



Wellness Ideas for the Classroom in Five Minutes or Less

Attending to our mental health takes practice but it doesn't need to take a lot of time. Below are some quick and easy strategies to promote mental health and wellness in homeroom, during an advisory period or in the classroom at any time of the day. Schedule these ideas into the daily routine or designate a day of the week such as "Wellness Wednesdays" or "Fitness Fridays." Alternatively, use these strategies, as needed, when students lose focus or have difficulty managing behaviors.

- ★ **Begin the day with a mindful moment.** Lead students in a brief, breathing exercise. It can be as simple as taking 3 slow, deep breaths. Short strategies ranging from 1-5 minutes on releasing tension, focused breathing and relaxation are available on YouTube and online at sites, such as: <https://britannicalearn.com/blog/classroom-relaxation-exercises/>
- ★ **Give yourself a hug.** Your neurons don't know it's you — and when they get squeezed they activate and think, "Someone loves me!" and then oxytocin along with other happy hormones start reacting in the brain and bloodstream.
- ★ **Practice gratitude.** Let someone know why you appreciate them. Written expressions of gratitude are linked to increased happiness for both the giver and the receiver.
- ★ **Write a journal entry.** Students can write in a personal journal that is just for them. The process of writing about both positive memories and difficult personal experiences can be therapeutic. Students can also collect meaningful quotes, advice from others or start their "bucket list" of things they want to accomplish, try or places to visit.
- ★ **Create Art together.** Art can be therapeutic and working collaboratively on a project like a collage or wall mural can provide positive inspiration for everyone. Other easy DIY projects like Mind Jars or Zentangles are also fun and quick activities for students which at the same time teach mindfulness.
- ★ **Teach positive thinking.** When you're super stressed and overwhelmed about something in your life, see if there's any way to put a positive spin on it. Give students a personal example and have them practice it. They will be amazed at how well it works.

- ★ **Access a short guided meditation video.** For elementary education classrooms, GoNoodle includes several videos designed to help students manage stress and enhance focus. Short guided meditation exercises for teens are available on YouTube.
- ★ **Track stress from technology.** Discuss how distracting technology can be and how it can lead to stress and anxiety. Assign students to track in a journal any change in their stress levels when using technology- cell phones, iPads, computers, video games - over a two-day period. They should also record how stress levels change when these devices are turned off for a few hours.
- ★ **Build a strong support system.** Discuss the importance of having a healthy support network. A visual to help students understand the importance of a strong safety net would be to place a heavy object(s) like blocks on a piece of plastic that is not anchored well and place a few inches above the ground so the blocks fall off. Then place blocks under the plastic so it is on solid ground before adding more blocks on top. Identify what these foundation blocks may represent (parents, teachers, counselors, friends, etc).
- ★ **Become a group member.** The beginning of the school year is a good time to go over social, athletic or academic groups that students can join. Discuss how joining in can make you feel part of something bigger to help others, build confidence and skills and make friendships - all keys to wellness.
- ★ **Teach the benefits of volunteering.** Connecting to things bigger than you can help boost your mental health. The meaning and purpose derived from helping others or the community can enrich and expand your life—and make you happier. Teachers might encourage students to volunteer as a class, spending a few minutes at the beginning of each day or week developing a plan for a project. You can invite students to find a charity or cause they want to help.
- ★ **Hold a brief exercise session.** Have students work on their posture, coordination, balance or body awareness. Go Noodle has several 1-3 minute videos for the elementary classroom. For secondary classrooms, use a deck of cards to create quick movement breaks. Assign an exercise to each suit (i.e. hearts are jumping jacks, diamonds are running in place). Then draw a card(s). Ten of hearts means students do 10 jumping jacks. King of diamonds means students run in place for 13 seconds.
- ★ **Declutter your desk.** Never underestimate the amount of satisfaction that can be derived or stress that can be relieved from finishing a small task. Or what you might find in that messy desk. Give students a moment to declutter backpacks, desk, wallet, etc.
- ★ **Smile and Laugh.** Show a funny short video or just practice smiling. The physical act of smiling and laughter have several short- and long-term benefits, including an improved immune system, elevated mood, and reduced stress. Humor activates the brain's reward and pleasure centers, generating emotions and relaxing the mind.