



MINDFULLY CREATING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

"When we believe it's possible, then we can help students believe it's possible."

— Sandra Y. McGuire

OVERVIEW

A brief practice that involves recalling and focusing your attention on the emotional experience associated with helping a student in order to recognize and understand your emotional patterns

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year, but especially at the beginning of the year to cultivate positive relationships with students
- To foster a positive relationship with a student who is having a challenging time or with whom you're having a difficult time creating a connection
- During a staff training

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

MATERIALS

- None

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Teachers will:

- Cultivate awareness of their emotional experiences as a teacher by visualizing and noticing how it feels to help a student

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

If you're leading this exercise with a group of teachers, take a moment to visualize a student you have helped in the past. What happened? How did it feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

- Memory is a powerful tool for mindfully exploring one's emotional experience and for learning to recognize and understand one's emotional patterns, or our habitual emotional responses to events.
- This reflection activity is a skill-building practice that involves recalling and focusing one's attention on the emotional experience associated with helping a student. It is intended to help teachers tune in to how they and their students feel when they respond to students' needs.

THE PRACTICE

- *Think about a student you are trying to help. Perhaps she is struggling with school in some way, or maybe he has problems getting along with his peers.*
- *Most likely there are many children you are trying to help in some way.*
- *For the purposes of this exercise, choose just one.*
- *See if you can bring a picture of this child to mind.*

- *Try to recall as many details as you can about the way he or she looks and dresses.*
- *Once you have recalled this student, sit in a comfortable, mindful posture and focus your attention on your breathing.*
- *Feel the gentle breath filling your lungs with air. Feel the warm air exit as you exhale.*
- *Next, see if you can recall a specific point in time, a situation when you did something to help this child.*
- *Try to recall details about the situation.*
- *Next, imagine that you are back in that situation again with this student, helping him or her.*
- *Notice how you feel as you help this student.*
- *Notice any bodily sensations. You may notice a sense of temperature or color. You may also feel different sensations in various parts of your body.*
- *Now spend a few minutes writing down what happened and how you felt.*

CLOSURE

- If doing this practice with a group, invite participants to share what this experience was like for them. What, if anything, did they learn about themselves and their emotional patterns when working with students?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice a shift in how teachers relate to students after engaging in this practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Studies have found that teachers who practice mindfulness may experience an increase in [awareness](#), [focused attention](#), and [working memory capacity](#)—all of which can help them to become more intentional in the kinds of relationships they build with their students.

And decades of research show that for students from pre-K to 12, positive student-teacher relationships increase [engagement](#), [motivation](#), [prosocial](#)—kind and helpful—behavior, and [academic achievement](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The [teacher-student relationship](#) is at the heart of teaching. Indeed, students do better when their teacher cares about them.

The impact of this relationship has long-lasting effects, as well. Conflict-ridden relationships with teachers in kindergarten [predict](#) worse grades, work habits, and discipline problems into late elementary or even middle school—thus pointing to the importance of fostering healthy relationships early on, especially with students who struggle with being successful in school.

SOURCE

Adapted from *Mindfulness for Teachers* by Patricia A. Jennings. Copyright © 2015. Published by W. W. Norton.
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