**Stress Reduction & Classroom Management for High School & Other**

**At-Risk Populations: Mindfulness & Breathing Meditation**

Presented by Melissa Wheeler

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**SECTION 1 - Instructions for initial implementation (Script)**

**Before Starting**:

* There are many different types and definitions of meditation and you might like to experiment to find what type works best for you. We’ll be practicing a mixture of meditations including mindfulness meditation and breathing meditation. Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment on purpose, without judgments. It is not thinking about the past or the future, but is being in the now. We could also call mindfulness meditation focus or concentration. It can be spiritual or not. Some religions use meditation, but meditation is not religious by definition.
* Before starting make sure cell phones are on silent and that you can breathe through your nose. Blow your nose if you need to. Get ready to be quiet and still for several minutes.

**Preparation:**

* Sit up in a comfortable position with both feet on the floor, hands on lap, and chin gently dropped. It’s important to have good posture, but not to be in pain.
* Do a “check-in” with yourself and think about how you’re feeling today before we start. Show me your thumb to express how you’re feeling.
	+ Have students put their thumb in the air. Thumbs up means they are feeling good. Thumbs down means they are not feeling good.

**Practice:**

* We’ll go over the three parts or components we will use.
* First breathe quietly through your nose. Breathe quietly enough so that your neighbor cannot hear you. Breathing through your nose is the healthiest way to breathe.
* Next breathe into your stomach area. This is called belly breathing. Most of us breathe in a shallow way, into our chest area. This is a sign of stress, but is normal for most of us since we live in such a fast pace society. It might be helpful to put one hand on your chest, and one on your belly. Demonstration.
* Next is rhythmic breathing. Make your exhale longer than your inhale. For example you might breathe in to the count of 2, 3, or 4… and you might breathe out to the count of 4, 5, or 6.
* These things combined create an automatic relaxation response in your nervous system. It actually soothes the nerves and reduces heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, etc. in healthy ways.
* For the next few minutes do your best to focus on your breathing. Concentrate your attention on your breathe. If you get distracted by your thoughts or by sounds, just notice it without judging it and remind yourself to focus again on your breathing. You might have to do this repeatedly and this is normal. With practice, you will likely get better at focusing on your breathe.
	+ Let the meditation go on for a few minutes. I like to do 5 minutes consistently.
* Ring a bell or chime…
	+ to signal the end.
	+ I like to use Tibetan bells. I tell the students that some traditions believe the sound of the bells clear any negative energy that might be left in the room. Then I ring them three times.

**Closure**:

* Think about how you were feeling before we started. Compare how you feel now, to how you felt before. Do you feel worse, the same, or better? None of these answers are wrong if you are being honest.
	+ Do a “whip” around the room. Each student says one word. Worse, same, or better. I do this part the first few times we practice meditation to help students internalize the positive change. Most of the student answers will be “better”. Let any answer (worse, same, better) be ok.
	+ Meditation can often make people feel sleepy or tired. This happens when we haven’t had enough sleep. Sometimes students equate feeling tired to feeling worse and that’s ok.

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**SECTION 2 - Notes & Tips**

* Distracting Sounds: If there are continuous sounds, students can choose to focus on the sounds rather than their breathing.
* Disruptive Students: Before starting it can be helpful to tell students that if they are intentionally disruptive, you will ask them to leave the room.
* Students Who Dislike It:
	+ I often have one or two students who say they hate this meditation practice. It’s important to let that be okay and not to tell them that is wrong or bad.
	+ Sometimes students ask if they *have* to meditate. I tell them that I can’t force them to do this and that if they fake it I won’t be able to tell, but that they do need to sit up, close their eyes, and stay quiet. I also tell them that it may take more effort from them to fake it, then it does just to try it and that they might just take pleasure in having a break from regular class time. I also remind them that if they don’t follow directions, then they will have to lie later when we write about it in our warm-ups or when we do the whip.
* Frequency: I do this every day for one to two weeks to start and then reduce to twice a week. I like to do this as a warm-up and then have students write a few sentences about their experience, pair-share, and then share with the class.
* Insomnia: This is a helpful tool for insomnia. It can easily be done in bed. It’s helpful if someone has trouble falling asleep or if they wake up and have difficulty falling back asleep. Many of my students and adult friends have said that it works amazingly well.
* Types of Meditation or Mindfulness Practices: There are many different types of meditation including creative/visualization, body scan, progressive muscle relaxation, moving meditation, yoga, walking, sound-based, breathing (other various techniques), mindfulness, heart-centered, reflective, prayer, MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction), TM (Transcendental Meditation®), Zen, and so on. See **section 3** for more explanation of many of these.
* Student’s Say: This is the most transformative tool or strategy I’ve ever used in my PE and Health classes. Students have reported a variety of benefits and experiences including pain reduction or elimination, relaxation, improved energy, improved mood, clearer minds, a better “high” than drugs, etc.
* Personal Practice: I would not recommend using meditation in your classes if you don’t have your own personal practice. This could be something as simple as five minutes a day, a few days each week.
* Length of time: Do these practices for whatever length of time suits your situation. Anywhere from three breathes to 15 minutes could work well in a school situation.
* Caffeine & Sugar: Consumption of these two stimulants (along with any others) will make meditation and focus more difficult.
* Classroom Management: Use sitting meditation when energy is high or rambunctious, before tests, or to create calm or focus. Use active meditation (with movement) when energy is low, after sitting for long periods, or to bring energy up. See **section 3** for more explanation.

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**SECTION 3 - Other Types of Mindfulness Practices for Classroom Management**

**Seated or Lying Down:** Use when energy is high or rambunctious, before tests, or to create calm or focus.

* Creative/visualization: Imagine yourself in a favorite place or setting and/or doing something enjoyable. Another option is to imagine that you’re successfully performing an upcoming task or activity. Practicing it in your mind is just as powerful as practicing it in reality.
* Body Scan: Pay attention to each body part, moving progressively up the body from feet to head (in order of the chakras). Additionally you can imagine a feeling of warmth applied to each body part as you move up, or a sphere of healing white light.
* Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Tense and then relax each body part, moving progressively up the body from feet to head (in order of the chakras). Alternatively this can be done for shorter duration with just the hand into a fist.

**Standing/Active/Movement:** Use when energy is low, after sitting for long periods, or to bring energy up.

* Vertical Trunk Twisting: A) Stand with feet shoulder width apart, twisting side to side, arms relaxed at sides gently swinging. Continue for sever seconds. B) Stand with feet shoulder width apart, hands on head, elbows out, twisting slowly and exhaling to the right, inhaling and twisting to the center. Repeat on left side. Match the length of the movement to the length of your breath. Repeat several times.
* Shoulder Movements: Stand with feet shoulder width apart, move the shoulders in the following ways, repeating a few times a) up & down, b) forward & back, c) in circles. Inhale for the first half of the movement, exhale for the last half of the movement. Match the length of the movement to the length of your breath.
* Neck Movements: Stand with feet shoulder width apart, move the head in the following ways, repeating a few times a) up & down, b) side to side, c) bend ear toward shoulder. Inhale for the first half of the movement, exhale for the last half of the movement. Match the length of the movement to the length of your breath.
* Walking: Walk mindfully, paying attention to how it feels when your heal touches the ground, and then the middle of the bottom of the foot, and then the toes, and so on. Pay attention to each tiny movement. See how slow you can walk. See how many tiny parts of the movement you can pay attention to. Alternatively, see if you can coordinate your breathing with your walking. For example, see if you can inhale while stepping to with the right and exhale while stepping with the left.