SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH IN YOUTH MATTERS

NEW TEACHER CENTER’S 19th NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TEACHER INDUCTION

REALIZE: GROW + TEACH + LEAD

FEBRUARY 13 & 14, 2017
**Why is Social-Emotional Learning Important?**

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is at the core of our program. Often referred to as “the missing piece” in education, SEL is vital to whole student development and has been proven essential in creating a better learning environment and a more receptive and balanced school community. This learning theory encompasses a set of competencies that enable individuals to recognize their emotions, self-regulate, demonstrate caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and constructively handle challenging social situations. Strengthening these essential skills has the power to shape more effective, collaborative and empathetic leaders, which in turn creates a more compassionate community at large. In a major review of SEL programs in schools, Durlak et al. (2011) found that students who participated in social-emotional programs (compared with students not in social-emotional programs) demonstrated the following:

- Increased academic achievement.
- Increased social-emotional skills.
- Improved attitudes toward self and others.
- Improved positive social behaviors.
- Decreased conduct problems and emotional distress.

These results were consistent across grade level (elementary, middle, and high schools), location, (urban, rural, and suburban), and school type (schools serving ethnically and racially diverse student populations).

Mindfulness Without Borders’ educational content integrates the key findings of CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning), and elements of their five social and emotional learning domains, including:

- **self-awareness**— accurately assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths; maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

- **self-management**— regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; expressing emotions appropriately.

- **social awareness**— being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences.

- **relationship skills**— establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict.

- **responsible decision-making**— decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations.
Paying attention to the breath is a core mindfulness practice. In TAKE FIVE, we use five fingers of one hand to count each breath cycle, hence the name TAKE FIVE. In this practice, a breath cycle consists of a gentle in-breath ending in a momentary pause, followed by a gentle out-breath that also ends in a momentary pause. The breath cycle repeats itself five times. We notice the body expanding with each in-breath and contracting with each out-breath. In so doing, we withdraw our attention from distracting thoughts and bring our attention back to the present moment.

**TAKE FIVE**

Here’s how:

- Sit in a comfortable position. Allow both soles of your feet to connect to the floor and rest your hands on your lap.
- Gently close your eyes or look for a point somewhere on the floor where you can return your eyes when you get distracted.
- Turn one hand palm up to the ceiling. This will be your counting hand. At the end of each breath cycle, you will fold one finger on this hand into your palm until all five fingers are folded.
- Gently take a breath in to fill your lungs. Notice the pause that happens naturally once the in-breath is complete.
- Gently breathe out until your breath comes to a pause. Fold your first finger. This is TAKE ONE.
- Gently take another in-breath to fill your lungs. Notice the pause that happens naturally once the in-breath is complete.
- Gently breathe out until your breath comes to a pause. Fold your second finger. This is TAKE TWO.
- Breathe in again, filling up your lungs until you feel the pause.
- Breathe out to empty the lungs until you feel the pause. Fold your third finger. This is TAKE THREE.
- Breathe in; notice the pause. Breathe out; notice the pause. Fold your fourth finger. This is TAKE FOUR.
- Now, breathe in following the whole length of the breath. Breathe out, following the whole length of the breath. This time, turn your counting hand palm down. This is TAKE FIVE.
- Continue to breathe in and out.
- You don’t need to breathe in a special way. Your body knows how to breathe.
- When you are ready, slowly bring your attention back to the council, and take a moment to notice how you feel.
The right social and emotional learning activities can help your students acquire the soft skills they’ll need to manage day-to-day ‘ups and downs’, navigate interpersonal relationships, empathize with their peers, and lead more successful, productive and happy lives. They can help strengthen teacher-student relationships and in turn, create classroom communities of more compassionate, responsible and well-rounded students. The following classroom activity is taken from The ReThink Digital Kit which includes over 100 activities for grades 7-12 educators passionate in bringing social and emotional learning to their classrooms.

**SEL ACTIVITY**

**Time:** 15 minutes  
**Materials:** Talking Piece

**What:** An activity that fosters self-awareness by encouraging students to voice their emotions, personal insights and experiences.

**Why:** Building self-awareness increases one’s ability to accurately recognize the influence that personal thoughts and emotions have on behavior. It fosters a sense of confidence, and can help students accurately assess their strengths and limitations.

**How:** Gather the students in a circle and lead the class in five mindful breaths. Choose one question from the suggested list of prompts that you think will most spark your students’ curiosity. Either go around the circle and let each student respond, or pass the talking piece to the students that are willing to share their personal insights. This activity is complete when all dialogue prompts have been answered.

**Dialogue Prompts:**
1. Tell a story of a time when you took a chance and ended up learning something new about yourself.
2. Name a quality that you would like to cultivate within yourself.
3. Name a quality you have that you’d like to let go.

**Dive Deeper:** Once all the students have contributed, pass the talking piece around the circle once more, asking them to share what they learned from their peers.

**Resource:** [www.rethinkdigitalkit.com](http://www.rethinkdigitalkit.com)  
**Learn More:** Contact [info@mwithoutborders.org](mailto:info@mwithoutborders.org)