

Beyond The Program - Taking Care of Yourself 2017

You care for your students every day, but what do you do for yourself?

When you are with your students, you are undoubtedly in the present, you don't really have a choice when 20 – 30 kids are sitting in front of you looking for guidance and learning. However, when you are not in the classroom, where is your mind? Teachers are often preoccupied and for good reason. We are busy and have lots to do. Members of our families may be facing challenges. You may be affected by the distress of your students or new teacher contracts. With all the air space politics have taken up lately, perhaps that's on your mind.

Stressful thoughts can make a gigantic impact on our health and well-being. Without paying particular attention to them, thoughts and emotions can run our lives pouring stress hormones into our systems, wreaking havoc on our physiology; headaches, stomach aches, malaise, anxiety.

Good news! It doesn't have to be that way. In our preschool and elementary programs, we ask students to repeat, "I have the power to make wise choices." So do older students and adults. We can choose where to put our attention, but to do so means we need to break the habit of allowing our minds and emotions to control our moods and actions. By labeling what is happening, we can disrupt the habit of ruminating thoughts. For example, if you notice that your anger at a partner, child or friend is occupying your mind while you are engaged in conversations or activities that don't involve that person, label the emotion, "anger" and return to what you were doing. You may need to do it multiple times. Ultimately, you have the power to put your attention where you wish.

Being mindful of our thoughts is not easy, but our lives are so much richer when we live in the present instead of in our heads. So, if you can't sleep because you are concerned about your own child's college essay getting done, you can notice that and choose to think about something for which you are grateful. When you notice that you cannot stop reliving a conversation, you can choose to think about a fruitful conversation with a friend, colleague or family member. Perhaps you are having dinner with a few friends, but find yourself completely preoccupied with what you need to do for school the next day. When you notice that your attention has wandered, even if it happens 10 times, keep bringing yourself back to the conversation. And remember, mindfulness means no judgment, so don't get down on yourself when you notice your mind doing things you don't like. We guarantee that if you choose to live in the present instead of your head, you will be much happier and healthier.

May your 2017 be everything you want it to be!

The IE Team

ACTIVITIES ESPECIALLY FOR YOU!!!

This Month's Beyond the Program is Dedicated to Your Well-Being!

Choose a person with whom you communicate frequently on the phone. The next three times you converse with that person, keep a piece of paper handy and mark down with a hatch mark every time your mind wanders. When you notice your mind has wandered from the conversation, try to bring it back to the present moment.

The next time you have a meal alone, see if you can focus the entire time you are eating on what you are

consuming. Notice the color, texture and taste of each food you eat and see if you can keep your focus there while you are eating. Notice your level of hunger and fullness.

The next time you drive or walk to work, make an effort to notice your surroundings. See if you can find five things you have never noticed before.

On your route from your classroom to the office, see if you can pay attention to your process of walking, notice each step you take and notice what it feels like to pay attention in this way.

Choose one chore you don't enjoy. Maybe it's the dishes, cleaning the bathroom, or making your bed. For a week, make a commitment to be fully present for the chore. For example, if you are making your bed, notice yourself making it. Notice yourself tucking in a sheet, pulling on the bedspread, fluffing up a pillow. Feel the fabric. Listen for any sounds. Put your whole self into the effort and reflect on what you notice.