

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS



Central Michigan District Health Department

CMDHD - January 2022



- **Teacher Resource Page**
- **Classroom Activities**
- **Meditation Exercises**
- **Writing Prompts**

TEACHER RESOURCE PAGE

Links provided below are available for teachers, staff, and administrators for classroom exercises, lesson plans, and ideas for classroom materials. These resources are intended to increase education and materials while also cultivating spaces for teachers and students to develop whole health needs

Socio-Emotional Learning

- Reach Out
 - o Student resources to address bullying, transitions, friendships, mental health, resilience, respectful relationships, social media, study stress
 - o Reach Out webpage click [HERE](#)
- Harmony & Inspire
 - o “The Harmony Online Learning Portal provides PreK-6th grade teachers with everything they need to successfully integrate Harmony’s social-emotional learning program into the classroom, including training, lessons, activities, videos, stories, games, and songs.”
 - o “The Inspire Online Learning Portal provides free, on-demand professional development modules and resources to help teachers improve their practice and encourage Pre-K through 12th grade students to become enthusiastic, engaged learners.”
 - o Can register for both on the same site for all administrators:
 - My Learning Portal to register click [HERE](#)
- Michigan Department of Education
 - o State socio-emotional learning recommendations, statistics, and resources for K-12. (Assessment resources expected in early 2022)
 - o To go directly to their website click [HERE](#)

Mental Health Resources

- Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
 - o MHTTCN website with resources click [HERE](#)
 - o Trainings, Resources, and COVID-19 Resources
 - Anxiety related to returning to Work/School
 - Grief, Loss, and Bereavement
 - School Mental Health
 - Racial Equality and Diversity

Support for Teachers

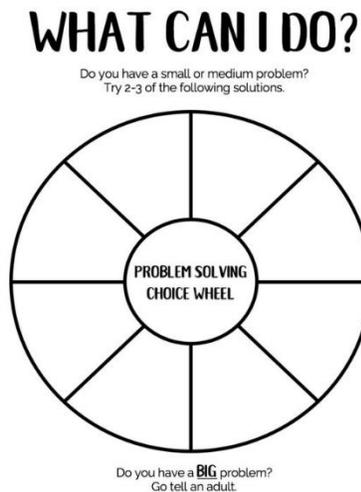
- Michigan “STAY WELL” Support Group for Teachers
 - o To get connected click [HERE](#)
- “Not Waiting for Superman”
 - o Identifying healthy mental wellness skills for teachers
 - o Reminders to help cultivating healthy daily practice
 - o Online website resources click [HERE](#)
- Webinars/Mental Health Resources for Teachers
 - o To see new and old mental health webinars click [HERE](#)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Classroom activities are active ways which help create community in the classroom. These activities can be for individuals or can be shared as a group.

1. Problem-Solving Wheel

The problem-solving wheel gives visual context and record of ideas. This wheel allows you to explore with your students and each other what option may be best to address difficulties as they arise.



Benefits

Benefits include:

- Encouraging problem solving skills for large and small problems
- Increasing understanding of various ideas and exploring consequences of their actions

Duration

It is recommended to take 10-15 minutes for this activity inclusive to group discussion. In lieu of group discussion writing prompts can be used.

How to Apply

1. Print off [worksheet](#) or have the individuals draw a circle in the middle of a blank page
2. Write or draw the problem in the circle
3. If making without worksheet, have everyone draw a minimum of 4-5 lines from the circle.
4. In each section draw or write different solutions to the problem in the circle
 - a. No solution is a “bad solution” Accept all ideas.
5. Discuss each solution and discuss what would be the best option and why

Note: This project can be done in a group if noticing a problem in your classroom such as interrupting, throwing paper, difficulty listening, etc. This allows the students to be an active participant in the solution and helps develop behavior modification plans.

2. Handprint (Teen & Older)

This activity builds on understanding self and differences in every individual story. It will require two pieces of paper and desired drawing materials (crayons, markers, paint, pencils, etc.).



Benefits

By drawing the past and the future, individuals identify meaningful life events from the past as well as looking at goal setting. This allows students to set future-focused ideas, helps fight depression and can lead to motivation behind behavior change.

Duration

This activity will last about 15 minutes with prep time. However, activity has the potential to last up to an hour with discussion and age group.

How to Apply

1. Take a blank piece of paper and have the individual trace their own hand using a writing utensil.
2. One hand will represent the past, the other will represent the future. Have each student identify which prior to starting.
3. After identifying each hand have them complete the following:
 - a. Past: use words and images to identify areas in the past which are meaningful to them.
 - b. Future: use words or images to identify things you would like to see in your future or have happen in the future.
4. Find a partner or discuss as a group the important pieces of each.

Note: For older age groups, this can be helpful for writing prompts, psychology classes, and sociology classes to discuss impact. Feel free to use these for subject related areas as well. For example: Environment (climate change, growth, etc.), History (things that happened in American history during their lifetime; things they want to see as they get older)

Additional Ideas



For more activities to help kids explore their feelings or find ways to increase emotional healthy alongside your existing lesson plans, please continue looking here:

- **We Are Teachers**
 - o Eight different activities that can be supplementary to lesson plans or easy space fillers for students can be found [here](#).
- **Expressive Art Inspirations**
 - o Over 100 ideas which are based on need (feeling identification, relaxation, etc.) can be found [here](#).
- **Family Therapy Basics- Kids with Anxiety**
 - o Sensory friendly ideas you can use for kids with anxiety (may benefit students with ADHD and Autism) can be found [here](#).
 - o Uses alternatives such as books, stress balls, and “toolboxes.”

MEDITATION EXERCISES

1. Shark Fin Breathing Exercise

You can start teaching mindfulness in the classroom with this easy exercise. It's also one of the fun mindfulness activities for kindergarten.

Benefits

Shark Fin breathing exercises are perfect for facilitating calmness quickly and spontaneously and for helping kids sort out their thoughts and feelings while relaxing the body. It helps focus on the "now." You can also use it as a warm-up before longer mindfulness activities for students.

Duration

This exercise will take 2 minutes at most. We told you it was quick.

How to Apply

1. Students can sit down on a chair, floor or comfortable surface, and close their eyes.
2. Tell them to place their thumb on their forehead with their other fingers pointing to the sky like a shark fin. Their palm should be looking towards their side.
3. They should take a deep breath and move their hand slowly down from their forehead to their chest, keeping the 5-S's in mind:
 - Sit straight
 - Still
 - Silent
 - Soft breathing
 - Shut eyes
4. Breathe in and out a few more times.
5. They can open their eyes; encourage them to notice how they feel.

2. Mindful Breathing Colors Exercise

Mindful breathing colors exercise is one of the creative mindfulness techniques for the classroom.

Benefits

Children will calm down and let go of their unhealthy thoughts and feelings. It will also help them overcome anxiety and reduce stress.

Duration

This exercise will take 5 minutes.

How to Apply

1. Ask students to assign colors to their feelings. First, start with a relaxing positive color.
2. Then, ask them to think of a color that represents stress, sadness, or anger, or whichever of those emotions is most relevant or suitable for your students' age group etc.
3. Students start mindful breathing. When they breathe in, they imagine inhaling the relaxing color and visualize it filling their lungs.
4. When they breathe out, they imagine exhaling the stress, sadness, or anger color out of their body.

3. Mindful Breathing Exercise

Mindful breathing exercises are another example of quick mindfulness activities for the classroom.

Benefits

Mindful breathing enables students to be present, improve their concentration and sort out their feelings.

Duration

This exercise is one of the 5-minute classroom mindfulness activities.

How to Apply

1. Students can choose either standing or sitting for this activity.
2. Ask students to put both their hands on their belly. If you want, you can give out small wooden blocks or similar items to place on their belly as well.
3. Students can close their eyes, stare at the ceiling or look down to their hands.
4. Guide students in taking three slow deep breaths in and out to see if they can feel their hands or the object on their belly moving with the air flowing through their bodies.
5. You may like to count for each breath. Count “one” when inhaling, “two” while exhaling. Count “three” with another breath in and “four” with the following breath out.
6. Complete counting after 5 minutes. You may want to set up a timer to keep track of time.

Encourage students to think about how the breath feels. It is important that they only focus on breathing and that their minds don't wander off during the exercise.

4. Mindful Body Scan Exercise

Such ideas for mindfulness in the classroom are perfect to practice in class because students can take them home. Better yet, ask them to teach their parents the mindfulness exercises they learn in class.

Benefits

Need a time out? Mindful body scans help children relax, focus on bodily sensations, and calm their minds. It is also one of the exercises that are perfect before bedtime.

Duration

This exercise takes about 10 minutes.

How to Apply

1. Students should lie on the floor, with their hands and arms placed slightly apart from their bodies. It is better if they close their eyes, but it's okay if they prefer to look at the ceiling instead.
2. Encourage students to pay attention to their feet for 5 to 10 seconds.
3. Tell them to move their focus on to their toes, then ankles, then calves and knees. Continue focusing on each body part until you reach the head.
4. Ask your students how each part of the body feels to bring their awareness to their bodies and to the moment.
5. If they feel any tightness or stress, tell them to imagine breathing the stress out of that part of the body with each exhale.

You may ask questions like “**How do your arms feel?**” or “**Are your hands cold or warm?**” to draw the students' attention to the body scan and amplify the benefits of mindfulness for children.

5. Mindful Eating Exercise

It's snack time! This is one of the mindfulness strategies for the classroom that helps us notice how mindlessly we do things. You will be able to teach them that it is better to savor and enjoy a bar of chocolate instead of gobbling it in less than a minute.

This exercise is best for 3rd graders and up. Be careful with foods that are choking hazards and beware of allergies.

Benefits

Mindful eating can combat overeating as it helps us realize how much and what exactly we eat. It allows focusing on the flavors and tastes of different foods and noticing what effects different foods have on how our bodies feel. It also builds the capacity for stillness and mindful focus.

Duration

Mindful eating exercises take about 5 minutes.

How to Apply

1. First, choose your food. A piece of candy or chocolate, a small fruit like grapes or strawberry, or a raisin will do. Be sure that none of your students are allergic to your choice of food.
2. Have the students put the food in their mouths. The key is that they can't chew it or swallow it.
3. Have them savor the flavor. Can they feel the aroma released in their mouths while they breathe?
4. For three minutes, students should focus on the candy melting in their mouths slowly or the raisin watering their mouths.
5. After 5 minutes is up, they can chew and swallow.

Mindfulness is about being present, so if their thoughts drift away, tell them to simply bring them back to the candy.

If you would like more meditation exercises for your classroom, these exercises and more can be found [here](#).

WRITING PROMPTS

Writing prompts encourage students to look at their mental health through internal promptings and self-awareness skill.

Ideas for writing prompts (even simple writing prompts can have meaningful impacts on various age groups):

- 1. Explain your day (or a part of your day) in extreme detail.**
 - a. Explain other's expressions, your surroundings, and how you felt.
- 2. Describe a goal.**
 - a. Why do you want to achieve this goal?
 - b. What are steps you need to take to get to this goal?
 - c. What is the timeline to achieve this goal?
 - d. What are things that may make it difficult or keep you from this goal?
- 3. Write a letter to your future or past self.**
 - a. What is important for them to know?
 - b. What do you want them to remember?
 - c. Is there anything you would like to see changed or to know about?
- 4. Describe yourself to a stranger.**
 - a. What are qualities you like about yourself?
 - b. What are things you can do?
 - c. What things have you accomplished?
 - d. What are things you like and dislike?
 - e. What is important for them to know about you?
- 5. Who is someone that is important in your life?**
 - a. Why are they important?
 - b. How would you describe them to someone who hasn't met them?
- 6. What is something that makes you feel cared about?**
 - a. Explain it in detail.
 - b. What about it makes you feel cared about?
- 7. What does the word "safety" mean to you?**
 - a. How do you incorporate this into your daily life?
 - b. Who helps you feel safe?
 - c. What actions make you feel safe?
 - d. Are there objects that help you feel or keep you safe?

***This is something that can be used even with small age groups and can encourage conversations of boundaries and supporting healthy relationships.