when Kemer (who had to remain flat on her back in the hospital crib) became very agitated upon our arrival. She kept pointing at Kendi, and Kendi kept reaching for her. Mind you, Kemer was still learning to verbally communicate with us since she had only been home a couple of months, and these two were still learning about what it meant to be sisters. We finally decided to allow Kendi to sit in the crib beside Kemer. To our surprise, Kemer was immediately comforted by her sister's presence and Kendi was content to just sit and rub her arm, which is quite a feat for a busy two-year-old. It was a good

reminder never to underestimate a child's ability to feel empathy, and that sometimes empathy needs no words. The sense of connection through empathy is a powerful thing.

AWARENESS OF THE NEED FOR EMOTIONAL LITERACY

When it comes to the teaching of emotional literacy, Dolby (2013) stated, "As budgets tighten and the focus of higher education shifts toward skill-driven courses and outcomes-based competencies, and away from a broad education in the humanities and social sciences, the ability to develop a culture of empathy erodes even further" (p. 63). I completely understand if the thought of incorporating one more thing into your day is overwhelming. The demands of high stakes testing have taken up a big space in today's classroom. However, I would like to suggest that we not view emotional literacy strategies as a part of curriculum but instead as a practiced response. In a research study on empathy, Baron-Cohen developed an Empathy Quotient (EQ) scale, and revealed that science students scored lower on the Empathy Quotient scale than humanities students (2011). Teaching emotional literacy, including empathy towards students, is of global importance as it not only enhances the lives of individual students, but of society as well. According to Gordon and Letchford:

We know that the biggest predictor of later success in life is social and emotional competency. Adults who do not possess these skills are more likely to face mental illness and addiction, incarceration, unemployment or under-employment, and other negative life consequences.

(2009, p. 52)

In addition, Slote (2011) said, "If empathy also helps make us morally decent individuals, then, once again, it has a social, political, and individual significance that recent scientific studies of empathy have not really or fully honed in on" (p. 14). Gordon (2005) further stated, "It is emotional literacy that opens the door to empathy, allowing us to see situations from another's perspective and to understand their feelings" (p. 117). One could make the argument that emotional literacy should be taught at home, but again, I would like to propose we view empathy as a practiced response that is incorporated into the educational culture. A child may or may not be taught to tie their shoes at home, but even if they were, that does not mean they should only practice that skill at home. If their shoe becomes untied at school, they should take that opportunity to practice tying. Sometimes, they need a teacher to show them how to tie it. Other times, they might see a classmate struggling to tie their shoe, so they become the teacher in response to the need of another. Regardless of where children should learn to tie their shoes, the world is a safer, happier place if we all practice keeping those shoes tied.

IMPACT OF EMPATHY ON BULLYING

Some experts in the field of emotional literacy have come to the conclusion that empathy can alleviate bullying. Gordon and Green (2008) said, "Learning to relate to the feelings of others constitutes bully-proofing from the inside out" (p. 35). Further,

Szalavitz and Perry stated, “Failure to empathize is a key part of most social problems—crime, violence, war, racism, child abuse, and inequity, to name just a few” (2010, p. 4). Learning empathy should be viewed as a preventative measure, which overall is a more productive response to many problematic issues, including bullying. Too many times, the focus is on what the consequences should be in response to things like bullying and crime, but by that time, the damage has been done. We need to invest our energies into preventing injustices in the first place. Moving to an empathic level of understanding takes us away from our traditional approach of judging behavior without evaluating the root of the behavior. The interaction becomes punitive in nature and sometimes escalates or, at the very least, does not improve the behavior.

Years ago I sat through many hours of training in order to be licensed as a foster-care parent. Herschel Hargrave, an employee of the training agency who had also fostered approximately 129 children at that time, shared a very powerful insight about working with children of trauma and their behaviors that has stuck with me. He said, “Trauma is like no other experience. We cannot talk kids out of it or discipline them into appropriate behaviors. Consequences never change the person on the inside; it only takes place in relationship” (H. Hargrave, personal communication, 2010). If the goal of educators is to be transformational in the lives of their students, it is imperative to develop relationships with them as quickly as possible, teaching appropriate behaviors instead of administering consequences.

Gordon (2005) determined, “Empathy is integral to solving conflict in the family, schoolyard, boardroom, and war room. The ability to take the perspective of another person to identify commonalities through shared feelings is the best peace pill we have” (pp. xvi–xvii). According to Weissbourd and Jones:

We can't teach children empathy as if it were just a skill, like word decoding or simple addition. The kind of empathy that is crucial to develop in children is not simply a skill or a strategy: It's born of a broad and deep sense of humanity.

(2014, p. 44)

Furthermore, de Souza and McLean (2012) said, “Learning programs that focus on treating the other with kindness, respect, and dignity should raise the empathy level of the individual, mature spirituality, and reduce the incidents of bullying and violence in schools and classrooms” (p. 178). When the entire school is bought into well thought out interventions that involve various strategies inclusive of curriculum and pertinent social skills, bullying can be notably decreased (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Bathina (2013) stated, “Incidents of bullying and hate crimes could possibly be averted if teachers take time to actively teach empathy, respect, and tolerance in the classrooms” (p. 47). Further, Gordon and Green (2008) suggested that “the development of social and emotional competence and empathy awakens the sense of moral responsibility in children for the wellbeing of their peers” (p. 35).

THE WORLD NEEDS EMPATHY

As you can see, the importance of empathy and its role in who we are and how we connect with others has been the topic of several studies and articles. As it pertains

to learning, research has shown that establishing an empathic connection with students keeps them more engaged in the educational process, which is especially critical for the wounded student. Engaging with students and being more inclusive establishes a sense of community where empathic relationships can be practiced. However, failing to establish empathic connections with students can cause feelings of isolation for them. Therefore, every caregiver/ educator should be equipped with strategies to develop inclusive environments for students. Understanding the value of empathy for ourselves and others should afford the insight to suggest the validity of its important role in schools and the learning process. The interactions between educators and students and the ways students behave towards one another have the potential to create a less stressful learning environment. Additionally, the presence of empathic relationships has been shown to reduce the instances of bullying.

Take a moment to reflect on your own experience as a student. Were your connections with most teachers and classmates empathic ones? So, what will the legacy of your classroom be?

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

—Maya Angelou

KEY POINTS

In the quest for academic success for every student, educators are becoming increasingly aware of the significance of social-emotional factors in a whole-brain approach to teaching and learning.

Developing an awareness of children’s core longings can decrease stress levels, cultivating feelings of safety and security where learning takes place.

The ability of educators to be empathic with their students builds connections and a sense of community that in turn engages the learning process.

As educators, we need to position students for empathic connections with not only ourselves, but also other students.

When educators empathize with their students, they are attuning to their students’ needs and circumstances, which can build relationships on a deeper level.

Teaching empathy gives students an awareness of their own feelings and the feelings of others.

Teaching emotional literacy does not jeopardize academic achievement but encourages a positive environment more conducive to learning.

Teaching emotional literacy and incorporating empathy can have an immediate impact as well as a long-term global impact.

Encouraging empathy is a preventative.