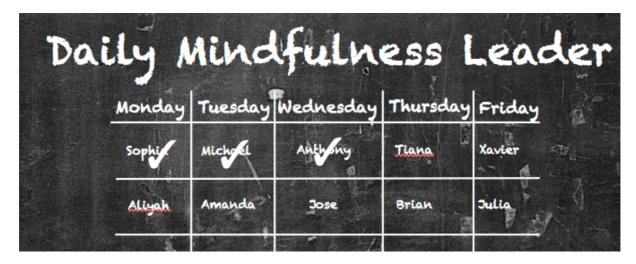
Inner Explorer
Beyond The Program for Teachers
January 2016



Mindfulness Throughout The Day



Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

Happy New Year! All of us at Inner Explorer wish you the happiest and healthiest of New Years. We are thrilled to be partnering with you to support both you and your students in being happy, healthy educators and learners.

As you are aware, by using the program every day, you and your students are able to be in your lives more fully. Implementing mindfulness during the transitions in your school day can be extremely useful in enabling students to refocus after breaks like recess, lunch or passing periods. Even one minute of mindfulness can do this.

Many teachers have found that their students love leading the practice during these transition times. We will provide scripts in the classroom activity section of this email that either you or your students can use to begin implementing a minute of mindfulness. Once your students begin leading the practice, it can be very helpful to use the roster so you are not spending time choosing who gets to lead and so everyone begins buying into the practice. It's wise to let students pass if they are not comfortable leading, but eventually most will be and if you are using a mindful minute once or more in a day, you will get through the roster fairly quickly.

Practicing mindful awareness on a daily basis enables us to recognize emotions as they arise providing space between what we feel and what we do. Therefore, a daily practice which creates awareness helps us make better decisions. Connecting those dots for the students is a good practice and in some of our practices for younger students, we begin lessons that way.

Using mindful listening as a way into a short period of silent mindfulness practice can be quite helpful. Anything that makes a sustained sound can be used, a <u>rainstick</u>, <u>nature sounds</u>, <u>music</u> or a <u>bell</u> or <u>chime</u> can be used. The practice you conduct between transitions need not be long, a mindful minute will suffice and create smoother transitions for you and your students.

Finally, the more opportunities the students have to practice, the more easily it will be for them to call on their awareness when it is most needed.

Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

1. "I have the power to make wise choices." A lack of awareness may cause us to act on autopilot. How often have we said or done something we wish we could take back? Usually the reason for this is we are reacting to a difficult feeling. Recognizing that we have a choice in how we speak or behave provides us with the freedom to choose our words and actions.

Depending on the age of your kids, you can begin your minute of mindfulness asking the kids to put their hands on their hearts and to repeat "I have the power to make wise choices."

- 2. Host a discussion or give a writing assignment about when students have said or done something they wish they hadn't. Inquire as to why that had happened. What emotion or feeling might have gotten the better of your students which precipitated such words or actions? What got in the way better words or deeds? Ask students how mindfulness might help them make a better choice.
- 3. Use sound as a way to begin the minute of mindfulness. At least in the beginning, use the same sound each time so that the students' bodies and minds become accustomed to that sound. A rainstick, nature sounds, bell or chime will work. Have the students listen from the beginning of the sound until the end. Ask them to raise their hands when they can no longer hear the sound before you enter your minute of silence. You can use the same sound to end the session.
- 4. Using the Sharkfin to get ready to practice a minute of silence can be helpful for elementary school students. (Actually for all, but the older kids won't think this is cool). The Sharkfin is a short cut for five s's, and it quickly gets kids prepared to practice. The five s's are sitting up straight, sitting still, sitting silently, soft breathing and shut eyes. To do the Sharkfin, you put the side of hand on your forehead with your thumb touching your forehead and fingers, including the thumb touching each other and pointed upward towards the ceiling. Then you move your hand down your face, in front of your nose and say shhhh as your hand moves down. The Sharkfin can be used to get ready to practice but also to remind your students to pay attention. You can say to your students, let's do the Sharkfin, then listen to a sound, and then practice for a minute. Have a discussion about when it would be useful to do the Sharkfin. We have seen kids use it during tests to bring them to the present moment, when a teacher is lecturing, and even on sports fields.



5. Script you or students can use to lead a minute of mindfulness. For elementary school students.

Please do the Sharkfin. Please listen to the sound of the <u>rain</u>, <u>music</u>, <u>birds</u>, or whatever sound you choose to use. When you can't hear the sound, please raise your hand. Now let's practice mindful awareness (or let's focus on our breath) for _____minutes.

For Middle School or High School students you might want to do a brief mindful check-in. Here's a sample script.

Let's begin with our feet flat on the ground. Please sit in a comfortable but alert position with your

eyes closed. If you are uncomfortable closing your eyes, please cast your gaze downward.

Taking three deep breaths. (Wait for them to do that).

Moving the attention from the breath to the body, noticing any sensations that are present without needing them to change; tingling, pressure, tension, pain, temperature or maybe no sensations at all. (Wait 15 seconds).

Now moving the attention from the body to the mind and thoughts. Noticing what is happening in the mind – again, not needing it to be different. (Wait 15 seconds).

Finally shifting the attention to the emotional state – positive, neutral or difficult emotions, noticing whatever emotions are present without needing them to be different. (Wait 15 seconds).

Now, taking five slow deep breaths.

When you are ready, please open your eyes.

(This exercise may take up to two minutes. If you want to do something shorter, adapt the elementary script above. You can lengthen the exercise by changing 'taking five slow deep breaths' to we'll do mindful breathing for _____ minutes.)

PLEASE NOTE: You do not want to use mindfulness as a disciplinary activity. That said, it can be helpful to employ the Sharkfin, or have the students do 30 seconds of mindful breathing to calm down the room whenever needed, particularly if students get too loud or distracted while engaged in a project.

Neuroscience of Consistent Mindfulness Practice

(Adapted from Pam Nicholl's Integrating Three Parts of the Brain, based on Dan Siegel's Work)

What Fires Together, Wires Together

Donald Hebb, Canadian Neuropsychologist

When you are aware *that you are aware*, neurons from three parts of your brain connect. When the brain stem, limbic system and prefrontal cortex integrate in this way, your prefrontal cortex is activated.

The prefrontal cortex's activation and involvement in brain function are necessary for well-being. When the brain is observed on brain scans during mindfulness practice, the prefrontal cortex's activation can be seen. It is "lit up." It is this process of activation that leads to an integrated and regulated state in the practitioner. Through this activation, mindfulness cultivates the essential qualities of well-being.

"Integrated" means "brought together into a functioning whole." Another key word is "regulated," meaning "controlled and brought to the desired level." Integration of the three areas of the brain produces the best-regulated levels of physical, cognitive, and emotional activation.

Over time, with repeated activation, that integrated state becomes a *trait* – an enduring personal characteristic. This is a potential outcome of mindfulness practice.

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