

# supporting our teachers

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publication

**STOP!**



Thank you Inner Explorer teachers for what you do every day,

Well, it feels like the home stretch. It's amazing how school years can fly by. During this teacher appreciation week, we want you to know that all of us at Inner Explorer are immensely grateful for your commitment to children and for your hard work. While the year may have flown by, we know that your days are packed. Each day does not fly by, and many of them, if not each of them, is filled with intensity, both positive and at times difficult. You give and give and give, and the impact you have on your students is tremendous. We acknowledge the tough profession you have chosen and words cannot express the deep gratitude we feel for you.

Our newsletter has a new format! Each 'Beyond the Program' will feature a classroom and will include a brief introduction, a class picture and student and teacher comments. This month we are highlighting Mr. Rodriguez's third grade class at Reach Academy in Oakland, California, pictured above. Please send a photo of your class with their comments about Inner Explorer and you'll receive a gift card for \$25 to do something fun with your class.

In May we'd like to encourage you to utilize the practice of mindful awareness throughout your day, when things are calm, really busy, stressful or just plain nutty! It takes very little time to do this.

STOP! Stop, Take a Breath, Observe & Proceed comes straight out of Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program. At any moment of the day we can stop for a few seconds to check in with ourselves and to notice our body, thoughts or emotions. Perhaps you are preparing tomorrow's lessons and you take a moment to check in. You might notice you are bent over in a funny way or perhaps you feel misaligned in some way. You can stop, take a breath, observe your body and change your posture if it's needed. Or, perhaps you'll find you are starving and haven't eaten and need a snack or meal, or perhaps you've had to go to the bathroom for an hour but just wanted to finish off one more thing.

Supposing you are in class and one of your most challenging students triggers a strong emotion from you. You start raising your voice and then you realize it. You STOP. You might indicate to the class that you need to take a few breaths. You might ask them to do that with you. You approach the student differently without raising your blood pressure and you might even get a different response from him or her.

And then there's driving! You are stuck in traffic and you are late. You notice you are holding onto the steering wheel tightly and your arms and shoulders are stiff and tight; you notice your thoughts racing and your heart beating quickly. You recognize that your brow is furrowed and you are hardly breathing, and you decide to STOP, you take a breath, watch what is going on in your body and proceed. You decide to pull over, make a quick call, let them know you are going to be late, get back on the road, turn on the radio and begin to sing. The singing may not make the trip any quicker, but it sure can make it less stressful and more fun. You have taken control over the stressful situation and made it as good as it can be. Chances are you will arrive at your destination in much better shape and you'll even be more effective when you get there.

Finally, exhausted you roll into bed. Your body is exhausted but your mind is very active. You have

thoughts about your list of things to do, thoughts about what went wrong with your students, thoughts about an argument with a sibling. You toss, you turn, you worry, you look at the clock and then you STOP. You notice what's happening and you choose to focus on your body. You begin by taking a few breaths. Perhaps you engage in a body scan or a progressive relaxation exercise. You've chosen to bring your mind into the present where it can feel the exhaustion of your body. With any luck, it is much easier to fall asleep now.

This month, (actually for the rest of your life!) we invite you to use STOP as a way to be in the moment, to get out of your head and into your life. It's a much wiser place to live.



## Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

1. Invite students to talk about times when they have said or done something they later regret. You might want to start by sharing something in your life that you feel comfortable sharing.

2. Teach your students the concept of STOP: Stop, Take a Breath, Observe, and Proceed. Have a discussion about why it is important to do this and how it relates to Inner Explorer and mindful awareness.

3. During a chaotic time in the classroom, get the students' attention. Ask them to practice STOP at that moment. Talk about what they observed.

4. Request that the students identify a chaotic time in the classroom and invite them to take responsibility for using your classroom signal to get their classmates' attention to encourage them to STOP.

5. If you are brave enough, ask the students to help you by identifying when you might need to use the practice, and reminding you to do so. Being respectful is a key ingredient in all of these exercises.

6. Create a log, or have your students create one, to keep track of times when they use STOP

during the school day. Brainstorm good times to use it. (For example, when daydreaming during a lesson, when freaked out during a test, when angry at a classmate for any reason, when disappointed because not called on, etc.)

7. Hand out a log for homework and have students practice STOP outside of school. Brainstorm ideas; i.e. fighting with sibling, getting yelled at by an adult, on phone at 1 a.m., watching TV while eating dinner, etc. Have a conversation the next day asking students to share when they remembered to use the practice.

8. Give a homework assignment asking students to use STOP as soon as they wake up in the morning. Have them keep track of what happens each day in a week. On Friday, have a discussion about the activity. You might want to remind them to do so at the end of each school day.



## Brain Science of STOP

Stopping and taking a breath can help stimulate our parasympathetic, or rest and digest, nervous system. When we stop we may notice we are preoccupied, angry, anxious, tense, calm, relaxed or in any number of other states. We have a choice about our response to a particular situation. Stopping interrupts our sympathetic nervous system which is busy raising our blood pressure and heart rate, tensing our muscles, and releasing stress hormones into our body. Awareness is often the key to disrupting this chain of events. STOP is a magnificent technique that stimulates awareness, leading to better choices and more ease in our lives.



***Mr. Rodriguez's 3rd Grade Class - REACH Academy, Oakland CA***

“Mindfulness is peace. It helps me think. Inner Explorer taught me to listen.”

“Inner Explorer helps me believe in myself.”

“Mindfulness is starting a new day. My favorite Inner Explorer lesson is all of them.”

“Inner Explorer helps me get ready for school.”

“Mindfulness is your life. When you get mad if you take a deep breath then you will get calm.”

“My favorite Inner Explorer lesson is friendly wishes because you can send love and kindness to people you don’t know.”

“Mindfulness is great and it helps us be present in the moment. It helps me believe in myself and get ready for tests. My favorite Inner Explorer lesson is sending friendly wishes because it lets you know better about people.”

“Children in Oakland should have Inner Explorer because it helps others concentrate.”

“Mindfulness helps me take the power from the little man. (Anger) Inner Explorer taught me the little man tries to carry me. It is so funny imagining the little man carrying me. I think all children should have mindfulness so they can relax.”

“It helps me concentrate and relax and be calm and learn. It helps me be prepared for anything.”

“I think all children in Oakland should have Inner Explorer because they could feel safe wherever they are.”

“My favorite Inner Explorer lesson is taking 5 or 10 breaths because it helps me calm down.”

“Mindfulness is a time to breathe. It helps me be peaceful.”

“Inner Explorer helps you have good days.”

“All children in Oakland should have Inner Explorer so they can calm down, have a good day and have fun at the same time.”

“Mindfulness helps me get ready for school and ready for math.”

“My favorite Inner Explorer lesson is the relaxation train because it helps our brains and bodies get ready to sit on the carpet and get ready for reading, math and writing.”

“If all the children had Inner Explorer, there wouldn’t be any violence and they could feel safe wherever they are.”

“Mindfulness is a program that helps you for today. All children in Oakland should have Inner Explorer so

they can have an exultant day!”

“Inner Explorer helps you go into class and learn new things. Kids are happy when they learn and they can be good in the classroom so when they grow up they can have money.”

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