

Inner Explorer
Beyond The Program for Teachers
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supporting our
teachers

an  **inner** **EXPLORER**
publication

Mindfulness as a Means to Address Bullying



Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

Despite the proliferation of programs to address bullying, the behavior persists in schools all over the US and abroad. The continuous spate of senseless violence involving random shootings on campuses, in movie theaters, even in churches, often profiles the perpetrators as loners, individuals who may have felt alienated from others, sometimes victims of bullying themselves.

Many anti-bullying programs teach students about the bullying triad- victims, bullies and bystanders. First and foremost, they are taught bullying is bad. They are taught to stand up for themselves, not to hurt others and to do something to help when they witness others being bullied; all great advice, but not necessarily helpful in the "heat of the moment."

Knowing about bullying is simply not enough. To reduce bullying behavior, a gap needs to be bridged between what students know and what they do.

An important goal of Inner Explorer is to help students recognize and identify strong feelings as they arise, creating space between an emotional stimulus and one's response. That space allows students to respond rather than react to difficult situations. Through the practices, students learn that they have the power to make wise choices, especially when the going gets rough.

Let's take a peek at anger as an example. Practicing mindfulness each day enables students to feel and understand anger as it arises in them. They can recognize a quickening heartbeat, a flushed face, or hair rising on their arms. The awareness breaks the cycle of reactivity. Thus, choice is born.

By sensing into one's emotions, students are better able to regulate what might otherwise be an impulse on autopilot. Mindfulness helps all of us connect with our innate selves where kindness, compassion and empathy live.

When mindfulness is practiced daily, all three players in the bullying triad benefit. Bullies are able to recognize their own pain which may be causing them to lash out and hurt others. They learn to pause before acting, resulting in fewer incidences of bullying.

Through mindful practices students become more aware of who they are, their gifts, and capabilities. Over time, they become more confident and resilient. Practicing mindfulness shifts standard dynamics and students who may be targeted stop believing that they are worthy of being a target. Suffering in silence is no longer an option; these students often learn to seek help or stand up for themselves.

Ninety percent of bystanders think bullying is wrong but only 11% actually act to interrupt bullying when it occurs. Often they are afraid of getting bullied themselves. When practicing mindfulness, students become more empathetic and more inclined to stand up for others themselves or to seek help.

Mindfulness is taught in many prisons. It is not uncommon to hear inmates say that if they had known mindfulness as kids, adolescents, or young adults, their lives would have turned out differently.

Mindfulness helps all parties in the bullying triad gain skills of awareness, resilience and compassion which is why schools that utilize Inner Explorer report 50% fewer incidences of bullying.

Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

1. Discuss the bullying triad. Ask students how they think bullying arises and effects each person in the triad.

2. Many of us have played all three roles in the bullying triad at different times in our lives. Have a conversation about this and encourage students to describe bullying situations and the different roles kids play in those scenarios.

3. Ask students to identify three different situations in which they played each role in the triad at school or in camps, in their neighborhood, or in their homes with family.

4. Break students into groups of four or five. Ask them to role play different bullying situations. Ask them first to role play typical bullying situations. After they perform for the class, ask them or another group to reenact the situation using skills they have learned to not engage in bullying.

5. Have students make anti-bullying posters that can be posted around the school.

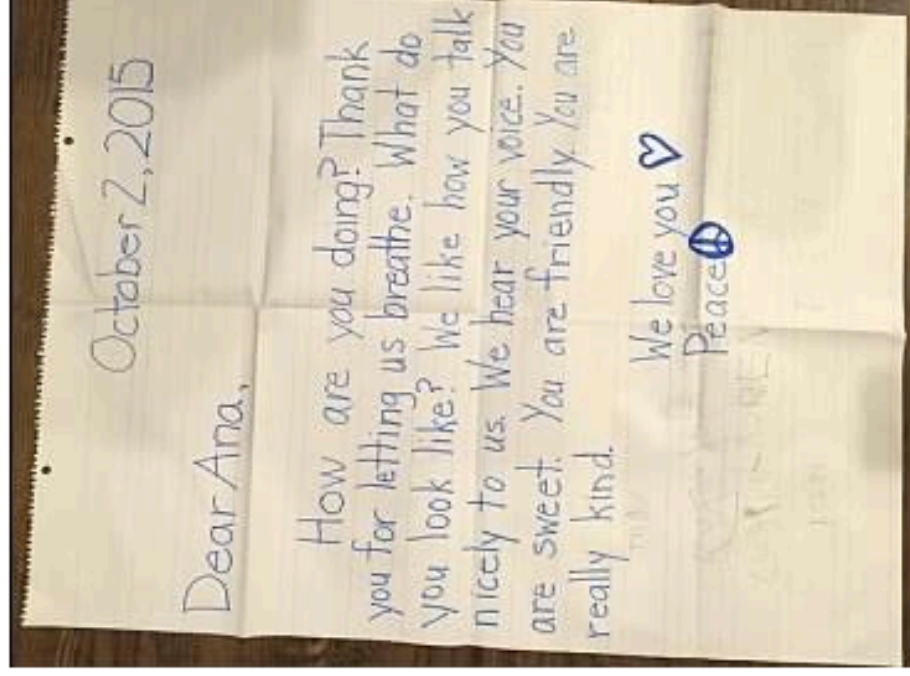
6. Have older students put presentations, skits and role plays together for younger students. (You can have kids make signs of each role and hang them on strings around the students' necks).

7. The Mosaic Project in Oakland, California discuss a conflict resolution approach: It's not me and you against each other; it's me and you against the problem. Explore this idea with your students, and discuss how this could assist in solving issues of bullying.

Neuroscience Behind Mindfulness & Bullying

Discomfort, anger, fear and desperation all cause stress hormones, adrenaline and cortisol to course through the body. When this happens the amygdala, the center for fight and flight in the brain is activated. That activation actually severs the connection between the prefrontal cortex (executive function) and hippocampus (explicit and autobiographical memory). As a result we can "flip our lids" and do things that don't make sense; things that aren't good for us or for others. Bullies may bully, fear may cause bystanders to act like deer in headlights and victims may remain passive when being targeted. When practicing mindfulness the part of the brain where compassion resides becomes more active, students become more empathetic and kind to each other making school environments less conducive to bullying.

PICTURES & STORIES



This letter was submitted to us by a kindergarten class from the Cutler School in Hamilton, MA. The children wrote a letter to Ana, the voice of the Inner Explorer program Exploring Me. The students love hearing Ana's voice every day and wanted to know more about her.

Please send your stories and pictures to Tabitha at totoole@innerexplorer.org.

(If you send a photo, we will need a completed consent form. [Click here to print the photo release form.](#))

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