Inner Explorer
Beyond The Program for Teachers
May 2016



# **Self Care**



No Need to Wait Until School Ends!

# Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

In this issue of Beyond The Program, as teachers are working diligently to finish up what needs to be finished up, we are going to really delve into self-care. In February, we wrote about self-compassion. One cannot focus enough on this very important topic. Every day as teachers, we have very long lists of things to do. Is your well-being on that list? For many of us, we never make it onto the list. Walking through hallways in several schools in the last two weeks, I've heard several times: "Only 23 days left!" or "19 more days..." or "Just need to hold it together for a few more weeks!" You know the drill.

A few tweaks in your day may make all the difference in how you feel and how you walk through the last few weeks of school. If your morning before school tends to be rushed, might you wake up 15 minutes earlier? Might you wake up, sit up in bed and follow your breath, or listen to sounds for three to five minutes? When you step into the shower, can you notice your brain churning, or To Do lists piling up? If so, might you change the channel so that your focus tunes into how warm water feels on your body, or how it feels to massage your head as you wash your hair? If you eat or drink before you leave for school, might you add two or three minutes to the routine to really smell the coffee, to taste what you are eating? If you have to get kids ready, could you ask them to join you in taking a minute to notice the breath or the

flavor of the food? On the way to school, if you drive and hit traffic, might you lighten your grip on the steering wheel and take a few breaths? Some teachers are gathering together for five minutes before school begins to sit and practice as a way to launch their days. They swear their lives have changed as a result. Do you have any colleagues that might think this is a good idea?

And, we've said this before but we will say it again, listening to Inner Explorer, especially as an early activity in the day can change the tone of your day to one of presence, to enjoying being with your students, to really listening to what they have to say, to appreciating yourself for all you accomplished in this school year. If you are in a middle or high school and listen to the program after lunch, might you listen to it by yourself before school begins?

During lunch, as we've suggested before, can you make a commitment to take two or three days a week and go for a walk around the block? (Put it in your calendar and when someone asks you for a meeting, say you are busy!!!).

After the school day, can you find 10 minutes for yourself to just sit, not to necessarily practice but to just sit there, no phones, tv, computer, tea....simply to sit and to be.

Finally, to be healthy most adults need seven hours of sleep a night. Can you schedule at least four nights a week to do this? And once you lay down, if your thoughts are racing and preventing you from getting good shut-eye, try doing a body scan.

And as I write this, you might think, this is all well and good, easier said than done. That's for sure, but no one, let me repeat, no one is going to gift you time for yourself. You just have to take it! Chances are if you are happier and healthier and more present in the classrooms, you will get more done! And if you are happier and healthier, the people around you; family and friends may benefit too! (See attached letter).

### Self Care Activities - It's Time To Focus On YOU

- 1. Read the piece above with a paper and pencil. Make a commitment to do one of the suggestions above per day. (Start small)
- 2. Use the <u>attached calendars</u> to keep track of your progress. Hang up the calendar in the bathroom so it's one of the first things you see in the morning and one of the last in the night.
- 3. Subscribe to Dr. Lee Freedman's daily email reminders to take three breaths. They are beautiful, come at all different times of day, have magnificent photos and quotes. It's free and a great reminder throughout the day to stop: <a href="http://bit.ly/1U9jVrQ">http://bit.ly/1U9jVrQ</a>

- 4. Pick a route at school to walk mindfully; your classroom to the staff room, your classroom to the restroom, your classroom to the school entrance. When you walk this route, by really paying attention to your walking, to each foot as it rises and then falls, you will help yourself become present.
- 5. Find one colleague or more that is willing to sit for five minutes before school begins each day. If school starts at 8:15, meet from 8:05 8:10. Set a place to do this every day and whoever shows up, shows up.
- 6. When doing a chore you don't love (i.e. making a bed or doing dishes), see if you can bring real presence to the activity. When you make the bed, pull the sheet with intention, feel the sheet in your hand, notice the pressure of your pulling, notice what it feels like to tuck in the sheets.
- 7. Become gratitude email buddies with someone you love. Email at least three reasons you feel grateful a few times a week. Your buddy's emails will make you happy and your recognizing your gratitude will make both of you happy!

#### **Neuroscience of Self Care**

When you are present, that is when you are aware that you are aware of the water in the shower, your feet on the ground as you walk, your breath even for three breaths, you connect the parts of your brain (prefrontal cortex, limbic system, brain stem) that stimulate your parasympathetic nervous system. In so doing, you activate the "rest-and-digest" part of your nervous system with the result of lowered blood pressure, better digestion, easier sleep, and many other physiological benefits. So, the self-care you provide to yourself will positively support your nervous system and help you be happier and healthier. Every day counts. Please don't wait until the end of the school year!

# **Self Care All Summer Long!**



an at-home edition featuring a playlist of IE's favorite tracks

The key is daily practice, no matter what time of the year!

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