



A Global Perspective of Mental Health

World Mental Health Day is observed on October 10 every year, with the overall objective of raising awareness of mental health issues around the globe.

World Mental Health Day is a great opportunity for teachers to incorporate a lesson related to global mental health awareness into their day. The School Mental Health Training and Resource Center at the Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) has developed four lesson plans for different grade levels and disciplines that teachers might consider using in class.

Lesson plans include:

- Mindfulness
- A Global Look at Mental Health and Suicide
- Mental Health and Refugees
- Cultural Beliefs about Mental Health Around the World

Teachers and administrators may also be interested in reviewing the World Federation of Mental Health resources assembled at <https://wfmh.global>.

For questions or more information contact the Resource Center at 518-434-0439 or by emailing schools@mhany.org.

World Mental Health Day Lesson Plans

Mindfulness

Grade Level: K-12 (modifications for different grade levels). These resources can also be incorporated into a Wellness Day for students or school staff as part of a professional development meeting.

Objective: to teach students the benefits of mindfulness and lead them through mindfulness exercises they can use on their own to learn to relax.

Activities/Discussion:

Explain to the class that people throughout the world feel stress and use different ways to relax when they are feeling nervous or uncomfortable. Brainstorm with students what makes people feel anxious or stressed in an age-appropriate way. Discuss how it makes them feel; how their body reacts. Ask them if they have any techniques they use to relax when they are stressed.

Mindfulness lesson plans: Elementary Level

Tell them you would like to share a special idea to reduce stress that originated in a part of the world that includes India (show students India on a map). Students can either stay at their desks or find a spot on the floor with their legs crossed or lying down so they have their own space. You can recite the text below or use [this video](#) of Dr. Amy Saltzman, if you'd prefer.

The Still Quiet Place – an exercise designed by mindfulness instructor Amy Saltzman. Accessible online at: <http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/teachers-guide/>

The language below is for elementary education students but can be adapted for all ages.

Hi, today I would like to share one of my favorite places with you. It is called Still Quiet Place. It's not a place you travel to in a car, or a train, or a plane. It is a place inside you that you can find just by breathing.

Let's find it now. If you feel safe, close your eyes. Whether your eyes are open or closed, take some slow deep breaths. See if you can feel a kind of warm smile in your body. Do you feel it? This is your Still Quiet Place. Take some more deep breaths, and really snuggle in.

The best thing about your Still Quiet Place is that it's always inside you. And you can visit it whenever you like. It is nice to visit your Still Quiet Place and feel the love that is there. It is especially helpful to visit your Still Quiet Place if you are feeling angry, or sad, or afraid. The Still Quiet Place is a good place to talk with these feelings, and to make friends with them. When you rest in your Still Quiet Place and talk to your feelings, you may find that the feelings are not as big or as powerful as they seem. Remember you can come here whenever you want, and stay as long as you like.

When you finish the mindfulness exercise discuss it with students. Ask them how it made them feel. Remind them they can find a Still Quiet Place at home, too. Teachers are encouraged to have 'Mindful Moments' with students and remind them about the Still Quiet Place on a regular basis.

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Optional follow-up exercises for elementary level:

- 1) Use the 6-minute video in the resources below on another day to have students practice calming breath meditation.
- 2) A great resource for mindfulness exercises is <https://www.gonoodle.com/>, a site some elementary schools use on a daily basis. There is a 30-day free trial period available. The site costs \$10 a month for teachers; \$1,500/year for a schoolwide subscription.
- 3) Incorporate video yoga stories into the daily schedule. Students move through yoga poses as the narrator reads a story. Below are two examples:

Good Morning Yoga (Miriam Gates) - <https://youtu.be/u-a4iOERMRS>

Rachel's Day in the Garden (Kids Yoga Stories) - <https://youtu.be/OP35lIWpm4w>

Extension assignment: Have students draw a picture of themselves in their Still Quiet Place.

Mindfulness lesson plans: Secondary level

This lesson can be used in any middle or high school classroom to help students cope with stress in school. It is easy to incorporate into the content of a Health or Psychology class, a Biology class studying the respiratory system or the impact of stress on the body, or a Global History class studying the religions of Buddhism and Hinduism. The teacher should begin by introducing students to the concept of mindfulness and its benefits. This [3-minute animated video](#) is a good resource to show students to help in your background discussion.

Ask students to find a comfortable place – either at their desk or on the floor. Soft background music is optional as you spend a few minutes leading students through a breathing relaxation exercise. Once students are relaxed the teacher should slowly read through the P.E.A.C.E. exercise below designed by mindfulness instructor Amy Saltzman. Accessible online at: <http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/teachers-guide/>

If we remember to use it, mindfulness can help us deal with difficult situations -- from ordinary every day difficulties like losing your cell phone to more extreme difficulties like failing a class, breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend, having a family member or friend go to jail or maybe even going to jail yourself, or grieving a death in your family or community.

Mindfulness is much more than just watching the breath. For me, the power and beauty of mindfulness is that using it helps me when things are most difficult.

PEACE is an acronym for a practice that can be used in any difficult situation. Perhaps you can begin by practicing with small daily irritations. Those of you dealing with more extreme circumstances may need to repeat the practice many times a day, and you may also want to get additional help from a friend, a parent, a counselor, or a doctor.

The practice goes like this.

P- P is for pause. When you become aware that things are difficult, pause.

E- E is for exhale. When you exhale you may want to let out a sigh, or a groan, or even weep. And after you exhale you want to...Inhale. Just keep breathing.

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A- *A is for acknowledge, accept, allow. As you continue to breathe, acknowledge the situation as it is. Your backpack with all your stuff is gone, your parents are getting divorced, your best friend is now dating the person who just became your ex... Acknowledging a situation doesn't mean you are happy about it. It just means that you recognize the situation is as it is, whether you like it or not.*

Accept the situation, and your reaction to it. You are furious, devastated, heartbroken, jealous, or all of the above.

Allow your experience. Do your best to rest in the Still Quiet Place and watch the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. Notice when you are tempted to suppress your experience by pretending you are fine, or to create additional drama by rehashing things in your head or with friends. And allow this, too. See if you can discover a middle way: having your thoughts and feelings, without your thoughts and feelings having you and making you act in ways you may regret.

C- *C is for choose. When you are ready, and this may take a few moments, days, weeks or even months, choose how you will respond. At its best, responding involves some additional Cs.*

- *Clarity: being clear about what you want, what your limits are, what you are responsible for.*
- *Courage: the courage to speak your truth, and to hear the truth of others.*
- *Compassion: compassion for yourself, for others, and for how incredibly difficult it sometimes is to be a human being, and*
- *Comedy: (Actually, I prefer the word humor, but it doesn't start with C.) It is amazing what a sense of humor and a willingness to not take ourselves too seriously can do.*

E- *E is for engage. After you have paused, exhaled, allowed, and chosen your response, you are ready to engage with people, with the situation, with life.*

Remember, if it is possible, practice with small upsets first. For extreme circumstances you may have to repeat this process over and over and receive additional support. The more you practice, the more PEACE you will have.

At the end of the PEACE mindfulness session, the teacher leads a discussion asking students how they felt during practice. Would they consider using it at home? It may be beneficial for students to journal their answers to the following questions so they can reflect privately:

- What came up for you during the practice?
- Are there situations in your life where this practice might be helpful?
- Are you willing to practice PEACE when difficulties arise during the coming weeks?

Reinforce the PEACE practice by keeping it on a blackboard or bulletin board for students to refer to in time of need. It would also be helpful to engage in further meditation sessions and remind students about PEACE during the year when they are facing stress.

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Optional follow-up exercises for secondary level:

Time permitting, the [20-minute guided meditation](#) video could be used in the classroom at a later date. Students could also use this video at home. There are many shorter options available on YouTube. Encourage students to find ones that work for them and share them with the class.

The video on [mindfulness techniques for pre-teens and teens](#) could also be discussed and practiced in class or at home.

Resources for mindfulness lesson plans:

Elementary Level

- Practice videos at Dr. Amy Satzman's website - <http://www.stillquietplace.com/practice-videos/>
- Book readings with yoga poses:
 - Good Morning Yoga (Miriam Gates) - <https://youtu.be/u-a4iOERMrs>
 - Rachel's Day in the Garden (Kids Yoga Stories) - <https://youtu.be/OP35IIWpm4w>
- A 6-minute calming breath meditation video designed to introduce children to mindfulness. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvF9AEe-ozc>
- Mindfulness exercises (subscription required to access full site) - <https://www.gonoodle.com/>

Secondary Level

- The benefits of mindfulness and meditation are described in a 3-minute animated video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjtfyuTTQFY>
- Mindfulness techniques for pre-teens and teens <https://www.doyouyoga.com/10-cool-meditations-for-pre-teens-and-teens-67578/>
- 20-minute guided meditation for teenagers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5sXaLzAhGQ>
- Resources on the history of Buddhism and meditation when teaching about world religions in a Global History classroom - <http://www.pbs.org/thebuddha/lesson-plans/>

For All Grade Levels

- *Mindfulness: A Guide for Teachers* by Amy Saltzman, a holistic physician and nationally recognized mindfulness teacher, provides a historical perspective of mindfulness, extensive information about the benefits and strategies for use in the K-12 classroom.

http://www.contemplativemind.org/Mindfulness-A_Teachers_Guide.pdf

World Mental Health Day Lesson Plans

A Global Look at Mental Health and Suicide

Grade Level: Middle/High School (Health, Psychology)

Objective: to expose students to global issues surrounding mental health and suicide to gain a greater appreciation for the scope of problems faced by people worldwide.

Activities/Discussion:

- Explain the purpose of World Mental Health Day to students as described in the introduction.
- Show the [2-minute World Bank video](#) on the impact of mental health concerns worldwide. Discuss the findings and ask students if they are surprised by any of the statistics.
- Discuss the [fact sheet](#) on global mental health from the International Medical Corps and point out statistics of interest.
- Explain to students that suicide is a major issue not only in the United States, but globally. Review [suicide facts and statistics](#) provided by World Health Organization, including [global map](#). Discuss possibilities for differences in rates, including culture and challenges related to accurate data reporting. To summarize WHO statistics: close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year, which is one person every 40 seconds. Many more attempt suicide. Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan and is the second leading cause of death among 15-29 year olds globally.
- Show students the [5-minute video](#) on preventing suicide and discuss.

Resources for global mental health lesson plans:

- 2016 World Bank (2 minute) video on the impact of mental health concerns worldwide

<https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/International-Medical-Corps-2014-Mental-Health-One-Sheet.pdf>

- Fact Sheet on global mental health from the International Medical Corps

<https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/International-Medical-Corps-2014-Mental-Health-One-Sheet.pdf>

- World suicide statistics, including map of prevalence rates (source: World Health Organization)

http://www.who.int/mental_health/suicide-prevention/en/

- WHO video about suicide worldwide

<https://youtu.be/8NVBMfdP1Ww>

World Mental Health Day Lesson Plans

Mental Health and Refugees

Grade Level: High School (Health, Psychology, Sociology, Social Studies)

Objective: to have students understand the psychological struggles of refugees as they adjust to a new home

Activities/Discussion:

- Ask students if they know what the letters PTSD stand for and what it is. Discuss circumstances that may lead to PTSD in children or adults (death of a loved one, childhood trauma, car accident, war, natural disaster, etc.)
- Explain that PTSD is experienced by people worldwide, including refugees who leave their homelands. Syrian refugees, who have come to Europe and the US in large numbers in the past few years, have been seriously impacted by this.
- Show [2-minute video](#) on Syrian refugees and PTSD.
- Read the article [‘The Troubled Mind of Migrants’](#) in the October 2016 issue of *Nature*, an international weekly journal of science. Instruct students to answer the following questions individually, in small groups or as a class:
 1. European countries like Germany have taken in millions of refugees in the past few years. Where are most of these refugees coming from?
 2. What type of stressors have refugees faced in their home country and as they have traveled to new countries? Brainstorm these as you read the article.
 3. Beyond PTSD, what other mental health issues have they faced?
 4. What solutions are professionals using to help refugees and what are some obstacles to providing good mental health care to refugees?
 5. If you were forced to migrate from your home, what psychological problems do you think you or your family members might face?

Resources for refugee mental health lesson plans:

- video on Syrian refugees and PTSD_

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luOKqLKr7-M>

- October 2016 Nature article, “*The Troubled Mind of Migrants*”

<https://www.nature.com/news/the-mental-health-crisis-among-migrants-1.20767>

World Mental Health Day Lesson Plans

Cultural Beliefs about Mental Health Around the World

Grade Level: High School (Health, Psychology, Sociology, Social Studies)

Objective: to give students a greater awareness of the cultural/societal differences that exist in diagnosing mental health disorders throughout the world.

It is recommended that teachers read the following article in preparation of this lesson with students: [Possessed or Crazy? Mental Illness Across Cultures](#)

Activities/Discussion:

- Ask students what a doctor in the United States might say about a person who was having regular hallucinations. Discuss what kinds of hallucinations people might have (auditory, visual, etc.). Use [this article](#) to familiarize yourself with hallucinations.
- Have students view the following [video about the difference in cultural beliefs](#) globally about the purpose of hallucinations (You will need to register to view the entire video). Discuss.
- Have students read the article ['The Culture of Mental Illness'](#) from [Psychology Today](#) either individually, in small groups or as a class. Discuss the different sections of the article either as you read together or after they have read it silently. Focus on some disorders that are perceived differently in American society than in traditional societies and why, such as depression and eating disorders, as well as psychosis.

Resources for world cultural beliefs lesson plans:

- Psychology Today article: *"Possessed or Crazy? Mental Illness Across Cultures"*

http://www.psychotherapy.com.au/fileadmin/site_files/pdfs/InterfaceFeb2009.pdf

- WebMD article about hallucinations_

<https://www.webmd.com/schizophrenia/what-are-hallucinations#1>

- Video about the difference in cultural beliefs globally about the purpose of hallucinations_

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-hallucination-definition-causes-types.html>

- Psychology Today article: *"The Culture of Mental Illness"*

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201206/the-culture-mental-illness>