

All Emotions Matter: *for the Secondary Classroom*



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.



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The goal of this lesson is to:

- Validate feelings and emotions.
- Teach students to manage their response to emotions rather than change how they feel.
- Understand that we are not our emotions.

To learn more, visit the School Mental Health Resource and Training Center at www.mentalhealthEDnys.org

518.434.0439

Emotional Literacy




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Talking Points

We are not born knowing how to read and write. Likewise, we are not born knowing how to express our emotions. It is a skill that needs to be taught, and a skill that needs to be practiced. We will have some practice sections shortly.



Emotions are feelings.

Emotions are **not** “good” or “bad.”

Emotions are **not** “right” or “wrong.”

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Talking Points

“You shouldn’t feel sad,” may seem like something you say to a friend to make them feel better. However, it actually invalidates their feelings and can make it seem that their emotions are not correct.

Most people are not in control of how they feel. Someone might say, “You need to control yourself!”

That does not mean to stop feeling the way that you do. It simply means that you have options for how to *react* and *respond* to your feelings. That we do have control over.

Exercise

Introduce the concept of negative emotions (anger, jealousy, etc.) and positive emotions (happy, peaceful, etc.)

Ask the students if they think that they can manage their emotions and/or their feelings. One response may be: “yes, because when I feel angry I want to hit something but I have learned to walk away or take a few deep breath”.

You might respond with: “did you change how you **felt** or how you responded”

NOTE: for the rest of the lesson, we are going to focus on how to **manage responses** to our emotions, **not change** our emotions.

What does anger feel like in the body?



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Talking Points

Anger is not bad and you are certainly not a bad person for feeling angry. “You shouldn’t feel angry,” is just not true. You feel what you feel. Learning how to get in touch with your anger can help you *react* and *respond* more appropriately.

Anger is an important alert system notifying you that you have a need that is not being met, or a boundary that is being crossed. Be curious about what may have happened in various interactions, and how you may have contributed to an angry conversation. Did the other person cross one of your boundaries? Is there a need in the relationship that did not get met? This will help you make sense of why you are feeling the way that you do. Feelings can provide a lot of information for us and if we can respect and identify their clues, we can allow our feelings to guide us throughout our life.

Exercise

We can learn how to be in touch with our emotions based on cues like shoulders drooping, eyebrows tensing, shoulders rising.

Ask the class to provide any physical responses or senses they notice when feeling angry.

Some examples may include:

- Eyebrows furrowed
- Shoulders tense
- Shallow breathing
- Breathing quickly
- Not breathing much at all
- Hands clenched
- Sweaty hands
- Stomach pains

What does anxiety feel like in your body?



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Talking Points

Just because we are feeling anxious does not mean that we have a mental health disorder. Everyone worries from time to time. There are two types of stress—eustress and distress.

Eustress is moderate psychological stress that is beneficial; it can act as a motivator in some instances.

Distress is pain (physical or emotional) that negatively affects the body and/or mind.

Exercise

Ask the class to give a few examples of situations that involve eustress and distress.

Ex. Eustress - anxiety over an upcoming test might motivate a person to study harder.

Ex. Distress – anxiety over an upcoming test might immobilize a student and cause avoidance.

Ask the class to provide any physical responses or senses they notice when feeling anxious.

Some examples may include:

- Tight jaw muscles
- Tense shoulders
- Grinding teeth
- Stomach pains
- Overwhelming fatigue
- Racing thoughts



What does your body physically feel like when you feel happy?

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Exercise

Ask the class to provide any physical responses or senses they notice when feeling happy. Have them identify what makes them feel happy so that they might be able to redirect their feelings if the previous slides triggered them. Remind them that we are not our emotions by modeling appropriate language (ex. I *feel* happy rather than I *am* happy.)

Some examples may include:

- Smiling face
- Uplifted feeling
- Feeling light
- Awake and alert
- Relaxed shoulders
- Calm mind
- Relaxed
- Deep breathing

The Body Scan



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Talking Points

Sometimes we might not be able to tell what we are actually *feeling*. For example, I may not recognize that I am feeling mad until I realize that my shoulders are up to my ears, I'm getting sweaty and my stomach is in knots. This is a good time to practice a body scan. Mindfulness does not mean to be still and not have any thoughts. It is about just noticing what is going on, without judgment. Let's notice what is going on in our bodies.

Exercise: The Body Scan

Purpose: To get in touch with our bodies and our feelings without judging anything. This can also be a relaxation strategy. If you'd prefer, visit [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search "body scans for students". You will find examples that lead guided body scans posted by GoZen, Mindfulness for Kids and many others.

Lead the students through the following steps:

- Allow your body to get into a comfortable position (sitting, standing or lie down) and make sure you are arm's length away from your neighbors.
- If you are comfortable, you may close your eyes, or just let your eyes feel soft.
- Take a few deep breaths as you get into your body. Breath in through your nose (count to 4 slowly) and out through your mouth (count backwards from 4).
- Start to sense your body and how it feels on your chair, or on the ground. Is it heavy or light? Warm or cold? Begin to sense what your clothes feel like against your skin.
- Become aware of the top of your head. What do you feel? Maybe stillness, or a light breeze?
- Bring your attention to your ears. What do you sense? Do you hear anything? Can you hear a clock ticking?
- Now notice your jaw. Is your jaw firmly closed or open slightly? See if you can let your facial muscles soften and unfurrow your eyebrows.
- Begin to sense your shoulders. Are they tight and close to your ears, or relaxed?
- Now notice your chest. You can put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Notice any movement in your body as you breathe. Does your chest rise and fall? Do you feel your stomach move when you breathe? Is the air warm or cool? Remember, there are no "right" answers. We are just noticing.
- Bring your attention into your stomach. Is it tight? Maybe there is no particular feeling there. That is OK, too.
- Now notice your hands. Are they clenched into fists? Are they relaxed?
- Begin to sense your feet on the ground. Feel your feet inside your shoes. What does that feel like?
- Now bring awareness to the whole body, and take another deep breath through your nose (counting up to 4) and breathing out your mouth (counting back from 4.)

Follow-up talking points: Is it possible to read other people's emotions by looking at their body language?

NOTE: to promote wellness among your students, consider repeating the body scan exercise either routinely (beginning of class) as needed.

Body Scan Practice/Reflections

Name: _____

Date	Describe what led you to do the Body Scan.	What Did You Feel, Notice or Learn?

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Instructions:

Students may practice the Body Scan Practice and jot down some reflections on their own. Journaling reflections could include what happened that led them to do a Body Scan, then reflect on what they may have felt, noticed or learned.

Directions for printing the homework page:

1. Go to File
2. Go to Print
3. Make sure to have the settings set to "Full Page Slides"