



**Greater Good in Education**  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## SELF CHECK-IN JOURNAL

*"A highly developed values system is like a compass. It serves as a guide to point you in the right direction when you are lost."*

— Idowu Koyenikan

### OVERVIEW

Use a values-informed reflective process to help students make ethical decisions with open-mindedness, integrity, and fairness—responding in a meaningful and responsible manner.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To help students identify areas of personal growth
- To teach students how to make ethical decisions
- When you know your students are going through a difficult situation or will have to make a major decision
- Any time

#### TIME REQUIRED

- <15 minutes

#### LEVEL

- College
- High school
- Middle School

#### MATERIALS

- Journal
- Pencil/Pen

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Reflect on a challenging situation or decision they are trying to make
- Identify changes that they can make
- Consider others' perspectives

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think of a challenging situation you are trying to work through or a decision you are trying to make. Then, choose one question set from the list below and respond in writing.
- Did your perspective on the situation shift? Did your response bring up any additional questions to explore? Based on your reflection, are there any changes you can make in your life? If applicable, commit to making one change in your life.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### OVERVIEW

Introduce students to the practice of reflection as a way to engage moral character through decision making that is human-centered and considers new perspectives.

- Ask students to take time for reflection at least once every quarter of the school year.
- Begin by asking students to think of a challenging situation they are trying to work through or a decision they are trying to make. Then, ask students to choose one set from the sets of questions below and write about it.
- Remind students to be honest in their responses as this reflection is for them, and it is meant to help them grow as individuals.
- Next, have students review what they wrote and consider the following questions: Has your perspective on the situation shifted? Did your response bring up any additional questions to explore? Based on your reflection, are there any changes you can make in your life? If applicable, commit to making one change in your life.

- Have students share out loud whether they found the reflection process helpful. If so, why? If not, why not?
- One step further: If it's comfortable for them, encourage students to ask teachers or peers for input in order to broaden their perspective.

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#### QUESTION SET 1

- What is my mission or vision?
- How am I aligning my choices with my mission or vision?
- *Possible use:* when deciding how much time to spend studying or what college to apply to

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#### QUESTION SET 2

- What are my values?
- How are my values reflected in my decisions?
- *Possible use:* when deciding whether to go along with your friends' idea for how to spend the evening

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#### QUESTION SET 3

- What are my biases?
- Do I acknowledge the bias I bring to this situation, or am I taking action to remove that bias?
- *Possible use:* when deciding which students you want to get to know better or when voting for a class representative

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#### QUESTION SET 4

- What do others need from me in this situation?
- How might I contribute in a way that is fair, equitable, and just?
- *Possible use:* when working on a group project

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#### QUESTION SET 5

- What emotions am I feeling?
- How are my emotions in this situation connected to my values?
- *Possible use:* Possible use: when you feel stressed or overwhelmed at school

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#### QUESTION SET 6

- How am I practicing (and encouraging the practice of) love and care?
- What are the consistent opportunities and practices that I set in place that encourage the development of authentic relationships?
- *Possible use:* when making a decision about a school club you help lead or a group you are a part of

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#### QUESTION SET 7

- How am I being empathetic towards myself and others?
- How can I support others in connecting with their identity and interests?
- *Possible use:* when responding to peers who are going through a challenging time

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did students respond to this reflection process? How might you help students cope with any challenging emotions that arise during their reflection?
- Have you noticed any positive changes in your student's behavior after engaging in this activity?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Research](#) suggests that deliberate reflection can strengthen moral character, particularly by increasing individuals' practice of humility. [Deliberate reflection](#) also encourages the practice of self-correction and acknowledgement of biases that may influence behavior. Thus, deliberate reflection helps lay a foundation for engaging in more honest and fair behavior.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Adolescents are often faced with multiple decisions and a variety of pressures, which can make it difficult to navigate their next steps. Intentional reflection helps to cultivate practical wisdom, the skill that helps us to know and do good in the right way. This is a useful tool for adolescents who are learning how to manage growing independence while becoming responsible adults. Reflecting on question sets like these can help students make more ethical decisions that cultivate a safer and more welcoming learning environment.

## SOURCE

[Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College Principled Innovation](#), Arizona State University