

Dear First Up Community,

As our lives are being disrupted and changed by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we remain committed to all of you – to ensure that you have the information and resources you need to take care of yourselves and your communities.

In times of stress, it's so easy for our attention to be drawn to those around us, but it is crucial that we find time to look after our own needs as well. To that end, we have collected some of our favorite resources for stress management and mindfulness in this packet. Please feel free to use some or all of these techniques to help you, your families, and communities stay grounded in this time of uncertainty.

Stress Management and Mindfulness Activity Guide

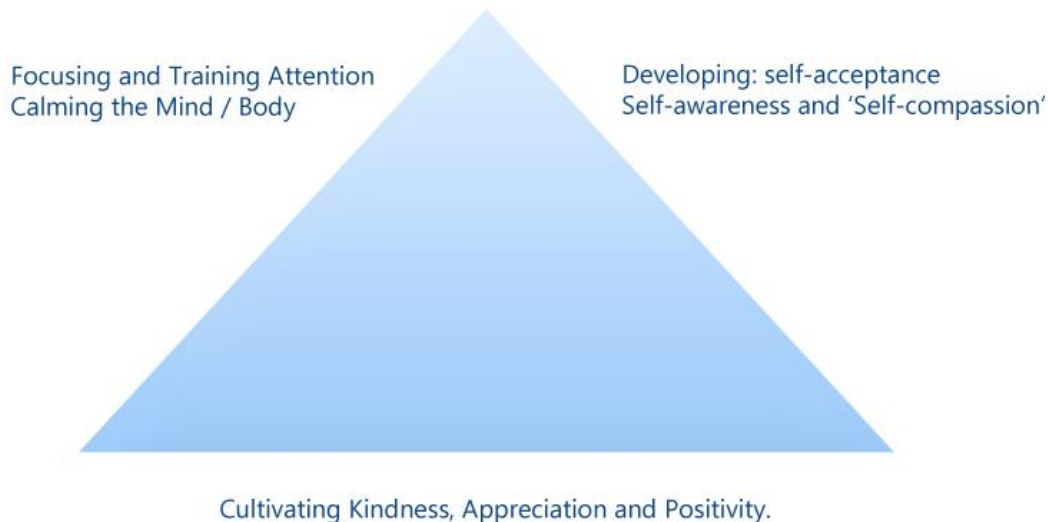
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THE MINDFULNESS TRIANGLE

As a Classroom Teacher it is helpful to **visualise Mindfulness as a Triangle.**

Each side of the triangle has particular skills and practices you can teach.

Depending on the situation and your intention / need, you choose where to focus:



Triangle Side One: Focusing and training attention - and calming the mind /body.

Focusing and training attention supports calming and relaxing the mind / body in preparation for learning. Bringing the attention to the breath or the body and its senses – listening, smelling, etc. - calms the parasympathetic nervous system, while training the mind to be alert and focused.

It also helps children manage impulsive behaviour and gives them a sense of control over their brain / mind. You can further support this sense of control by teaching about key parts of the brain – particularly the functions of the amygdala and hippocampus in the limbic system and the pre-frontal cortex - and about how they affect each other – and about their impact on our behaviour.

The primary training tool is learning to direct the attention to the breath or to the body (or to sound or any of the senses). These tools include instructions such as 'notice your breath'; or guided instructions to notice sensations in one's body (body scan). **It's a bit like puppy training.** The breath / body focus is like your leash. You notice when the mind becomes absorbed in thoughts and feelings or pulled around by external distractions (as it inevitably will); and when you notice the mind tugging on the leash, then you gently return the puppy of your attention to the breath/body/senses. Don't keep the leash too tight (don't try too hard). Calmness and acceptance need a soft leash.





Begin with body awareness by guiding the children to find a gently upright and balanced **posture**.

Suggest they find balance on their sitting bones by gently rocking left and right, forward and back, until they find a balanced, upright position. Encourage 'wiggly' children to continue rocking gently – absolute stillness is not necessary. Being mindful of any movement that's happening is better than trying to be absolutely still.

Guided instructions to relax the body / mind such as progressive muscle relaxations, visualising calm, peaceful places, finding inner peace and stillness are also very beneficial for children – **provided the teacher 'normalises' the usual thoughts and feelings that occur during these exercises!**

'Focusing and training attention' also includes:

- **Bringing intention to attention** and learning to direct 'the flashlight of our attention' where we want it and in the way we want it – e.g. a fine, sharp focus or a broad soft beam of focus;
- Knowing the **difference between focus and awareness** – both are necessary for learning;

Some children (and adults) say they "can't do mindfulness" because they think their mind should always be completely still, quiet and calm. Thinking and distraction are normal. One can even be present when recalling the past or imagining / planning the future. What mindfulness does is to calm and quieten the everyday jumbled-scrambled-worrying-spacy thinking. This allows the children to discover that they are not their thoughts (or their feelings); it creates a 'precious pause', a quieter place where they can make choices about their thoughts, feelings and related actions.

Mindfulness creates a precious pause ...



....and helps children discover 'almost' moments:

"I almost hit my friend..."

...but then I took a breath and calmed down and I didn't hit her!"

Mindfulness doesn't change **what** happens; it trains you to change **how** you experience 'what happens' – which creates the space to **choose a wise / skilful response** to 'what happens'. That often leads to **changes in 'what happens next'!**



Triangle Side Two: Developing self-awareness, self-acceptance and 'self-compassion'*.

The primary training tool is learning to bring a gentle, curious, non-judgemental (kind) noticing to one's thoughts and feelings – both as they come up quite naturally during mindfulness of breathing practice – and as they come up during the day. The attention is also directed to the way thoughts and feelings naturally relate to the breath (e.g. shallow / deep or slow / fast, etc.) and to the body (e.g. butterflies in the tummy, feeling 'happy inside', tight shoulders, etc.)

The teacher supports this 'kind noticing' by **allowing time for the children to talk about what happened during the breathing practice**. The teacher gently enquires and encourages the children to communicate their experiences. It is helpful to make time for this enquiry once or twice a week.

When children are encouraged to talk about what really happens during mindfulness practice, they will tell you they:

- Notice that thoughts and feelings come and go (like the clouds in the sky). This creates a space for them to let go of negative rumination and better manage anxiety: "I can have my thoughts and feelings without them having me."
- Notice how thoughts and feelings form and how they change. This leads to greater awareness of context and 'cause and effect'; children notice that thoughts and feelings can be influenced by data collected through the senses – e.g. a scary noise, a beautiful butterfly, a change in the weather, an expression on someone's face; and by emotional memories.
- Realise that "everyone has thoughts and feelings similar to mine". This normalises their inner experiences and increases empathy;
- Learn to be kind and compassionate to themselves by not judging / criticising their thoughts and feelings; a 'kind mind' develops resilience; an 'unkind mind' can lead to depression and self-harm;
- Can accept and tolerate difficult thoughts, feelings and experiences better. Developing 'affect tolerance' leads to less reactivity and more emotional maturity and resilience;
- Learn not to let difficult thoughts and feelings dictate actions;
- Notice they don't feel good after they have done something 'bad' - or they do feel good after they have done something 'good'. Noticing this develops their inner 'moral compass'.

As they listen to others, they develop their listening skills, gain appreciation of differences and broaden their perspective. **Listening to each other also develops their social / emotional intelligence.**

From an educational perspective, when the children are encouraged to talk about their experiences, it engages their curiosity and interest and develops their vocabulary and language skills. Mindfully noticing thoughts and feelings can also help children learn to follow interesting and useful trains of thought, to notice novelty, to see situations from different perspectives and notice themes and patterns.

* Research by Christina Neff and others demonstrates that 'self-compassion' is much more important than 'self-esteem' in developing resilient children – see: <http://www.self-compassion.org/what-is-self-compassion/self-compassion-versus-self-esteem.html>]

Triangle Side Three: Cultivating Kindness, Appreciation and Positivity.

These practices are Social Emotional Learning tools which explicitly guide children to connect to themselves and others, develop positive qualities and build resilience. The primary tools include:

- Practices which intentionally generate feelings of kindness and compassion for oneself and others;
- Using positive guided imagery for relaxation and/or using positive imagination to improve anything from moods to test scores ;
- Intentionally noticing and re-calling 'positive' experiences – in at least a 3:1 ratio to difficult experiences – increases optimism, which in turn opens us up to new learning;
- Empathic listening and communication exercises;
- Gratitude / appreciation practices - including writing in a 'gratitude journal'.

Summary – the Triangle needs all three sides!

The three sides of the Mindfulness triangle overlap and support each other. As a classroom teacher of mindfulness, the mindfulness triangle will help you plan which aspect of Mindfulness you want to highlight in each session.



Put on your own
oxygen mask
before helping
those around you.

Teachers need to practice mindfulness too!

Many people, many teachers are naturally mindful. Nevertheless, developing a conscious mindfulness practice has enormous benefits for you personally, and will give you greater confidence to guide your students in mindfulness. You should always practice with your students.

Studies show that teachers who learn and apply mindfulness in their own lives benefit by:

- Improve their physical and mental health through better stress management / self-care
- Gain confidence in applying and teaching Mindfulness skills in the classroom
- Boost their enthusiasm and motivation for teaching
- Manage complex demands with increased calmness, skill and compassion
- Tune in better to their students and can respond with more flexibility.

"I find I am much calmer in the classroom and somehow that helps the children calm down. I'm not raising my voice as much. When problems arise, I seem to sort them out much quicker than before I began practicing mindfulness." Grade 5/6 teacher.

7 Things Mindful People Do Differently

1

Approach everyday things with curiosity
—and savor them

Forgive their
mistakes—
big or small

2

3

Show gratitude for
good moments—and
grace for bad ones

Practice
compassion and
nurture connections

4

5

Make peace with
imperfection—
inside and out

Embrace vulnerability
by trusting others—
and themselves

6

7

Accept—and
appreciate—that
things come and go

List created by Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., psychologist, author of *The Now Effect*

{ SELF-ESTEEM journal }

MONDAY

SOMETHING I DID WELL TODAY...

TUESDAY

I FELT GOOD ABOUT MYSELF WHEN...

WEDNESDAY

I HAD A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE WITH...

THURSDAY

3 GOOD THINGS ABOUT ME ARE...

FRIDAY

SOMETHING I DID FOR SOMEONE...

SATURDAY

TODAY I ACHIEVED...

SUNDAY

TODAY I OVERCAME...



5 Stress-Prevention Suggestions from Peter Moses of [The Mindful Experience](#)

1. Enjoy taking one deep, conscious breath (or as many as you like) every day!

Feel the relaxation as you exhale. Notice how this brings your attention to the present moment.

It is always NOW. The present moment is the point of power where you can best think creatively, plan, give and serve those who are with you. If you notice you are stressing out and losing energy wondering about the future, just take that deep relaxing breath and come back to NOW.

2. Get some exercise as this will relieve stress as well.

Take a walk with the family. Tune in online or on TV to an upbeat fitness program. Be sure to drink plenty of water.

3. Recognize what has always been true --- that we are all in this together!

Share your feelings and your needs with others. Call and email friends and family. Give and receive graciously.

4. Notice and feel gratitude for all the little miracles.

Springtime is blossoming around us.

5. Remember what our awesome children are ready to remind us at any time, as they play and learn, that the present moment is what is real!

Relaxation techniques: Breath control helps quell errant stress response



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The term "fight or flight" is also known as the stress response. It's what the body does as it prepares to confront or avoid danger. When appropriately invoked, the stress response helps us rise to many challenges. But trouble starts when this response is constantly provoked by less momentous, day-to-day events, such as money woes, traffic jams, job worries, or relationship problems.

Health problems are one result. A prime example is high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease. The stress response also suppresses the [immune system](#), increasing susceptibility to colds and other illnesses. Moreover, the buildup of stress can contribute to anxiety and depression. We can't avoid all sources of stress in our lives, nor would we want to. But we can develop healthier ways of responding to them. One way is to invoke the [relaxation response](#), through a technique first developed in the 1970s at Harvard Medical School by cardiologist Dr. Herbert Benson. The relaxation response is a state of profound rest that can be elicited in many ways, including meditation, yoga, and progressive muscle relaxation.

Breath focus is a common feature of several techniques that evoke the relaxation response. The first step is learning to breathe deeply.

Deep breathing benefits

Deep breathing also goes by the names of diaphragmatic breathing, abdominal breathing, belly breathing, and paced respiration. When you breathe deeply, the air coming in through your nose fully fills your lungs, and the lower belly rises.

For many of us, deep breathing seems unnatural. There are several reasons for this. For one, body image has a negative impact on respiration in our culture. A flat stomach is considered attractive, so women (and men) tend to hold in their stomach muscles. This interferes with deep breathing and gradually makes shallow "chest breathing" seem normal, which increases tension and anxiety.

Shallow breathing limits the diaphragm's range of motion. The lowest part of the lungs doesn't get a full share of oxygenated air. That can make you feel short of breath and anxious.

Deep abdominal breathing encourages full oxygen exchange — that is, the beneficial trade of incoming oxygen for outgoing carbon dioxide. Not surprisingly, it can slow the heartbeat and lower or stabilize blood pressure.

Practicing breath focus

Breath focus helps you concentrate on slow, deep breathing and aids you in disengaging from distracting thoughts and sensations. It's especially helpful if you tend to hold in your stomach.

First steps. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit or lie down. First, take a normal breath. Then try a deep breath: Breathe in slowly through your nose, allowing your chest and lower belly to rise as you fill your lungs. Let your abdomen expand fully. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth (or your nose, if that feels more natural).

Breath focus in practice. Once you've taken the steps above, you can move on to regular practice of controlled breathing. As you sit comfortably with your eyes closed, blend deep breathing with helpful imagery and perhaps a focus word or phrase that helps you relax.

Ways to elicit the relaxation response

Several techniques can help you turn down your response to stress. Breath focus helps with nearly all of them:

Progressive muscle relaxation

Mindfulness meditation

Yoga, tai chi, and Qi Gong

Repetitive prayer

Guided imagery (relaxation technique that uses positive mental images to influence how you feel)

Creating a routine

You may want to try several different relaxation techniques to see which one works best for you. And if your favorite approach fails to engage you, or you want some variety, you'll have alternatives. You may also find the following tips helpful:

- Choose a special place where you can sit (or lie down) comfortably and quietly.
- Don't try too hard. That may just cause you to tense up.
- Don't be too passive, either. The key to eliciting the relaxation response lies in shifting your focus from stressors to deeper, calmer rhythms — and having a focal point is essential.
- Try to practice once or twice a day, always at the same time, in order to enhance the sense of ritual and establish a habit.
- Try to practice at least 10–20 minutes each day.

Harvard Health Publishing: Harvard Medical School <https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/relaxation-techniques-breath-control-helps-quell-errant-stress-response>

When you feel lonely and sad:

1. I feel the love of those who are not physically around me.
2. I take pleasure in my own solitude.
3. I am too big a gift to this world to feel self-pity.
4. I love and approve of myself.

When you feel terrified (without your safety being in danger):

5. I focus on breathing and grounding myself.
6. Following my intuition and my heart keeps me safe and sound.
7. I make the right choices every time.
8. I draw from my inner strength and light.
9. I trust myself.

When you feel insignificant:

10. I am a unique child of this world.
11. I have as much brightness to offer the world as the next person.
12. I matter and what I have to offer this world also matters.
13. I may be one in 7 billion but I am also one in 7 billion.

When you are nervous or afraid:

14. I trust my inner wisdom and intuition.
15. I breathe in calmness and breathe out nervousness.
16. This situation works out for my highest good.
17. Wonderful things unfold before me.

When you are angry:

18. I forgive myself for all the mistakes I have made.
19. I let go of my anger so I can see clearly.
20. I accept responsibility if my anger has hurt anyone.
21. I replace my anger with understanding and compassion.
22. I offer an apology to those affected by my anger.

When you feel hopeless and at the end of your rope:

23. I may not understand the good in this situation but it is there.
24. I muster up more hope and courage from deep inside me.
25. I choose to find hopeful and optimistic ways to look at this.
26. I kindly ask for help and guidance if I cannot see a better way.
27. I refuse to give up because I haven't tried all possible ways.

When you feel conflicted about a decision:

- 28. I know my wisdom guides me to the right decision.
- 29. I trust myself to make the best decision for me.
- 30. I receive all feedback with kindness but make the final call myself.
- 31. I listen lovingly to this inner conflict and reflect on it until I get to peace around it.
- 32. I love my family even if they do not understand me completely.
- 33. I show my family how much I love them in all the verbal and non-verbal ways I can.
- 34. There is a good reason I was paired with this perfect family.
- 35. I choose to see my family as a gift.
- 36. I am a better person from the hardship that I've gone through with my family.

When you are among friends:

- 37. I choose friends who approve of me and love me.
- 38. I surround myself with people who treat me well.
- 39. I take the time to show my friends that I care about them.
- 40. My friends do not judge me, nor do they influence what I do with my life.
- 41. I take great pleasure in my friends, even if we disagree or live different lives.

When you are around strangers:

- 42. I am beautiful and smart and that's how everyone sees me.
- 43. I take comfort in the fact that I can always leave this situation.
- 44. I never know what amazing incredible person I will meet next.
- 45. The company of strangers teaches me more about my own likes and dislikes.

When you are at work:

- 46. I am doing work that I enjoy and find fulfilling.
- 47. I play a big role in my own career success.
- 48. I ask for and do meaningful, wonderful and rewarding work.
- 49. I engage in work that impacts this world positively.
- 50. I believe in my ability to change the world with the work that I do.

When you can't sleep:

- 51. Peaceful sleep awaits me in dreamland.
- 52. I let go of all the false stories I make up in my head.
- 53. I release my mind of thought until the morning.
- 54. I embrace the peace and quiet of the night.
- 55. I sleep soundly and deeply and beautifully into this night.

When you don't want to face the day:

- 56. This day brings me nothing but joy.
- 57. Today will be a gorgeous day to remember.
- 58. My thoughts are my reality so I think up a bright new day.
- 59. I fill my day with hope and face it with joy.
- 60. I choose to fully participate in my day.

When you worry about your future:

- 61. I let go of worries that drain my energy.
- 62. I make smart, calculated plans for my future.
- 63. I am a money magnet and attract wealth and abundance.
- 64. I am in complete charge of planning for my future.
- 65. I trust in my own ability to provide well for my family.

When you can't get your loved ones to support your dreams:

- 66. I follow my dreams no matter what.
- 67. I show compassion in helping my loved ones understand my dreams.
- 68. I ask my loved ones to support my dreams.
- 69. I answer questions about my dreams without getting defensive.
- 70. My loved ones love me even without fully grappling with my dreams.
- 71. I accept everyone as they are and continue on with pursuing my dream.

When you come face to face with a problem:

- 72. I am safe and sound. All is well.
- 73. Everything works out for my highest good.
- 74. There is a great reason this is unfolding before me now.
- 75. I have the smarts and the ability to get through this.
- 76. All my problems have a solution.

When you want to do more with your life but feel stuck:

- 77. I attempt all – not some – possible ways to get unstuck.
- 78. I seek a new way of thinking about this situation.
- 79. The answer is right before me, even if I am not seeing it yet.
- 80. I believe in my ability to unlock the way and set myself free.

When you can't stop comparing yourself to others:

- 81. I have no right to compare myself to anyone for I do not know their whole story.
- 82. I compare myself only to my highest self.
- 83. I choose to see the light that I am to this world.

- 84. I am happy in my own skin and in my own circumstances.
- 85. I see myself as a gift to my people and community and nation.

When you feel you are not good enough no matter how hard you try:

- 86. I am more than good enough and I get better every day.
- 87. I give up the habit to criticize myself.
- 88. I adopt the mindset to praise myself.
- 89. I see the perfection in all my flaws and all my genius.
- 90. I fully approve of who I am, even as I get better.
- 91. I am a good person at all times of day and night.

When you want to give up:

- 92. I cannot give up until I have tried every conceivable way.
- 93. Giving up is easy and always an option so let's delay it for another day.
- 94. I press on because I believe in my path.
- 95. It is always too early to give up on my goals.
- 96. I must know what awaits me at the end of this rope so I do not give up.

When you recognize how powerful, gifted, talented and brilliant you really are:

- 97. The past has no power over me anymore
- 98. I embrace the rhythm and the flowing of my own heart.
- 99. All that I need comes to me at the right time and place in this life.
- 100. I am deeply fulfilled with who I am.

Five Tips to Help Manage Stress: American Psychological Association

Stress occurs when you perceive that demands placed on you — such as work, school or relationships — exceed your ability to cope. Some stress can be beneficial at times, producing a boost that provides the drive and energy to help people get through situations like exams or work deadlines. However, an extreme amount of stress can have health consequences, affecting the immune, cardiovascular and neuroendocrine and central nervous systems, and take a severe emotional toll. Untreated chronic stress can result in serious health conditions including anxiety, insomnia, muscle pain, high blood pressure and a weakened immune system. Research shows that stress can contribute to the development of major illnesses, such as heart disease, depression and obesity. But by finding positive, healthy ways to manage stress as it occurs, many of these negative health consequences can be reduced. Everyone is different, and so are the ways they choose to manage their stress. Some people prefer pursuing hobbies such as gardening, playing music and creating art, while others find relief in more solitary activities: meditation, yoga and walking.

Here are five healthy techniques that psychological research has shown to help reduce stress in the short- and long-term.

Take a break from the stressor. It may seem difficult to get away from a big work project, a crying baby or a growing credit card bill. But when you give yourself permission to step away from it, you let yourself have time to do something else, which can help you have a new perspective or practice techniques to feel less overwhelmed. It's important to not avoid your stress (those bills have to be paid sometime), but even just 20-minutes to take care of yourself is helpful.

Exercise. The research keeps growing — exercise benefits your mind just as well as your body. We keep hearing about the long-term benefits of a regular exercise routine. But even a 20-minute walk, run, swim or dance session in the midst of a stressful time can give an immediate effect that can last for several hours.

Smile and laugh. Our brains are interconnected with our emotions and facial expressions. When people are stressed, they often hold a lot of the stress in their face. So laughs or smiles can help relieve some of that tension and improve the situation.

Get social support. Call a friend, send an email. When you share your concerns or feelings with another person, it does help relieve stress. But it's important that the person whom you talk to is someone whom you trust and whom you feel can understand and validate you. If your family is a stressor, for example, it may not alleviate your stress if you share your work's woes with one of them.

Meditate. Meditation and mindful prayer help the mind and body to relax and focus. Mindfulness can help people see new perspectives, develop self-compassion and forgiveness. When practicing a form of mindfulness, people can release emotions that may have been causing the body physical stress. Much like exercise, research has shown that even meditating briefly can reap immediate benefits.