

supporting our teachers

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publication

TESTING!



Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

Testing! Don't stop using Inner Explorer Now....Use it before all tests!

Well, most of us will be administering standardized tests in the very near future if we aren't already. This season can be particularly challenging because of the value that has been placed on the tests. We are aware that teachers who have worked so hard all year may be evaluated on how well students perform on these tests, despite a child being a good test taker or not, despite whatever difficulties a child may be facing that day or many days. Testing may be a significant burden and we empathize with you! The good news is that you can use mindfulness to help your kids do better on tests.

As someone who got mostly A's, but did horribly on standardized tests, I could have used the suggestions in the activities described below! I often share with students that I never really took tests, I just worried about taking them. I would be doing fine on a question and if the next question stumped me I'd flip out, even cry and not be able to do much on the rest of the test. Sound familiar to any of you? If so, let's try something different.

First, please don't skip Inner Explorer because you're testing. The best test prep out there may be mindfulness. Readiness to learn, as we have mentioned before, is more predictive of academic success than IQ! I've heard of teachers who use the program faithfully but stop during testing. Please don't! Your kids' biology is used to practicing and testing shouldn't interrupt that. If you need to speak to your administrators, please do so. Extend the testing period by ten minutes. Move recess a bit, but PLEASE don't take away this relaxation and focusing tool when they need it the most!

Reminding the students to practice mindful breathing for one or two minutes before a test will settle them down and prepare them to focus on what they are being asked. Ask them to put down their pencil and take five breaths if they feel nervous or confused about a question, which can help ease their nerves and tap into their knowledge. You can also encourage a "Shared Breathing Strategy" and prompt students to take deep breaths when you change the time on the board or at different time intervals. This will give you the opportunity to practice mindfulness while proctoring tests. The entire experience will become more relaxing and less anxious for everyone involved while enforcing a mentality that "we are all in this together... you are not alone."

Several research studies show that practicing mindfulness reduces test anxiety. A March 28, 2013 Scientific American article describes research at UC Santa Barbara which indicated that undergraduate **students who had practiced mindfulness four times a week for two weeks increased their GRE test scores by 16% points**, while a control group that studied nutrition did not improve their scores. They attribute that increase to less mind wandering while taking the exam. Other studies indicate similar results.

So, please keep using Inner Explorer on test-taking days! You'll be giving your students a leg-up!



Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

1. Hold a conversation. Ask students how they feel about studying for tests. Ask them how they feel about taking tests. Let as many students share as will. Ask them how they think mindfulness could help them when taking tests.

2. Have students take half of a practice test. Stop the test in the middle and ask them to practice mindful breathing for two minutes before taking the other half of the test. At the end of the test ask the students to share how they felt during the first half of the test and then during the second.

3. Teach your students the Sharkfin and encourage them to use it if they get nervous during a test. If your students are in preschool or elementary school, they may already know it. If you teach middle or high school, your students will not have been exposed to the Sharkfin. They may think it's weird but it works! We have seen lots of kids use it when taking tests. The Sharkfin helps us prepare to get ready to practice mindfulness; it is a shortcut for the 5 s's – sitting still, sitting silently, sitting straight, shut eyes and soft breathing. To do the Sharkfin, you put the side of your hand on your forehead with your thumb touching your forehead. Now move your hand down your face, in front of your nose. Say shhhh and close your eyes as your hand moves down.

As the teacher, demonstrate for your students taking a test, getting nervous, doing the Sharkfin, taking three deep breaths and continuing with the test.

4. Encourage students to practice doing their homework as if they were taking a test. Ask them to practice two to five minutes of breathing before they do homework. Have them report back whether or not they felt a difference in how long it took to do homework, or if it made a difference in how easy it was to do it.

5. Hold a discussion about when else it would be useful to use mindfulness before needing to do well. (ie sports, musical or drama performances, etc). If your students are on teams, encourage them to teach their teammates mindfulness.

6. Conduct a test taking visualization with your students. Make up your own or use this script. Imagine I am about to pass out the test. As I do so, close your eyes and begin to practice breathing. You take five mindful breaths, breathing in calm and relaxation, breathing out any nervousness or fear you may have about the test.

Imagine yourself picking up your pencil and holding it gently between your fingers. Take three more

breaths here.

Imagine yourself answering the first two problems. They are easy and you feel good. Now imagine that the third problem is a little confusing. Instead of getting nervous, you put down your pencil and take three more breaths, each time breathing in calm and breathing out the confusion.

You look at the problem again, and you decide to answer the problem or skip and return to it later. No biggie! The next problems are not hard for you and you feel good.

At the end of the test, if you had skipped a problem, you return to it, take a few calming breaths, then work on it. You do the best you can and finish the test.

You put down your pencil and feel good about how you did.

Have a discussion and ask the students if they were able to do as suggested in the visualization. Ask how they feel and if they can see themselves transferring this process to the real test.

Neuroscience Behind Test Taking

Behind each ear we have a structure in our brain that holds our memories. Each of these twins is called a hippocampus. Mindfulness increases the amount each hippocampus can hold. The more it can hold, the easier it is for us to remember and use what we learn. The anterior cingulate cortex allows us to focus on what we learn. The hippocampus and anterior cingulate cortex work together really well when practicing mindfulness which is a good thing for learning and for test taking!

SAVE YOUR TEACHER FRIENDS FROM TEST STRESS!

Now is a perfect time to tell other teachers about Inner Explorer! See details below for registering now.



Our contact information is:

430 Franklin Village Drive #325 Franklin, MA 02038

p. 888-466-9732

www.InnerExplorer.org