

## **Chapter 10**

### **Example ASE**

#### **School Counseling Behaviors**

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## **Chapter 11 Abstract**

In this chapter, the author describes and provides examples of ASE school counseling practices. Examples includes how an ASE orientation affects the use of classical counseling skills. Also, in this chapter is a five-session school counselor led consultation intervention, intended for K12 classroom teachers. Each of these practice examples have been used in K12 schools and empirically tested in rigorous counseling trials. The ASE examples illustrate conceptual and practice elements endemic to ASE theory, including the influence co-determination of experience between students and educators (or other aspects of the school environment).

Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE) school counseling theory is primarily concerned with creating the conditions for students to thrive in K12 education contexts (Lemberger, 2010; Lemberger & Hutchison, 2014). The individual student is conceptualized as an amalgamation of various personal and social ingredients. Therefore, student development can be accomplished by cultivating characteristics inbuilt to the student and by succoring features in the environment. In this chapter, we will introduce a few example behaviors school counselors can utilize at the individual level and an example of an intervention approach intended to support the broader school environment.

The ASE counseling behaviors provided in this chapter are only a small sample of many expressions that a school counselor can use to support a student or other members of the school community. The practice of ASE can be accomplished using manualized intervention protocols, semi-structured activities, spontaneous counseling dialogue aimed at an individual or groups of people, or advocacy behaviors pointed at features in and beyond the immediate school context. What is consistent across the various types of intervention behaviors is a certain ASE orientation. An ASE orientation is receptive to the various experiences, interpretations, and possibilities germane to the individual while maintaining that all individual experience is bound to a vast kaleidoscope of influencing systems. The orientation is also optimistic and empowering, yet earnest in a commitment to personal development that is complimented by change in the various social structures that affect students. Finally, an ASE orientation is relevant to everyday wisdom and pragmatic behaviors; the process and the outcome of school counseling are compatible, therefore counseling practice must reflect the lives, values, and aspirations of the various people served.

### **Individual Advocacy Behaviors**

In practice, counseling behaviors inspired by one counseling theory can seem compatible with counseling behaviors inspired by other (even diametrically opposite) counseling theories. This is not terribly surprising given many western counseling theories were intended to support clients in similar settings (i.e., often clinical psychological treatment environments). Also, most contemporary counseling theories generally emerged from corresponding cultural and philosophical influences (e.g., post-enlightenment conceptions of an autonomous and volitional self, mind-body dualism). In many ways, even though ASE theory is specific to school environments and operates from nascent philosophic assumptions, the practice can be compatible with several classical theoretical approaches, especially when working directly with a certain individual in a school context. This is not to suggest that ASE is technically eclectic, sans a distinct epistemological and practice foundation; instead, ASE theory can draw from customary counseling behaviors and filter out in unique ways that are uniquely relevant to students in school environments.

The ways that counseling behaviors emerge from the various counseling theories are often subtle and only discerned through a deep scrutiny. ASE theory shares beliefs and behaviors with many classical approaches but is nonetheless different enough to be conceptualized and implemented as a standalone approach. In Figure 10.1, three of the most prominent counseling paradigms are introduced as a way to compare and contrast with ASE theory.

### **Figure 10. 1**

#### *Counseling Theory Comparison*

**Humanistic counseling** (e.g., person-centered, existential, gestalt, experiential) assumes the innate goodness in people who are endowed with responsibility and the free will to pursue personal and social wellness (Schneider, Pierson, & Bugental, 2014). The practice of humanistic counseling generally pertains to the here-and-now experiences of the client as supported by a counselor who prizes authentic therapeutic rapport.

**Cognitive-behavioral counseling** (CBT) (e.g., rational emotive behavior, cognitive, third wave, behavior modification) is a suite of approaches that suggest that people hold and express cognitive distortions (thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes) and their associated behaviors that can result in disturbed

symptoms or broader core pathologies (Dobson & Dozois, 2019). The practice of CBT includes spontaneous and structured interventions that typically pertain to challenging irrational or maladaptive thoughts, feelings, or behaviors and replace these irrational assumptions with more coherent expressions.

**Post-modern** counseling approaches (e.g., narrative, relational-cultural, constructivist) are based on the philosophical belief that there are multiple truths, often affiliated with subjective personal positions and/or distributed social influences (Anderson, 2015). Post-modern practices encourage flexible interpretations of experience while challenging potentially oppressive and harmful environmental conditions.

**Advocating Student-within-Environment (ASE)** theory pertains to school counseling and adherents aim to amplify students' and other school stakeholders' capacities while simultaneously pursuing more hospitable and contributory school climates. ASE is similar to humanistic approaches concerned with relationship building and here-and-now experiences; it is compatible with CBT's use of meta-cognition to untether personal and social influences that affect student and systems outcomes; and ASE is germane to the multiplicity of identity and options, as consistent with post-modern approaches. What distinguishes ASE as a theory for practice is the requirement that all interventions are reciprocal at the individual and systems level and, second, the non-dual assumptions of self and volition. Consequentially, ASE is generally more focused on preventative and advocacy behaviors, as compared to classical counseling theoretical approaches that are chiefly concerned with responding to the psychology of the individual.

Many classical theories are replete with specialized techniques that emerge from the philosophical assumptions endemic to each of these approaches. Further, counseling theories can alter how trans-theoretical skills are expressed. Two of the most foundational counseling behaviors that are present virtually every counseling theory includes a reflection of a client's feelings and open-ended questions. The following examples elucidate how these general counseling behaviors are expressed differently based on their influencing counseling theory:

### **Reflecting Feelings**

*Humanistic counseling:*

Example 1: As we are talking about your parents, I can see the profound grief that you're experiencing (*empathy*). This is more than a memory, but a feeling that you carry with you even now in this room after all these years (*here-and-now; experiential*).

Example 2: I noticed you pulled back when I said that; fearful of what you're experiencing now as we talk about what you experienced in the past (*here-and-now; immediacy & authentic experience*)

*Cognitive behavioral counseling:*

Example 1: Witnessing the grief of others (*activating event*) reminds the struggles you endured after your own parents passed away, and now you believe that you will never escape the feelings of despair (*beliefs*), which in turn compels you to limit your interactions with other people in your life (*consequence*).

Example 2: You attach shame to your experiences of grief; a belief which has haunted you for decades (*Core belief*)

*Post-modern counseling:*

Example 1: The grief still persists from the loss of your parents; some days are better than others (*deconstruction; dominant story; externalizing*). This illustrates that you are more than your grief, you are someone who can suffer deeply and also someone who experiences deep joy (*reauthoring*).

*Advocating Student-with-Environment:*

Example 1: You're experience of grief (curiosity and connectedness) affects you deeply (compassion) and in different ways across different circumstances (co-regulation).

Example 2: The loss you experienced is associated with a feeling of distress, yet sadness is coupled with this profound passion to support your family members as they are also grieving (contribution).

### **Questions:**

*Humanistic counseling:*

Example 1: How does reflecting on the past affect you in this moment? (*here-and-now; experiential*)

Example 2: You've endured much and I witness your resilience. In a similar way, I wonder what you learned about yourself? (*meaning*)

Example 3: You work hard to maintain your composure, but what is your fidgeting knee tell us if it could speak? (*somatic here-and-now*)

### **Cognitive behavioral counseling:**

Example 1: (downward arrow) 1) Can you tell me what you experienced when you were taking the test? (*minor mode*) 2) Okay, so felt anxious because you had the impression that you were not performing well after much preparation. If true, from your perspective, what does this experience tell you about yourself as a learner? (*protoschema*) 3) So you interpreted this one anxiety laden experience as reflective of your total ability as a learner. How might you then describe yourself as a learner generally? 4) You have this circular experience, you believe that you are incapable of learning even when preparing, which leads to anxiety in performance situations, contributing to undesirable learning outcomes and now this larger belief that you are unable to learn or demonstrate your learning? (*core belief*)

### **Post-modern counseling:**

Example 1: I wonder how someone else might interpret this experience in class. Think of the most charitable person you know, if she or he knew how anxious you were in class how might they interpret your performance after studying so many hours? (*externalizing*)

Example 2: Let's not disregard this recent episode, but let's also not focus only here. Could you describe to me some occasions when you had a different experience in a similar situation? (*exceptions*)

*Advocating Student-with-Environment:*

Example 1: What aspects from your classroom experiences most affect how you participate as a student (curiosity, co-regulation, and contribution)?

Example 2: Who in class is most helpful when you are struggling (co-regulation)?

Example 3: How might you notice when your attention starts to get distracted (co-regulation)? What things typically occur in class when you start to experience distraction (curiosity)?

To further illustrate how ASE theory employs reflections of feelings and questions to support the development of children, I (Matthew) was supervising my five-year-old son and his 4-year-old cousin. After a few normal disagreements, my son said that he wanted to play by himself, assumingly to avoid further conflict. This greatly disappointed my nephew who apparently felt rejected and angry, as he said, "If you don't play with me, I am going to hit you." My response to my nephew was something like the following:

Matthew: I see that you're quite angry when Atom (my son) said that he wanted to play alone. You were so upset that you said you're going to hit him.

Nephew: Yes, I am so angry at Atom.

Matthew: I wonder if you can tell me all of the different things that you can do when you get this angry?

Nephew: (listed about 3 strategies his parents had formerly introduced)

Matthew: That's a lot of ways to express anger; I wonder which ones might make you feel just a little bit better?"

In this short example, ASE concepts such as co-regulation and the prior determinants of experience are evident. Rather than discounting either child's feelings, experiences, or desires, the intention of my response was to recruit from those prior determinants and refocus them in a manner that is more consistent with each child's intended outcome. At the same time, each child is situated in a relationship with the other child, therefore personal desires must be distributed and reconsidered as they are compliant to the desires and actions of others.

From an ASE perspective, each individual counseling intervention is conceived and practiced from a systems perspective. It is essential that the school counselor does not approach the individual student, educator, or other stakeholder with a fixed or hierarchical perspective. Even when utilizing one of the various behaviors or aphorisms associated with ASE theory. When working with the individual, counseling behaviors are not intended proffered in a self-sustaining manner, rather individual intervention is intended embolden the individual as an active and able agent in their social system. This orientation can be captured in the following ASE aphorism: "I alone didn't create my circumstance, but I can affect how I internalize and express myself."

### **Systemic Advocacy Behaviors**

To illustrate how a school counselor can support student development through influence at the environment (systemic) level, we present a series of school counselor led consultation sessions that are aimed at supporting classroom teachers from an ASE perspective. Consultation is when a school counselor delivers content to one person or group with the intention that that person or group will utilize the content to support another person not generally involved in the initial consultation activities (Baker et al., 2009). The practice of consultation suggests that the content can be amplified to various individuals and settings, as the person engaged in the actual



consultation activities will be subsequently exposed to various individuals. Stated otherwise, the value in the content and the reach of the school counselor is amplified beyond the contact with a single recipient; instead, the efforts of the school counselor have the potential to reverberate through the consultee repeatedly.

Consultation is one of many strategies that a school counselor might utilize to advocate for more facilitative school environmental conditions. There are certainly other approaches to advocacy, not limited to political advocacy that might shape education and public policy, engage with community partners that might generate more active allies in schools, or raise awareness about the processes and outcomes of structural inequality and mistreatment. While each of these activities is potentially invaluable, consultation is uniquely orientated to empowering members of the social system to act on behalf of the needs of students and school systems. This feature of consultation is particularly consistent with the spirit of ASE theory, as consultation has the potential to result in reciprocal benefits for the consultee and students. Further, consultation is by its nature generative and adaptive, and it can adjust over time and across circumstances relative to how the content is internalized and actualized by the consultee.

It is for these reasons that consultation was chosen as one exemplar ASE practice. ASE can be delivered in various ways – such as individual counseling with a student, teacher, guardian, etc. or group counseling in and out of classrooms – but consultation most clearly reflects the ASE position that cultivating personal capacities can affect total systems. In this way, this chapter includes a five-consultation session unit that was used and empirically tested in an economically challenged middle school (Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023). Findings from the consultation intervention delivered by 9 middle school classroom teachers (and their 149 students) included significant change in teachers' perceptions of the teacher–student relationship

that predicted students' perception of the same relationship. Results from the study also demonstrated similar coregulated changes in two curiosity scales and a small change in teachers' stress tolerance from the pre- to post-test data collection periods. These results provide some inferential evidence that the ASE approach can affect personal development (for the teacher consultees) and system change (the relationships shared between teachers and students).

It is important to note that there are some unique features to this particular consultation example. First, the words provided below are semi-scripted and therefore more directive as compared to many other ASE interventions. ASE theory is generally complaint to direct and indirect practices (e.g., psychoeducational or spontaneous counseling sessions), yet in practice ASE is predominately student- or teacher-centered whereby the person served dictates much of the content and process. In the case of the consultation example used in this chapter, a more directive approach was identified to better illustrate the concepts and should not be confused as the ideal or even standard approach to practice. Second, these consultation sessions were delivered exclusively to classroom teachers and yet the acme ASE intervention would include something like these sessions delivered to teachers and complimentary sessions delivered to students in classrooms. Hopefully a school counselor can cultivate a reciprocal and dynamic climate shared between students, educators, and other members of the school community. Third, any intervention requires priming the participants, relationship building, and follow-up, all inferred in the current example but not fully elaborated in the text. For example, each of these sessions includes a mindfulness activity that can be confused with forced self-care activities often pushed onto teachers without their discretion. Certainly, mindfulness and ASE in general aspire toward a greater feeling of equanimity, but that is not the primary intent; instead

The consultation intervention included a mindfulness lesson in each session, but the particular mindfulness activities were not necessarily focused on stress reduction but chiefly concerned teachers' awareness of experience and intentional teaching behaviors.

Lemberger-Truelove et al., 2023, p. 7

Again, the general purpose of ASE is to elucidate how experiences are internalized, embodied, and then shared; moreover, ASE pertains to how we are more than passive recipients of experience, and with intentional intervention we can co-determine new possibilities.

## **Week One: Beginnings**

### **School Counselor:**

“Thank you for coming today, I know your time is valuable, and I hope that the times that we share over the following 5 weeks will be worth the investment, with clear benefits to you and your students. These are incredibly challenging times for educators and our meetings might provide you an opportunity to explore how these challenges have affected you and further explore new insights and responses to challenges in and beyond the classroom.

Our work together is not therapy in the classical sense, rather this is consultation. Consultation is intended to support a person who will in turn use those experiences to support someone else. In our case, hopefully what we do here between you and me will have direct effects on your experiences in the classroom and how you support your students’ development. This said, almost all effective consultation reflects the processes and outcomes of therapy, including the disclosing of personal information or the experience of intense emotions. With this in mind, it is essential that we establish some ground rules for our active participation in these sessions.

First, including this session, there will be five 30-minute consultation sessions. In these sessions we will establish a generic structure that I will facilitate, but much of the content will be dictated by your experiences and disclosures. We will begin each session with a brief breathing exercise intended to help focus our attention here and engage a mindset of mutual openness and growth. Then we will ask if there are any persistent or concerning professional experiences that you’d like to discuss. In the absence of anything specific, I have some prepared language devices inspired by research on social and emotional learning practices in school settings.

Either using your experiences or these imported language devices, we will spend some time exploring how your initial impressions are valid and how alternative responses might add new ways to approach your experiences with others. Second, in each session we will spend a few minutes discussing tangible strategies to improve the social and working conditions as an educator. Rather than commiserating on unattainable goals for change, we will try and narrow on immediate and attainable outcomes with measured implications you can experience directly and utilize immediately. Then, we will spend approximately 10 minutes each week engaged in a brief mindfulness activity. In this activity, we will use our breath to consider the various thoughts that arise, explore our reactions to these thoughts, and on occasion encourage curiosity and diverse responses to future experiences.

Finally, privacy is vital to the success of this consultation experience. Because we are in small groups with me and your peer teachers, I cannot promise total secrecy, but it is important that we make a formal commitment to keep what is said in here between us and in this context only, into perpetuity. As the lead consultant, my commitment to confidentiality is an ethical and legal requirement; anything you mention during our time together will be confidential, that is it is private and I will not share anything stated with other staff, faculty, or administrators on campus. I will uphold confidentiality and would request you do the same to keep the integrity of our work together. However, in cases of child abuse, neglect, exploitation or intent to harm another person or yourself, I am required by law to report it to the appropriate authority. Are there any questions?”

**Teachers:**  
(Response).

**School Counselor:**

Before we begin, I want to provide you with an opportunity to ask any questions about any of the introductions, including the duration and structure of sessions, issues pertaining to confidentiality, or the nature of consultation. Any questions or thoughts?

**Teachers:**  
(Response)

**School Counselors:**

Given what we have discussed, are you willing to consent to participation in these consultation sessions? We can revisit this commitment at any point.

**Teachers:**  
(Obtain verbal consent).

**School Counselor:**

As mentioned, I would like for each of us to begin this meeting with a brief breathing exercise intended to focus our attention here together. With this in mind, I encourage you to close your eyes and simply bring your awareness to your breath. Make no effort to change your natural breathing at this point, simply notice that you are breathing. Notice that this breath sustains your life and is something shared between you and the world around you. Try not to judge the quality of your breath, again simply experience it for the next 10 or so seconds.

(provide the teachers about 10 seconds)

Okay, perfect. Keep your eyes closed and continue to breathe in a natural way. It has been said, “As long as you are breathing, there is more right with you than wrong, regardless of what is going on in your life.”

While maintaining an awareness on your breath, I now invite you to take five intentional, deep breaths. If comfortable, take approximately a second or more to inhale, a second or more to fully exhale, and then just a short instance between each of the five breaths. Continue to be present with this deeper breathing, adding no additional mental reflection or commentary; simply sustain an open attention to your breath.

Once you are complete with these five breaths, slowly return to this moment by opening your eyes and engaging back into your typical breathing patterns.

Breathing is incredibly powerful and yet often neglected. It is astounding that our noses are situated right next to our brains, especially that front location called the prefrontal cortex, which is generally associated with how we regulate our experiences and make intentional decisions. This will set the tone for our experiences, namely accepting the inhale-breath as reflective of the

various influences that are present in our world, the exhale-breath as how we share our reactions with the world, and the brief pause in between as our quick and yet essential opportunity to reflect and create the next moment with intentionality and grace.

Let's take no more than 3 minutes to share what it was like to breath together, whether you have done things like this in the past or not is not necessarily important, we are interested in the present experience of doing it there together.

(3 to 5 minutes of teacher disclosure)

**School Counselor:**

Breathing is both an individual and group activity. It is especially apparent in these times that breathing is shared between people. In this way, it is appropriate that we take about five minutes total and introduce ourselves and at least one thing we hope to get from these five consultation sessions. I will begin by modeling and then I invite you to disclose as you feel fitting.

(Provide five minutes for the teachers to share)

Thank you.

**School Counselor:**

For our first meeting, the content will be a bit different as compared to what will occur for the next 4 meetings. In the subsequent meetings, I anticipate that much of the content will be driven by what you bring for us to discuss whereas today I want to briefly set the tone for the philosophy and practice behind this form of consultation. We will use this content to inform our work together.

Let's start with a little thought experiment: Think about your thoughts before you think them.  
(Give the teachers about 5 seconds to contemplate)

Of course, this is an impossibility, you cannot think about a thought before you think it. All thoughts are this way, we are experiencing thoughts as a reflection after their inception. It feels as if we are creating thoughts before they occur, but this is an impossibility; rather we are observing them after they manifest. And if true, then where do they come from, these thoughts?

(Give the teachers about 20 seconds to reflect and respond)

Let's play with this idea a bit longer with another experiment. Take just about 15 seconds to simply pay attention to your thoughts. Whatever the content, any thought is fine. Simply capture it. Try not to attach any evaluation or judgment about the rightness or wrongness; simply capture the thought.

(Give the teachers about 20 seconds to reflect and respond)

Thank you for giving these thought-experiments a try. I am going to now take a couple of minutes to unpack how they pertain to our work together.

With our thoughts, we often conflate the consequences of our thoughts with the causes of our thoughts. For example, in doing the thought experiment with you, my thought(s) was(were) (insert example), but upon deeper reflection that thought was informed by my personal background, the language I use, how my current day is going, values and hopes, and myriad other contributing influences.

When we experience only the consequence of a thought, we often inadvertently reduce it to the perceived cause. There is some function in this, as humans we try to make predictions based on prior causes and how they might likely lead to predictable consequences. But there is a shadow side, we tend to get rather algorithmic and rigid in our thinking, often missing the various causes or multiple consequences.

In action, this means we react, rather than respond. To react is to act again. There is a lot of wisdom and functionality in this. It is efficient, we don't have to exhaust a lot of effort to be influenced by a prior cause or react in a familiar way. But as a habit, simply reacting can also limit us.

Last exercise before we transition to our final two activities. Briefly write down one example of something that has affected your stress as a teacher in the recent past, preferably today or in the last week.

Try not to write any evaluations or judgements about these experiences, simply write them as objective experiences. Use no more than a single sentence. After this is complete, then take just a few minutes to sketch out as many of the things that contributed to this event or experience. Oscillate between things that you contribute to this experience and things outside of yourself. And then write out some of the things that preceded and contributed to these causes. Take about 3 minutes to accomplish this task. (verbally provide them an example from your life while they write)

Now, look at your sketches. See how each consequence is reasonable given the causes; this isn't to suggest that the consequence is right (or wrong), good or bad, but how it follows coherently between causes and effects. Now look at the list and see if there is one or more causes that can be altered; this doesn't mean that it was right or wrong, good or bad; rather it is simply something that you have the ability to easily manipulate without much effort or sacrifice. It can be as provocative as having a completely different instigating cause or as subtle as having a different perspective on the same cause.

Today, as you are confronted with novel experiences and thoughts, take a moment to briefly engage in this practice. "How am I reacting, what prior causes (personal and environmental) influence me to react this way? And while I accept my *reaction* as reasonable, I also accept that I can *respond* differently and contribute to a new possible outcome; noticing however small or influential those new outcomes might be."

To help you do this, I encourage you to consider using this phrase as a reminder, "Don't doubt my ability, try a different strategy."

I want us to briefly transition to our second content portion. Each session we will do something like the prior portion to support you in how you experience things internally and then we will do something to help influence your environment. It is wrongheaded to think that things will improve by simply altering one's orientation. As a teacher, your feelings of stress are real as are the things that contribute to these feelings. Students can be stressful. Administration or peers can be stressful. Policy can be stressful. Even our lives outside of our jobs can affect the stress we experience in our work. Stress is a natural physiological and psychological experience.

I want us to think of one thing that affects our stresses as educators, something that is particular to our school. Let's not judge it as good or bad at this point, let's simply identify it. Let's identify something that we think has various causes but consequences that affect our performance and experience as teachers. Over the next four weeks we are going to explore the causes and consequences of this stressor and pursue specific behaviors, together as a team, to make the school culture a little better, less stressful, and more connected.

(take 5 minutes to explore and commit)

Thank you. While we might not be able to completely change the working conditions, we might be able to alter some aspects that might in turn contribute to more helpful learning and working conditions. Just as earlier we used the phrase "don't doubt my ability, try a different strategy" to affect our internal thoughts, I offer another one for how we as a team might approach our work in advocating for a stronger school culture: "Little by little, bit by bit, we are improving everyday." Pursuing, noticing, and accomplishing a series of small and yet important improvements is a way of affecting causes leading to new consequences in and beyond our shared school environment.

Finally, I want us to take five minutes to close with our first formal mindfulness exercise. You might have some prior experiences with mindfulness, whether formal practice or things you have heard or read about. Consistent with our prior activity, I am going to ask you to not import any judgment or impressions related to prior experiences with mindfulness, instead I encourage you to approach this opportunity as novel as is possible. I am going to read my mindfulness script and support you as much as is possible.

### **School Counselor:**

<b>ASE Meditation 1</b>
<p>As a teacher, we rely on our intuitions and rapid recall and expertise. There are myriad people and events, always pining for our attention. Teachers are human, beautifully so; and like all humans, our capacity to be fully intentional is often limited.</p> <p>The great developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik commented that young children are like lanterns who distribute light broadly so to witness and have access to as many things as possible, for the more experiences at one's disposal, the greater number of things we can draw from to operate on own worlds later in life. This is different than adults, who are like flashlights, focusing light to specific apertures with targeted intention. We do this to be</p>



efficient because we'd be overwhelmed if we were constantly accumulating and processing disturbed experiences. As teachers, we must be like lanterns and flashlights, oscillating between the expanse of curiosity and creativity and intentional focus.

In our practices together, we are going to play around with these ideas, that is oscillating between expanding our awareness and curiosity and bringing back specific and useful details into intentional focus. To do this, we are going to use some practices associated with mindfulness, tailored specifically to working with children especially as an educator and in a school environment. Many of you have had experiences with mindfulness, and while these past experiences with mindfulness might range from helpful to challenging and while such past experiences will certainly affect your experiences with our exercises together, it might be helpful to suspend memory as much as is possible, begin anew with our work together now, as a lantern garnering new opportunities.

This first practice will be rather short. But I encourage you to consider the transferability of these short practices, especially in your busy day as a teacher. It is often suggested that one must practice many hours to become an expert, and while there is much wisdom in practice; in the current context, we are simply practicing attention to one's experiences, and there is no greater expert on you than you. These short practices are designed so that you can get back to you, be the expert of you, especially when the environment around you can be challenging and even stressful.

Our practice today will be especially brief and each week we will add a bit more time and focus. This week we will play around with the concept of personal and social curiosity. For our purposes, we will define curiosity as the pursuit of new information or experiences, where novel and surprising outcomes are anticipated and prized.

If you are standing, please take a seat or if you are already seated, take a moment to become aware of the sensation of sitting. It is generally helpful to sit as comfortably as you can, in whatever way has a history of keeping you tranquil and yet attentive.

As you focus your gentle awareness on sitting. Perhaps take a few deep breaths. Become aware of the sensations of breathing. You need not force anything. Simply observe. Notice where you feel the breath most clearly; it could be the tip of the nose, possibly the rise and fall of the abdomen or chest. Where you identify the sensation of your breath is personal and it can change as you continue to attend.

15 seconds

Breath is always with us. There is no need to alter the quality of your breathing for this exercise. Simply observe it. Notice all aspects of the breath, including the initial contact of the air outside of you to your skin, follow where it moves to in your body, and as it exits, and the pauses between breaths.

Continue to breathe in a normal and comfortable manner and notice any thoughts, feelings, or sensations that might arise. Regardless of the content of these inner mental experiences, open

up to them with curiosity. They are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong, simply attend to these thoughts. You might ask yourself, are there many thoughts, a single theme of thoughts, or maybe something like both myriad thoughts inspired by a single theme. Simply breathe and appreciate that you are the sole expert of your inner experiences.

Take a moment to inquire into the genesis of these inner mental experiences. Did you think of them before you thought them? More likely, you observed them after they are perceptible. Notice the relationship between the sensations of sitting and breathing, the sensation of attending to oneself in a curious way, and the cascade of thoughts that capture us.

When thoughts or feelings creep in, simply acknowledge them with brief momentary curiosity and then return to the breath.

When comfortable, comfortably expand your awareness back to the surroundings. To the counselor you are working with and the room that surrounds you.

The distinguished psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett offers the following wisdom: “In every waking moment, your brain uses past experience, organized as concepts, to guide your actions and give your sensations meaning. When the concepts involved are emotion concepts, your brain constructs instances of emotion.”

This brief practice we shared is an introduction in how one might interrogate how the brain uses our mind to organize and respond to our experiences. As teachers, especially during these inauspicious times, with many personal, professional, and social threats, it might be helpful to be curious about the infancy of our experiences, especially our emotions. While capturing our emotions will not necessarily remove or even alter the characters of these threats; it is possible that our curiosity is the first step in engaging in responding with flexibility and intention, rather than reacting.

This week you will find yourself back in your familiar classroom. While it might be infeasible to dedicate 5 to 10 minutes to capture your breath as we did; do invest in 3 to 5 intentional breaths with curiosity, interrogate where any thoughts might have come from, and return to the classroom with intention and compassion for oneself and others.

### **School Counselor:**

As we close, I want to encourage you to think about one thing that stood out and affected you today in our session. Commit to one very specific behavior that you can use this strategy immediately. How will you know when to use this strategy, how will you know if it was helpful, and if helpful how will you reinforce and celebrate your commitment or if it didn't help how can you try a different strategy?

Finally, I want to encourage each of you to consider downloading an app called “Healthy Minds Program,” that is free for either Apple or Android. While not necessarily required, it is a great research-supported program that is consistent with the practices we will be doing and therefore

likely deepen the outcomes of our efforts here. Thank you again and I greatly look forward to seeing you again this time next week.

## **Session Two**

### **School Counselor**

As we begin our work today, I want to briefly start by asking if you have any questions about the composition of these consultation sessions or revisit the confidentiality promise and limitations.

### **Teachers**

Allow 1 minute (or more if needed based on the teachers' queries)

### **School Counselor:**

Similar to last week, I would like for each of us to begin this meeting with a brief breathing exercise intended to focus our attention here together. With this in mind, I encourage you to close your eyes and simply bring your awareness to your breath. Make no effort to change your natural breathing at this point, simply notice that you are breathing. Notice that this breath sustains your life and is something shared between you and the world around you. Try not to judge the quality of your breath, again simply experience it for the next 10 or so seconds.

(provide the teachers about 10 seconds)

## **I: Teacher Self-Advocacy**

### **School Counselor**

Today I want to introduce the concept of radical curiosity and offer some very specific strategies informed by the empirical and conceptual literature pertaining to social and emotional learning to help us accomplish this radical curiosity. The hope is that we can apply these radical curiosity strategies, resulting in new insights and new more desirable outcomes.

**Curiosity** is a “drive state for information” (Kidd & Hayden, p. 450); as a practice, curiosity is a non-evaluative expression of inquisitiveness about a person and/or circumstance. In this way, the outcome of curiosity is not the acquisition of an unchanging or even ideal end, rather a persistent openness to ongoing development. For example, “What did you accomplish?” is only minimally curious whereas “How did you experience your accomplishments?” In both brief prompts, you can receive specific information about the accomplishment but only in the latter question does the prompt encourage elaboration beyond an isolated circumstance.

To be curious, it is often helpful to interrogate some of the things that contribute to our own inner conversations. This process of interrogation requires first, self-awareness, and then, second, self-management. Self-awareness is becoming more aware of our culture, thoughts, feelings, and potential whereas self-management is how we intentionally affect our emotions, thoughts, and actions to achieve goals, coping with stress, preserving.

Let's practice two language devices to generate curiosity through self-awareness and -management, namely a reflection of feeling and an open-ended question.

(Encourage one teacher to interface with another)

A reflection of feelings is identifying the emotional experience of another person and sharing it with this person to demonstrate empathy, understanding, and connection. This requires you to accurately receive and articulate the emotion and couple it with a causal anchor affiliated with the person's emotional experience. Here are a couple of examples:

- Janelle, you are feeling frustrated because the number of responsibilities you have as a teacher seems to exceed your time or resources.
- I can see how happy you are when you work really hard and identify one of many possible solutions that might work for you.

A second skill to generate curiosity is a non-evaluative, reflective question. These open-ended questions should be more than a re-request for information, rather a way to evince that you are curious about the other person's lived experience:

- What is it like for you to be experiencing these frustrations as a relatively new teacher?
- How did the APs statement affect your remainder of the day in class?
- When you are feeling motivated, what are some typical things that inspire these feelings?

Let's take a couple of minutes and practice these reflections and questions a few times.

(allow 2 minutes for each teacher to practice one or two each, with you offering non-evaluative help if requested)

These language strategies can be used for our own internal dialogue but also can be used as conversation devices when we interact with students, colleagues, or parents. Let's take a few minutes as a group and utilize each of these two skills. Pair up and come up with some event that occurred today in school. It can be something troubling or even something banal and ordinary. With your partner, rather than trying to figure out an immediate solution, try and use both reflections of feelings and open-ended questions to demonstrate curiosity. I am here to help should you need it.

(allow approximately 5 minutes)

## **II: School Environment Advocacy**

Okay, great. Let's shift our attention from our group to our broader school context. Last week we spoke about a possible event or phenomenon that is present in the school environment or culture; something that as a team we might be able to influence. Let's take a few minutes to discuss some possibilities and using our concept of radical curiosity, and the skills of reflection and questions, what is some specific behaviors that we can do to start the process of climate change in the school?

## **III: Mindfulness Activity**

I want us to take about 10 minutes and participate in our second formal mindfulness exercise. I am going to read a script and I encourage you to follow along as you find it comfortable and helpful.

**ASE Meditation 2:**

Welcome back. We genuinely hope that you found some value in the practice last week; in fact, we hope that the value inspired you to practice beyond these mere 10 minutes we share together. As a counseling professor, I tell my students that the measure of effective therapy is not found merely in the experiences during the 50-minute session but rather how that 50-minutes affects all of the minutes, hours, and days between and beyond sessions.

Last week we did a brief exercise of paying attention to your inner experiences, noticing how thoughts and feelings seem to emerge, and then evolve into other thoughts or feelings. We also briefly encouraged you to notice any evaluations that get overlayed on top of these transitory mental experiences. By distinguishing an experience from an evaluation, we might be able to better regulate our experiences, discern what is acceptable, and prove decisive enough to act more intentionally and connected to others.

This week, we are going to take this practice one step further and encourage you to interrogate these inner experiences, note the complexity of prior mental and environmental influencers that contributed to the manifestation, and how to retain that balance between accepting our inner experiences are natural expressions. In short, we accept that all responses are feasible, but reacting in the same way over and over again potentially limits our choices and consequences.

Last week, when walking my 8-year old daughter to school she asked, “daddy, is it okay to be scared?” And I responded something like, “Of course, everyone gets scared from time to time. It is your body’s way of telling you it feels threatened or unsure. Being scared can be a very helpful feeling to keep us safe. What is not helpful is that we behave the same way to everything that makes us scared. Sometimes when we are scared we need to run away, other times we need to protect ourselves, and sometimes it is okay to simply note that you felt something and that fear will soon go away and become something else.”

This brief story reflects a helpful practice of differentiating reacting from responding. To react is to act again, in a habituated way. To respond is to consider, however briefly, with complexity, acceptance of oneself, and discernment of various possibilities. As a teacher, we experience a litany of emotions, often influenced by prior determinants outside of our conscious awareness and control. It is okay to feel how we do in response to circumstance, but it is also permissible and even helpful to come prepared with a diversity of responses to circumstance. In fact, research suggests that the more that we anticipate prior determinants of experience, note that there are multiple determinants to any one or more experiences, and practice flexible responses, we generally have more internally useful ends.

Remember, our initial experiences are valid, but not fixed. Similarly, our evaluations we overlay experience have a basis in prior influences. As a practice, we can break them apart and interrogate them for more intentional and helpful outcomes; but ultimately, they are both simply the content of consciousness. We can observe them and by doing so, we are more likely to create new determinants of experience.

If you are standing, please take a seat or if you are already seated, take a moment to become

aware of the sensation of sitting. It is generally helpful to sit as comfortably as you can, in whatever way has a history of keeping you tranquil and yet attentive.

As you focus your gentle awareness on sitting. Perhaps take a few deep breaths. Without too much effort, bring to memory any salient feeling that you experienced today. Whatever first comes to mind is perfect and you need not sift through multiple possibilities.

Press down on this recollection for a couple of seconds. Where were you at? What was happening? Was anyone else involved? At this stage, effortlessly suspend any evaluation of the experience or anything related to it; simply bracket your attention to the facts about how you experienced whatever it is.

In a similar way, take a few seconds and recall any events however small or influential that contributed to the experience you noted. Even the most seemingly banal, insignificant, just observe the experiences. For example, returning to the story of my daughter and her inquiry about fear. Prior experiences might include being afraid the night before, messages she heard other say about being scared, what it means to disclose and inquire with her father. As a teacher, you might have recalled something challenging or inspiring in the classroom or with an administrator. There are proximal determinants like the relationships that contributed to the experience but more distal and abstract like your values in being a teacher that led you to the profession. Simply note all of them, quickly and without evaluation... all while retaining a gentle unforced pattern of breathing.

15 seconds

As you reflect on these causal agents of experience, did any stand out? Any surprise or affirm you? You can extend this beyond yourself and your determinants of experience. For example, if a student, parent, colleague or admin was a part of your memory, what prior determinants affected them and in turn contributed to your experience? Suspend evaluation, simply breathe and with each breath note that these are possible determinants that affect how we respond to circumstance.

10 seconds

Our initial memory, the feelings and evaluations attached to them are not necessarily separate, as they are all content of our conscious experience. But it can be helpful to disentangle their hold on us by pulling them apart, interrogating how causes contribute to consequences, noting that there are various causes, and how we privilege certain causes.

In accepting our thoughts and feelings, we are not passively accepting harmful things that happen to us. In a similar way, we don't accept that only helpful things will occur all of the time. Instead, we accept that our experiences are legitimate but the practice of breathing and reflection might contribute to more intentional, curious, flexible, and socially helpful outcomes. And when it doesn't immediately contribute, it makes us more likely to try something different until we do. Don't doubt one's ability, try another strategy.

Continue to breathe in a normal and comfortable manner and notice any thoughts, feelings, or sensations that might arise.

When thoughts or feelings creep in, simply acknowledge them with brief momentary curiosity and then return to the breath.

When comfortable, comfortably expand your awareness back to the surroundings. To the counselor you are working with and the room that surrounds you.

This week you will find yourself back in your familiar classroom. While it might be infeasible to dedicate 5 to 10 minutes to capture your breath and interrogate every experience as we just did together, but commit to something that is more feasible. Is 15 seconds worth a different outcome? 5 seconds to breathe, 5 seconds to reflect on possible prior influences, and 5 seconds to consider how curious, flexible, and connected outcomes might manifest from your investment.

Thank you again for your practice and for all of the important work that you do as an educator. These are dubious times. The purpose of these exercises is not to downplay the challenges you have as a professional teacher or in any moment in a school, but instead it they are intended to empower you in the midst of any challenge and accomplishment.

#### **IV: Closing**

Return back to the group when comfortable. As we close, I want to encourage you to think about one thing that stood out and affected you today in our session. Commit to one very specific behavior that you can use this strategy immediately. How will you know when to use this strategy, how will you know if it was helpful, and if helpful how will you reinforce and celebrate your commitment or if it didn't help how can you try a different strategy?



## Session Three

### **School Counselor**

Last week we talked about the concept of applied curiosity, that is how as educators we might interrogate our own inner ways of processing experiences but also extending this introspective process outward to others. Researchers consistently find that expressing respectful curiosity tends to lend to better relationships and a variety of valued student and teacher outcomes like improved achievement, lower stress, and stronger classroom climates.

To start this week, we will try and be curious with you about your experiences as an educator. Let's take a moment and identify something that is affecting your experiences as an educator. These need not be negative experiences, but don't feel inhibited to bring up something that you feel comfortable talking about but might be compromising your experiences. Take no more than 30 seconds, what first comes to mind is fine.

(Spend about 5 minutes listening, validating, and exploring their stories. Use the reflective listening skills explicated in Session Two and ASE counseling skills listed in the Chapter 10 of this book)

Building from curiosity, this week we are going to add to our concepts by adding co-regulation.

**Co-regulation** is the interface of two or more self-aware, intentional individuals who draw from various cultural, social, and personal sources to inform and influence behavior (McCaslin, 2009). For example, a self-regulated individual can monitor, predict, shift, and direct one's internal and external experiences, whereas co-regulation extends beyond one's inner experiences and places total experience in a broader social and historic context. "What have you done to improve yourself" is different than "How have you pursued your goals given the influences of (insert circumstance)?"

For our main activity today, we are going to bump up our Mindfulness segment.

### **II: Mindfulness Activity**

#### **ASE Meditation 3:**

Last week we did a brief exercise where you were encouraged to consider how any single experience has diverse and complex determining factors that all contributed to the experience. Nothing simply happens, but events occur out of numerous and often elusive prior influences. In a similar way, you were encouraged to attend to various possibilities that might arise from any circumstance. Our initial feelings can be completely valid; in fact, given the prior determinants, how we react to situations is plausible. This said, simply because something is plausible doesn't mean that it is inevitable. By having a flexible perspective about prior causes and diverse possibilities, we can be confronted by challenges, but also influence new more desirable outcomes.

This week, we are going to take this practice one step further and encourage you to consider how our inner dialogues affect our inner experiences or the experiences we have with others.

Returning to the lesson last week, we started by discerning facts about experiences from our inner evaluation of those experiences. That inner evaluation is baked into what it is to be a human, so we cannot likely turn it completely off (nor do we want to, as it can be protective or even lead to evaluations of gratitude and joy); but we do want to be more intentional about how we are affected by our inner stories.

For example, I was recently working with a teacher who was struggling with a student who was challenging in class, often interrupting the lessons with outbursts. We can accept that these behaviors are troubling, for you as teacher, for his peers in the classroom, and even for the student himself. We can also accept that there were probably prior causes for these behaviors, our reactions, and the effects on the classroom. In this case, the student was dealing with his parent's divorce, persistent violence in his neighborhood, among other things. By accepting these as possible influences, we can respond differently to this kid. Rather than reacting simply to the disruptions in class, we might respond with empathy. This doesn't require us to necessarily fix or even mention any of the causes, but by responding with compassion we might create new outcomes for all parties involved.

Please start by taking a seat and finding a comfortable and yet alert position. The goal here is to be comfortable and yet alert.

As you focus your gentle awareness on sitting, perhaps take a few deep breaths. Identify where the breath enters and then settles in your body. Continue to breathe naturally, noticing your unique breathing signature; notice any sensations in your body, or maybe more salient are thoughts that come to mind. Simply observe these experiences as they come and then naturally fade. It is curious that these inner experiences seem to come; note that they have an origin, birthed out of the sum total of your history and biology. There is nothing right or wrong about your experiences or history, simply note that these current sensations are present with you now.

Take a few more seconds and merely observe experiences as they arise.

Now, let's shift focus and provoke a specific type of experience, all while maintaining the same orientation of openness and acceptance.

Take a moment and try and generate a memory of a recent challenging conversation. Don't toggle through various memories or thoughts, simply land on the first one that comes to mind. Continue to breathe and use your breath as a way to accept that your experiences were valid given your history, personage, biology; also breathe with an openness that this validity doesn't foreclose you from different ways of experiencing yourself or others.

As you continue to mind your intentional breathing, again quickly and without elaboration, bring the experience to mind. Suspend the evaluations you have, but bring your awareness to your PROCESS. See yourself suspending your initial reaction. With a deep breath, witness yourself observing in an instant, "this conversation has a history, it occurred this way because of prior causes." Say to yourself, "I am going to respond in a way that creates connection in this conversation, where all participants will feel acceptance, safety, encouragement, and

respect.”

Our default ways of communicating are not necessarily wrong or harmful. Again, we accept that they have a history. But they do tend to be focused inward, privileging our perspective. As counterintuitive as it seems, we have a greater influence on others, in almost all circumstances, when we broach interactions with acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect.

This need not take much time. What we are doing today is pairing our breathing with this orientation of acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect. What occurs over time is that when we focus on our intentional breathing, this orientation will more likely be generated without much effort.

For approximately 20 seconds, breath and attend to your process of connecting with others. Try not to blame, evaluate, or even look for causes or justifications. Simply note that there are causes and accept them. Then shift this acceptance to an orientation preoccupied with acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect for self and others.

15 seconds

In accepting our thoughts and feelings, we are not passively accepting harmful things that happen to us. In a similar way, we don’t accept that only helpful things will occur all of the time. Instead, we accept that our experiences are legitimate but the practice of breathing and reflection might contribute to more intentional, curious, flexible, and socially helpful outcomes. And when it doesn’t immediately contribute, it makes us more likely to try something different until we do. Don’t doubt one’s ability, try another strategy.

Continue to breathe in a normal and comfortable manner and notice any thoughts, feelings, or sensations that might arise.

When thoughts or feelings creep in, simply acknowledge them with brief momentary curiosity and then return to the breath.

When comfortable, comfortably expand your awareness back to the surroundings. To the counselor you are working with and the room that surrounds you.

This week you will find yourself back in your familiar classroom. While it might be infeasible to dedicate 5 to 10 minutes to capture your breath and interrogate every experience as we just did together, but commit to something that is more feasible. Is 15 seconds worth a different outcome? 5 seconds to breathe, 5 seconds to reflect on possible prior influences, and 5 seconds to consider how curious, flexible, and connected outcomes might manifest from your investment.

Thank you again for your practice and for all of the important work that you do as an educator. We are completely aware that these mere activities cannot supersede the incredible number of stressors you have as a teacher. We also acknowledge that many of the tribulations we

experience are influenced primarily by others. The point of these exercises is not to be compliant but instead to make oneself more aware, accepting, and intentional in how we respond to an ever-challenging world.

(Spend five minutes using their specific stories and asking them to practice co-regulated language. Use the example to help them reframe the language [i.e., “What have you done to improve yourself” is different than “How have you pursued your goals given the influences of (insert circumstance)?”]).

Encourage the teachers to strategize how co-regulated language might affect their inner experiences? In a similar way, encourage them to ponder how it might affect others (e.g., students, colleagues).

## **II: School Environment Advocacy**

Last week we spoke about a possible event or phenomenon that is present in the school environment or culture; something that as a team we might be able to influence. Let’s take a few minutes to discuss some possibilities and using our concept of radical curiosity, and the skills of reflection and questions, what is some specific behaviors that we can do to start the process of climate change in the school?

## **IV: Closing**

As we close, I want to encourage you to think about one thing that stood out and affected you today in our session. Commit to one very specific behavior that you can use this strategy immediately. How will you know when to use this strategy, how will you know if it was helpful, and if helpful how will you reinforce and celebrate your commitment or if it didn’t help how can you try a different strategy?

Thank you again for your dedication. We have a spring break approaching. I wonder if there is one thing that each of you can dedicate specific practice, starting immediately, and reoccurring each day, just one thing be it the practice of radical curiosity or co-regulated language, how might you practice this and how will you recognize if it is affecting you?

See you when you get back.

## Session Four

### **School Counselor**

Welcome back. We have returned from a break and as we begin, I wonder if there are any experiences or insights that occurred over break that you might want to be included as content for our time together today?

### **Teachers**

Allow 1 minute

### **School Counselor:**

Similar to each of the previous weeks, I would like for each of us to begin this meeting with a brief breathing exercise intended to focus our attention here together. With this in mind, I encourage you to close your eyes and simply bring your awareness to your breath. Make no effort to change your natural breathing at this point, simply notice that you are breathing. Notice that this breath sustains your life and is something shared between you and the world around you. Try not to judge the quality of your breath, again simply experience it for the next 10 or so seconds.

(provide the teachers about 10 seconds)

### **I: Teacher Self-Advocacy**

Before break, we talked about how many of our experiences are co-determined by a number of internal and external forces. How we respond to these experiences is how we co-regulate; that is, how we draw from these myriad internal and external resources and make the decisions in an intentional manner.

This week, we are going to extend this a bit by introducing the concept of connectedness. In some ways, we are all connected to these co-determinants of experience. For example, this particular consultation experience that we are sharing now is affecting you and me in ways that would not have occurred had we chosen to be in a different setting. But connectedness goes a bit further than co-determination; just as co-regulation is our efforts to act intentionally in concert with our personal and social influences, connectedness is how we experience and pursue acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect between ourselves and others.

Let's take about five minutes and explore each of these constituent parts of feeling connected.

- 1) In what ways do you feel accepted or encouraged in your role as a teacher? Are there ways that your acceptance is compromised? Please consider specific examples.
- 2) In what ways do I consistently make others feel accepted or encouraged, including colleague teachers, students, and others?
- 3) What things contribute or compromise your current school environment in the areas of safety and shared respect?

The scholarship pertaining to feelings of connectedness in school are pretty compelling, as such feelings are associated with teacher stress, burnout, and persistence; for students, connectedness is affiliated with achievement, school behavior, and mental wellness. While we cannot control

others feelings of connectedness, in the spirit of co-determination of experience, the literature is also clear that our feelings of connectedness can affect others. With this in mind, I wonder if we can come up with a simple, valuable (to you) goal to amplify the feelings of connectedness in your classroom?

(one minute)

## **II: School Environment Advocacy**

Over the past few weeks we have talked about ideas to improve the school climate; particularly things that I might be able to do or advocate for as a school counselor, working in tandem with you as teachers. Inspired by your goals for highlighting connectedness in your classrooms, what further things might be improved upon in the broader school or education climate to affect your experiences of acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect? What is one possible thing that we could do immediately to affect you and how you operate in the system?

## **III: Mindfulness Activity**

I want us to take about 10 minutes and participate in our fourth formal mindfulness exercise. I will read the script and participate in any way that feels comfortable and relevant.

### **ASE Meditation 4**

Welcome back. Like you, the teachers and counselors involved in this project, I am coming back from spring break. I love these two words combined. Spring suggests new life. It also reminds me of a spring that coils into tension and then releases, jumping forward as if pursuing some intentional goal with passion. Break reminds us of the importance of resting and resetting, particularly after springing forward towards any goal. This message of springing towards goals and taking the time to break is an important lesson for us educators.

In our last mindfulness activity, we performed an exercise on attending to our thoughts, bracketing out any evaluations that get smuggled into our internal narratives, and pursuing more personally and socially meaningful outcomes.

This week we are going to pivot from introspection to how we interface with others. We cannot control other people, nor do we really want to (although it would occasionally be convenient or helpful!!!). But we do want to be intentional in how we affect them, as our intentions are likely to have some influence, which in turn will affect how they interface with us and further affect our inner experiences. In this way, our experiences are both connected and yet somewhat controllable.

Please start by taking a seat and finding a comfortable and yet alert position. The goal here is to be comfortable and yet alert.

As you focus your gentle awareness on sitting, perhaps take a few deep breaths. Identify where the breath enters and then settles in your body. Continue to breathe naturally, noticing your unique breathing signature; notice any sensations in your body, or maybe more salient

are thoughts that come to mind. Simply observe these experiences as they come and then naturally fade. It is curious that these inner experiences seem to come; note that they have an origin, birthed out of the sum total of your history and biology. There is nothing right or wrong about your experiences or history, simply note that these current sensations are present with you now.

Take a few more seconds and merely observe experiences as they arise.

Now, let's shift focus and provoke a specific type of experience, all while maintaining the same orientation of openness and acceptance.

Take a moment and try to bring to your awareness a person in the school environment who makes you feel accepted, safe, encouraged, and respected. This person could be a colleague or even a student, but someone who you feel unreserved reverence for... now imagine that this person can somehow intuitively experience your current esteem and I want you to witness how it affects them. Witness the joy and appreciation in their response to your impressions about them.

15 seconds

Standing beside this person who you have identified and honored, conjure up the image of another person, someone in school who doesn't know their worth but you see their brilliance and importance. Using the same power of intuition, this person can also somehow experience all of the hope, compassion, and support you now experience on their behalf. Take just a few moments to observe how their prior manner changed as a consequence of your feelings towards them.

15 seconds

Finally, standing besides these two featured people, now bring to mind someone in school who challenges or even frustrates you. Continue to breathe in a normal and comfortable manner and notice any thoughts, feelings, or sensations that might arise. When thoughts or feelings creep in, simply acknowledge them with brief momentary curiosity and then return to the breath. Try not to couple your prior evaluation of this person with your current experience, simply note the prior history of challenge and return to your breath and open awareness. (10 seconds) Now, look at all three people standing in a line in your mind; use the successes you invested in the initial two individuals and offer the same support and compassion to this third person. (ten seconds) Notice if there is any changes in how you experience this person when you think of them with unmitigated compassion.

Take about one minute and see yourself standing in front of all three individuals, imagine yourself investing connectedness and compassion to each of these people for the entire duration.

Take just a moment and reflect on how this mental exercise affected your perspective. Take one final moment to extend this same compassion and connection to all beings in the school or

people who affect people in your school.

When comfortable, comfortably expand your awareness back to the surroundings. To the counselor you are working with and the room that surrounds you.

This week you will find yourself back in your familiar classroom. While it might be infeasible to dedicate 5 to 10 minutes to capture your breath and interrogate every experience as we just did together, but commit to something that is more feasible. Is 15 seconds worth a different outcome? 5 seconds to breathe, 5 seconds to reflect on possible prior influences, and 5 seconds to consider how curious, flexible, and connected outcomes might manifest from your investment.

Thank you again for your practice and for all of the important work that you do as an educator. We are completely aware that these mere activities cannot supersede the incredible number of stressors you have as a teacher. We also acknowledge that many of the tribulations we experience are influenced primarily by others. The point of these exercises is not to be compliant but instead to make oneself more aware, accepting, and intentional in how we respond to an ever-challenging world.

#### **IV: Closing**

Return back to the group when comfortable. As we close, I want to encourage you to think about one thing that stood out and affected you today in our session. Commit to one very specific behavior that you can use this strategy immediately. How will you know when to use this strategy, how will you know if it was helpful, and if helpful how will you reinforce and celebrate your commitment or if it didn't help how can you try a different strategy?



## **Session Five**

### **School Counselor**

Welcome back. We have made it to week five of this project!!! Congratulations. I genuinely hope that this has been as valuable to you as it has been for us as counselors. I have learned a lot and I hope that the experiences here in some way can translate into the total school environment.

With that in mind, as we get started, I hope to use this last meeting as an opportunity to reflect on any developments, continued areas for personal and school growth, and looking forward to specific goals and resources.

### **School Counselor:**

As we have done in each of the previous weeks, I would like for each of us to begin this meeting with a brief breathing exercise intended to focus our attention here together. With this in mind, I encourage you to close your eyes and simply bring your awareness to your breath. Make no effort to change your natural breathing at this point, simply notice that you are breathing. Notice that this breath sustains your life and is something shared between you and the world around you. Try not to judge the quality of your breath, again simply experience it for the next 10 or so seconds.

(provide the teachers about 10 seconds)

### **I: Teacher Self-Advocacy**

Throughout the previous four weeks, we have talked about a number of topics, some based on your experiences as educators and others include some things that we have introduced from the empirical literature. Major themes include consider prior determinants of your experiences as teachers and even what contributes to the experiences of others. We have discussed and practices ways to co-regulate our responses to experience. For this week, it might be helpful to allow you to list some of the things that you have found helpful or some of the things that you are still working on.

(using ASE-inspired active listening and reflecting skills, engage in approximately 5 minutes, including validating, expanding, and creating concrete plans for how to continue to grow)

What topics were helpful? In what ways did these topics specifically affect you personally or your classrooms?

Were there any specific behaviors that were inspired by your experiences here in this project? In what ways might these behaviors be something you can retain and even amplify for the remainder of the academic year?

It is helpful for many people to celebrate our successes, even if they appear small and insignificant they can have a profound and exponential effect on systems. Consider the phrase, “Little by little, bit by bit, I am improving every day.” Small insights or large revelations here (or elsewhere) don’t just affect one experience or relationship, but have the potential to be generalized broadly in one’s personal and professional life.

Also considering the incremental nature of growth, we can become aware of the importance of compassion for self and others. Compassion is the steady and composed concern with either persistent or circumstantial feelings of suffering; com as a prefix means “to be with” and passion as the anchors highlights the “strong emotional connection.” Being a teacher is sometimes challenging. We are deeply connected to it, because we value the content areas where learning occurs and we value students as learners. Sometimes, we are so tied to the outcome of learning that the passion exceeds the being-with requirement. Let’s take a few moments today and work through how we can act compassionately with ourselves and others. What are some specific challenges that are still present in our school or your specific classroom? How can you reframe the challenge as a passion? And, what specific behaviors would accomplish “being with?”

## **II: School Environment Advocacy**

Over the past few weeks we have talked about ideas to improve the school climate; particularly things that I might be able to do or advocate for as a school counselor, working in tandem with you as teachers. Inspired by your goals for highlighting connectedness in your classrooms, what further things might be improved upon in the broader school or education climate to affect your experiences of acceptance, safety, encouragement, and respect? What is one possible thing that we could do immediately to affect you and how you operate in the system?

## **III: Mindfulness Activity**

### **ASE Meditation 5:**

Thank you for making it this far!!! When you committed to this project, you had only a modest notion of what would occur and yet here we are!!! Hopefully from those modest beginnings you have found one or more things helpful.

As humans, we generally crave seeing things to resolution. Like the storybooks from our youth, if there was a beginning there certainly must be an ending. As adults, life doesn’t always feel so sequential; even with the various habits we maintain, the arch of time appears to march onward.

If true, absolute resolution seems elusive. In its absence, to persist, we must accomplish some type of compassion for self and the other peoples in our lives. Compassion is the steady and composed concern with either persistent or circumstantial feelings of suffering; this is captured in the word construction itself; the prefix com refers to “being with” and passion is any “strong emotional connection” to someone or thing.

This week we will focus on the practice of compassion. If experiences are predicated by prior determinants, no one can be fully responsible and yet because we are passionate about our experiences, we are responsible to have the greatest influence on the outcomes.

As you focus your gentle awareness on sitting, perhaps take a few deep breaths. Identify where the breath enters and then settles in your body. Continue to breathe naturally, noticing your unique breathing signature; notice any sensations in your body, or maybe more salient are thoughts that come to mind. Simply observe these experiences as they come and then

naturally fade. It is curious that these inner experiences seem to come; note that they have an origin, birthed out of the sum total of your history and biology. There is nothing right or wrong about your experiences or history, simply note that these current sensations are present with you now.

Take a few more seconds and merely observe experiences as they arise.

Now, let's shift focus and provoke a specific type of experience, all while maintaining the same orientation of openness and acceptance.

With each in-breath, say to yourself, as if rehearsing for the great play that is one's own life, "be with" and then with the deep and yet comfortable out-breath, "give out." Be with. Give out.

(30 seconds)

This mental rehearsal coupled with the breathing is intended to codify the experience of patience and curiosity that you might associate with these exercises with the intentions to be truly and deeply with yourself and others, and then the intention to give out compassion to yourself in others as co-determinants of experience. Continue to breathe; be with, give out.

(15 seconds)

This action of breathing reflects the words themselves and illustrates how we are affected by others and how we affect others. This logical concludes the importance of compassion. If our aspiration is to live a quality life, we must be with and give out to self and others. We breath in what all people and non-people in the world give us, and we give out through breathing. Just like our minds, what we bring in and what we give out affects the qualities of experience.

(15 seconds)

Take about one minute and see yourself standing in front of all three individuals, imagine yourself investing connectedness and compassion to each of these people for the entire duration.

Thank you for your commitment to these practices for the last month and a half. We genuinely hope that you found some value. Certainly, exploring how your mind works in these brief exercises is insufficient given the fast pace and complexity of our lives, but hopefully these mere activities offered some examples of what is possible when you are curious (about self and others), co-regulate, connect, and act with compassion. Further, we hope that these exercises inspire you to find other related support, as your work as a teacher is invaluable and you genuinely deserve these types of support.

#### **IV: Closing**

These five weeks have been inspiring and enlightening. As we close, I want to encourage you to think about one thing that stood out and affected you today in our session. Commit to one very specific behavior that you can use this strategy immediately. How will you know when to use this strategy, how will you know if it was helpful, and if helpful how will you reinforce and celebrate your commitment or if it didn't help how can you try a different strategy?

One thing is not trivial. Thank you again for all that you do.

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