



6 STEPS TO SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL CARE FOR COVID-19 AND BEYOND

By Natasha Ward

When a pandemic occurs, there are unknowns and uncertainties. For students, those unknowns create a need for social-emotional care and awareness. Without social-emotional care, students suffer from anxiety, sadness, lack of discipline in class, poor academic performance, and a lack of overall well-being (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). Research shows that social and emotional competencies assist in self-awareness, self-management, decision making, conflict resolution, empathy, and social awareness (Lawlor, 2016; Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). In schools, teachers are often the first line of defense for social-emotional care for students. When teachers allow students to express themselves through mindfulness, they foster social-emotional care. Mindfulness promotes well-being, resiliency, self-awareness, and attention for students (Lawlor, 2016).

The accepted definition of mindfulness comes from Kabat-Zinn, “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience mo-

Thank you to Go Noodle (gonoodle.com), a website that focuses on the whole child.

ment by moment” (Lawlor, 2016, p. 66). Magaldi and Park-Taylor (2016) assert that mindfulness practices mainly include most or all of the following components: breathing, visualization, acceptance, reflection, and movement.

Using the main mindful practices, here are six strategies to incorporate in an online or traditional classroom setting to support social-emotional well-being.

- 1. Journal through color.** Visualization assists with activity engagement, coping skills, and stress management (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). Set a 3–5-minute timer. Allow your students and yourself to journal. Encourage them to use markers, crayons, or colored pencils. Using just pen and pencil is also encouraged.
- 2. Ask questions creatively.** Consider these three questions: Which weather forecast best describes you? What color best describes your current emotional state? If you could be any animal right now, which one would you choose? Then, ask why. Allow the students the opportunity to visualize, think, reflect, and share.
- 3. Just breathe.** Breathing improves the student’s ability to remain calm and attentive, especially when stressed (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). Close your eyes. Place one hand over your stom-

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ach, and place the other hand over your heart. Inhale through your nose. Exhale through your mouth.

The app Stop, Breathe and Think Kids is a mindfulness app that you can use with the whole group or one-on-one with individual students as a way to set the tone for the day and to assist students in releasing stress and decreasing anxiety. Stop, Breathe and Think Kids includes a check-in with feelings and guided meditations. Also, for older students, the app Calm provides guided meditations, visualizations, and sounds to calm students and promote self-awareness.

4. Move. Movement reduces anxiety (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). Have a fun virtual, collaborative moment. Play charades with your students to encourage laughter. Do a moment of just wiggling around to promote movement and blow off steam in the classroom. Go Noodle (gonoodle.com) is a website that focuses on the whole child. It provides movement breaks for students and helps students move with purpose while improving attention span, academic performance, and behavior. It also includes breathing activities for students.

5. Give thanks. Do the 3-2-1 exercise.

Ask yourself or your students:

What are 3 things you are grateful for today?

What are 2 things that made you smile?

What is 1 thing that you will do for yourself?

6. Accept. Acceptance improves well-being, mental health, and self-control (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). Tell students, “It’s okay not to be okay.” Give space verbally, in writing, or through drawing for them to share their thoughts and feelings.

After you complete each one of the six activities, debrief with the students. Give them a choice to share with the class or to pass on the opportunity. Ask the students some of the following questions:

How was that for you?

What are you feeling?

What are you thinking?

Would you like to share any of your work from the activity?

Can you explain to us what you drew/wrote/felt?

Overall, mindfulness allows teachers to provide more social–emotional care for their students. By incorporating mindfulness, students exert self-control and conscious awareness, reduce anxiety, heighten empathic awareness, promote acceptance, and increase attention span (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). When used in an online or traditional classroom setting, mindfulness provides social–emotional support for both students and teachers. It helps students become more aware of themselves and their surroundings, so they can express themselves and enjoy learning during this pandemic. 🍎

References

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