

# Mindfulness Activities Appendix



## Toolkit wellness practices

Each section has a recommended wellness practice aligned to the content of that section, and yet you may find that it does not seem suitable for yourself or the group you are working with. Below are all of the wellness activities found in the toolkit and you may choose to use what feels right. Additionally, there are more 'traditional' mindfulness practices listed as well as resources regarding accessible mindfulness practices.

### Section 1: Compassion In Action

Today we are talking about compassion. To help us become present in the space, we will take a moment to ground ourselves. Please place both feet on the floor, hands comfortably in your lap, and take three slow and deep breaths. Think of one thing that you have on your mind that you'd be able to set aside in order to be present with us today.

### Section 2: What Are We Talking About?

Most of us want to move through our world with a compassionate presence. And many of us would benefit from gentle reminders to include ourselves within the circle of our own good care. One way to sustain our compassion for others is to fill our own essential emotional tank by giving ourselves the very same care and kindness we give to others; that's self-compassion. The next time you feel like you have fallen short of your own expectations, or you have made a mistake and difficult emotions arise, pause and try this short exercise. Say the following phrases to yourself as a reminder to practice self-compassion:

*May I give myself the space and time to feel my difficult emotions when I believe I have not measured up.*

*May I be gentle with myself and recognize that all humans are imperfect, including me.*

*May I remember that I am not alone, I am part of humanity.*

*May I speak to myself with the kindness I would to others.*

*May I begin to forgive myself for my actions or inactions.*

*May I reach out to others for understanding and love when weighed down by shame.*

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## Section 3: Compassion Fatigue, Connections to Trauma, Stages, and Assessments

Often our compassion resilience relies on our ability to step back from negative encounters. Try this 5-step mindfulness exercise when you are with someone you serve, a colleague, or family member and feelings of compassion seem out of reach. Do it discreetly. We will practice by asking you to bring to mind someone who is a little difficult for you to be with at times. Eventually, you can use this to bring yourself out of a place of judgment in a tough interaction with another person. With your attention geared toward the other person, tell yourself:

*Just like me, this person is seeking happiness in their life.*

*Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in their life.*

*Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness, and despair.*

*Just like me, this person is seeking to fill their needs.*

*Just like me, this person is learning about life.*



## Section 4: Systems Drivers of Compassion Fatigue

**(Pair share)** What are you doing when you feel most alive — most like yourself? After 2 minutes, bring the group back and discuss these points:

- Raise your hand if you shared a situation of being at work (most will not).
- Think about what that means for how well we know our colleagues.
- Think of when you feel most alive at work.
- When you go home from your workday, do you have a tendency to share what happened in your day that left you feeling most alive or what was most draining?
- Our bodies experience the stress we relive in our conversations to some degree as if we were experiencing it again. Sharing the hard parts of our day may be needed to be understood and validated. We can become aware of when it moves from helpful to hurtful. We have a choice about how much time, and on what, we focus on when talking about our work. One practice to play with is to include what made you feel most alive in your day as you talk with friends and family.

## Section 5: Expectations from Self and Others

Please place both feet on the floor, hands comfortably in your lap and take three slow deep breaths. Think of a place that brings you peace and calm. What do you see when you are thinking about this place? What do you hear as you think of this place? What do you smell? Take another moment to really visualize yourself in this place. When you are ready, open your eyes or bring your gaze back to the circle.

## Section 6: Compassionate Boundary Setting to Build Compassion Resilience

Get into a position where both soles of your feet are on the ground and firmly connected. Either lower your gaze or close your eyes. Take a couple of breaths at your regular pace. Bring your awareness to the soles of your feet, as though you've never felt your feet before; getting really curious about what your feet feel like. Notice the connection of the soles of your feet to your shoes, to the ground, to the bare earth; noticing any sensations in your feet. Notice what happens inside the rest of your body as you do this exercise. What do you feel? When you are ready, open your eyes and come back to the group. Your feet can serve as a great opportunity for mindfulness throughout your day.

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## Section 7: Staff Culture

Distribute, discuss, and practice [Healthy Break Activities](#). Explain that the URL offers an option to have tips emailed to you daily. Pick one for the whole group to practice, or divide group into smaller groups and have small groups select one behavior to practice. Review list ahead of time, some of the behaviors will not be appropriate for your setting.

## Section 8: Wellness and Resilience Strategies – Mind

**Share:** Throughout the toolkit, we've been invited to practice mindful self-awareness. Our ability to be present and focused in the moment is a skill needed in all areas of our wellbeing. In this case, mindfulness helps us to recognize meaning in our work and exercise organization in our life.



**Explain:** We are going to transition into a mindfulness activity. Mindfulness involves focusing our attention on the present and noticing our thoughts and feelings with an attitude of acceptance. The goal of mindfulness is to be fully present with our emotions (HEART), with others (HEART), with our bodies (STRENGTH), with our environment (MIND), and with the universe (SPIRIT) (Davidson, 2012); therefore, mindfulness is a key skill that will form a foundation for building our compassion resilience in all four sectors of the wellness compass. We will practice doing a body scan, which is an internal practice designed to train your mind to be more present. Lead your group in a body scan by following the directions below.

### *Body scan directions:*

- Find a comfortable posture with your feet on the floor and your back erect. You may sit or stand and close your eyes or look at the ground.
- Now find your breath, typically most apparent in your nose, chest, or stomach. Give your attention to your breathing and attune to it with curiosity.
- Do not worry about your mind wandering, just gently bring it back to focus on the sensation of breathing.
- Notice how breathing nourishes your body even when you are not paying attention to it.
- Feel your whole body breathe, gently moving with the rise and fall of your breath. Try to pay attention to at least 5 breathing cycles.
- Now, release your breath and allow everything that comes into awareness to just be as it is.

## Section 9: Wellness and Resilience Strategies – Spirit

Guide participants through a grounding exercise. Ask them to sit with both feet on the floor, backs straight but relaxed and away from the back of the chair, palms on knees, and eyes either closed or softly open. If eyes are open, it is helpful to focus on the circle centerpiece. In a calm and soothing voice, guide them to relax their minds and bodies. Ask them to quiet their minds by simply noticing when thoughts come into their minds and allow them to leave without attention to them. Guide them to relax their bodies from head to toe, one area of their bodies at a time.

## Section 10: Wellness and Resilience Strategies – Strength

Ask participants to get into a comfortable position, take a few breaths, and focus in on this one activity. Take time to enjoy this article, [Why it's so hard for teachers to take care of themselves \(and 4 ways to start\)](#).

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## Section 11: Wellness and Resilience Strategies – Heart

**Share:** Practicing being grateful, among many other benefits, increases your energy. It turns out that our minds are wired to focus on the negative as a survival strategy. The three good things practice helps rewire your brain to notice the good in your life. Research shows writing them down has a longer positive effect on your wellbeing.

**(Individual reflection)** Write on your index card three things for which you are grateful and what role you had in them?

## Section 12: Building Compassion-based Relationships with Caregivers

Putting self-check ([Compassionate Action Steps](#)) to practice:

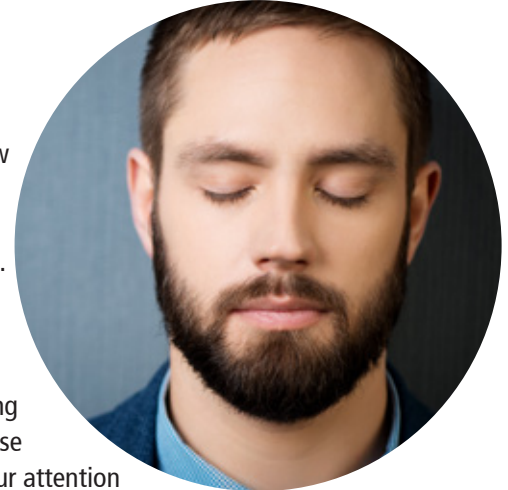
1. Practice a grounding activity that can be used prior to meeting with a student’s caregiver. Select from any of the grounding activities from previous circle agendas.
2. Choose one of four essential core beliefs for family engagement as an affirmation to hold in your mind as you do the grounding activity.
  - Families and teachers are equal partners.
  - The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnership among teachers, home, and community rests primarily with the organization’s staff, including leadership.



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## Other Mindfulness Practices

**A. Visualization scripts:** Read the following scripts out loud to participants. Allow time for participants to follow the directions before moving forward.



- 1. Passengers on the bus** – Find yourself in a comfortable seated position. You may close your eyes if you'd like or allow your gaze to fall just in front of you. Turn your attention toward your breath and pay attention to the thoughts that come to your mind. Begin to visualize yourself in the driver's seat of a bus as all the passengers are noisily chattering, being critical, or shouting. Sometimes, your own thoughts may feel just like these passengers. You can allow the passengers to shout, and you can keep your attention focused on the road ahead. You can allow your thoughts to just be as you turn your focus back to your breath. Take three slow breaths and when you feel ready, bring your attention back to the space you occupy.
- 2. The river** – Find yourself in a comfortable seated position. You may close your eyes if you'd like or allow your gaze to fall just in front of you. Turn your attention toward your breath and pay attention to the thoughts that come to your mind. Begin to visualize yourself sitting on a riverbank. Bring to mind what you might feel, see, and hear as you watch the river. What might you see floating in the river? Perhaps leaves, branches, or bits of mucky debris. Let those things represent your thoughts and watch for a moment as they float on by. Instead of struggling to stay afloat, we can stand talk on the bank watching our thoughts, images, and sensations pass us by.
- 3. The mountain** – Find yourself in a comfortable seated position. You may close your eyes if you'd like or allow your gaze to fall just in front of you. Turn your attention toward your breath and pay attention to the thoughts that come to your mind. Begin to visualize a mountain, standing tall against the horizon. Notice what feelings arise for you as you begin to visualize the mountain's strength and size. Keep the image of the mountain in mind as you bring your attention back to your breath. Whatever the weather, or whatever happens on the surface of the mountain, and even within it — the mountain stands firm, mostly unaffected. Strong, grounded, permanent. We can be like the mountain, observing thoughts, feelings, and sensations and yet know inner stillness.
- 4. The weather** – Find yourself in a comfortable seated position. You may close your eyes if you'd like or allow your gaze to fall just in front of you. Turn your attention toward your breath and pay attention to the thoughts that come to your mind. As those thoughts come to mind, visualize them as clouds in the sky. Whatever those clouds may do — rain, provide shade, sleet, or snow, they move past. We cannot control the weather, so we have to learn to adapt to it. We can put a coat on for instance, but we cannot stop the wind or rain, and it would be foolish to try. Regardless of what we do, the storm will pass. Our thoughts and feelings are like the weather. They come and go. We cannot control or stop them, but we can watch it pass with a raincoat prepared.

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**B. Mindful sensory awareness script:** Find a comfortable position. Staying in this position, listen to the questions below, listening for your response after each question. If you do not have a recording of these questions, you can make one for yourself (or ask a friend to make one), recording each question with about 5 seconds in between.

1. Can you feel your hair touching your head?
2. Can you feel your belly rising and falling as you breathe?
3. Can you feel the space between your eyes?
4. Can you feel the distance between your ears?
5. Can you feel your breath touching the back of your eyes while you inhale?
6. Can you picture something far away?
7. Can you notice your arms touching your body?
8. Can you feel the bottoms of your feet?
9. Can you imagine a beautiful day at the beach?
10. Can you notice the space within your mouth?
11. Can you notice the position of your tongue in your mouth?
12. Can you feel a breeze against your cheek?
13. Can you feel how one arm is heavier than the other?
14. Can you feel a tingling or numbness in one hand?
15. Can you feel how one arm is more relaxed than the other?
16. Can you feel a change in the temperature in the air around you?
17. Can you feel how your left arm is warmer than the right?
18. Can you imagine how it would feel to be a rag doll?
19. Can you notice any tightness in your left forearm?
20. Can you imagine something very pleasant?
21. Can you imagine what it would feel like to float on a cloud?
22. Can you imagine what it would feel like to be stuck in molasses?
23. Can you picture something far away?
24. Can you feel a heaviness in your legs?
25. Can you imagine floating in warm water?
26. Can you notice your body hanging on your bones?
27. Can you allow yourself to drift lazily?
28. Can you feel your face getting soft?
29. Can you imagine a beautiful flower?
30. Can you feel how one arm and leg are heavier than the other?

**C. Mindful listening script**

1. Invite participants to find a comfortable seated position, and close their eyes if they feel comfortable.
2. Share that the following exercise focuses on mindful listening.
3. After turning on the music, ask participants to listen as they normally would.
4. After a minute or two of listening, ask participants to turn their focus to the strings section. Focus on that part of the music only. Be mindful of the strings. Can you distinguish between the sounds of the different string instruments?

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5. Now sift your attention to a different instrument section (horns, percussion, woodwinds). Again, first listen for the entire section, and then see if you can distinguish between the different instruments. It is okay to simply note the different sounds.
6. Do you notice anything happening as you shift your focus back and forth between the different instruments? Do you start to focus on the sound of only one instrument? Experiment by shifting your focus back and forth.
7. Finally, bring the entire piece of music back into focus. Be mindful of all the instruments playing at the same time. Do you find yourself noticing certain sounds more than others? Can you hear all the different instruments, while listening to the piece as a whole? What happens when you listen to the whole piece? Does it change into different, bigger sound? Pay attention to how you react to the music.
8. Turn down the music and ask participants to return their attention to their breath and to rejoin the group when they feel ready.

## D. Mindful appreciation script

1. The point of this exercise is to simply give thanks and appreciate the seemingly insignificant things in life; the things that support our existence but rarely get a second thought amidst our desire for bigger and better things. For example, electricity powers your kettle, the postman delivers your mail, your clothes provide warmth, your nose lets you smell the food in the kitchen, your ears let you hear the birds in the tree.
2. Exercise:
  - a. Find a relaxed sitting position.
  - b. You can do this exercise with eyes closed or open.
  - c. Think about one thing in your life that usually goes unappreciated (stop for 30 seconds to let people pick their choice.)
  - d. Try to bring to mind the thing of your choice, whether it's electricity, your thumb, or a person. Observe it with openness and awareness. Try to be aware when you start judging or evaluating the thing that you choose.
  - e. I'm going to ask a series of questions. You don't need to answer these questions out loud (stop for about 30 seconds between questions):
    - Do you know how this thing/process came to exist, or how it really works?
    - Have you every properly acknowledged how this thing benefits your life and the lives of others?
    - Have you ever thought about what life might be like without this thing?
    - Have you ever stopped to notice its finer, more intricate detail?
    - Have you ever sat down and thought about the relationship between this thing and how together it plays an interconnected role in the functioning of the earth?
3. Ask each member to share the thing that they chose. Provide gentle reminders when people start to insert judgment or evaluation while describing the thing of their choice.



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- E. Mindful breathing script:** The primary goal of mindful breathing is simply a calm, non-judgmental awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.
1. Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.
  2. Bring your attention to your breathing.
  3. Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath and falling with the out-breath.
  4. Thoughts will come into your mind, and that's okay, because that's just what the human mind does. Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.
  5. Likewise, you can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.
  6. You don't have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don't judge yourself for having them, or analyze them in any way. It's okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.
  7. Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing.
  8. It's natural for thoughts to enter into your awareness, and your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.
  9. And when you are ready, open your eyes and bring your awareness back into the room.

**F. Creative mindfulness practices**

1. **Visual brain teasers**
  - a. Share one of the visuals from the link provided.
  - b. Ask participants to spend 5 minutes focused solely on the brain teaser.
  - c. Take a few share outs and reflect on what it was like to pause outside thoughts for the time being.
  - d. Invite that practice into the group space.
2. **Share and observation video**
3. **Spot the difference photos:**
  - a. [Spot the difference, Smithsonian Magazine](#)
  - b. [Find the difference in these photos, Reader's Digest](#)
4. **Draw your breath activity**
  - a. Provide participants with a piece of paper and a writing utensil.
  - b. Ask participants to focus on their breath and draw a line up toward the top of the paper when breathing in, and to draw a line toward the bottom of the page when breathing out. Do this for 1 minute.
  - c. Compare drawings with the group and reflect on the visuals seen.
5. **Describe an object activity**
  - a. Describe an object with as much detail as possible and have the group guess what the object is.
  - b. Have everyone grab a piece of paper. One peer describes an object using ONLY shapes while the rest of the group draws it. The group needs to guess what the object is based on what they were instructed to draw. (Ex: to describe a sun you may say, "Draw a circle. Starting on the outside of the circle, draw lines straight out of the circle all around the circle.")





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## G. Mindful journal prompts

1. Do a word association. Write the top 10 words that pop into your mind when you think of vulnerability. Are there any patterns that emerge? What can you learn about yourself from this exercise?
2. Brainstorm a list of values that are important to you. Circle your top 10. Double circle your top 5. Why did these make the cut? What are some examples of how you 'live your values' in your day-to-day life?
3. Take an inventory of your talents! What are you good at (list at least 5 things)? How would your loved ones answer this question (about you)?
4. Under what circumstances do you feel least vulnerable (the most fortified, strong, invulnerable)? Do you feel more or less connected to others when you are least vulnerable?
5. What motivates you?
6. What are the top 10 situations that you think require the most self-compassion?
7. Write your personal mission statement.
8. The original definition of the word courage is "telling who you are with your whole heart." What does that mean to you?
9. Reflect on times you've felt vulnerable. What were they? How did this impact your relationships with other people?
10. What qualities or traits do you admire most in others? In what ways do you display or embody these traits?
11. Research indicates that self-compassion must include 3 components: mindfulness, common humanity, and self-kindness. What do you think this means?
12. What factors most influence your sense of happiness? And do you think that expectations play a role?
13. What are the three things you're most proud of in your life to date?
14. What is something (a song, an animal, a flower, a poem, a symbol, etc) that represents you? Why?
15. What does "life purpose" mean? What is yours?
16. List as many things you are grateful for as you can in 10 minutes. (Don't stop writing!)
17. Choose an inspirational quote that is meaningful to you. Of all the quotes in all the world, why did you choose this one? How can you apply this quote to today?
18. When was the last time you really laughed? What did you laugh about?
19. Who do you know that radiates self-respect? How can you tell this person respects themselves?
20. List 10 people you're grateful for, and why.
21. List 10 places you are grateful exist, and why.
22. List 10 objects in your life you're grateful to have, and why.
23. What are some ways you could be more positive in your daily life? How do you think a positive attitude affects confidence and self-esteem?
24. Consider the past week, what brought you bliss? How could you tell you were experiencing happiness?
25. Aside from caffeine or other energy enhancing substances, what lifts your energy levels? What specific emotions/feelings do you experience when you feel 'revived'?
26. Take 3 deep breaths and let your thoughts come and go without judgment. How does staying in the present moment, breathing, and observing your thoughts without judgment help boost confidence?



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## Adaptive Mindfulness Resources

**A. [Why Your Meditation Practice Must Be More Accessible](#)**

After a spinal cord injury, Dr. Rex Marco, a devoted meditator, began his journey to accessible meditation practices. This article provides research around the importance of meditation for those who don't have the ability to hear, see, or touch and provides links to Dr. Rex's own guided meditation practices.

**B. [Deaf Mindfulness](#)**

This website provides mindfulness videos and practices in sign language for the deaf community.

**C. [The University of Washington's Center for Child and Family Well – Being's Mindfulness In Sign Language](#)**

This website provides resources for mindfulness practices and yoga practices for the deaf community.

