

HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY MIND, HEALTHY BODY

LESSON 3: CONNECTING THE BODY AND MIND

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will learn about how mindfulness, physical activity, and breathing affect their bodies and mental health, and they will create plans to minimize and respond to stress in their bodies.

TIME

One to two 45-minute classes

OBJECTIVES

In this lesson, students will:

- Identify areas of stress and tension in their bodies;
- Participate in a mindfulness exercise; and
- Create a list of relaxation and coping strategies to use in times of stress.

STANDARDS

CASEL FRAMEWORK

SELF-AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts. This includes capacities to recognize one's strengths and limitations with a well-grounded sense of confidence and purpose. Such as:

- Identifying one's emotions
- Experiencing self-efficacy
- Having a growth mindset
- Developing interests and a sense of purpose

CDC NHES

- 6.8.1 Assess personal health practices.
- 6.8.2 Develop a goal to adopt, maintain, or improve a personal health practice.
- 6.8.3 Apply strategies and skills needed to attain a personal health goal.
- 6.8.4 Describe how personal health goals can vary with changing abilities, priorities, and responsibilities.

MATERIALS

In addition to common classroom materials and an Internet connection, students will need:

- Read Your Body handout
- Relaxation Plan handout

PREPARATION

1. Arrange the classroom to accommodate multiple groups of 4 students.
2. Prepare the handouts.

KEY TERMS

- **Mindfulness:** the mental state of focusing one's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations
- **Tension:** a feeling of nervousness that makes you unable to relax
- **Stress:** feelings of worry or anxiety

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INTRODUCTION

Ask students how they are doing today. Accept all answers.

Then, ask them to **really** think about how they are doing today. Explain that today they will be thinking more deeply than their usual answers of “fine”, “ok”, and “good” and take a close look at how their bodies and minds are coping today. Explain that we often have stresses that we get used to ignoring, and those can build up over time and affect our physical and mental health.

LESSON PROCEDURE

Step 1

Explain that they are going to “read their bodies.” Give each student the **Read Your Body** handout. Ask them to think about each part of their body and to list any feelings of pain, tension, or other sensations they have.

Step 2

Explain that sometimes pain and tension in our bodies are caused not by injury, but by built up mental and emotional stress. According to [Harvard Health Publishing](#), long-term, untreated, and unresolved stress can contribute to anxiety and depression, suppress your immune system so that you are more likely to catch a cold or virus, and cause high blood pressure. However, breath focus can evoke a relaxation response throughout your body. Explain that there are things you can do to relax and help to minimize that stress. Explain that breathing and mindfulness (or being present in the moment and acknowledging sensations) are part of the exercise they are about to participate in.

Step 3

Ask students to close their eyes. When everyone’s eyes are closed and the room is still, slowly read the following, allowing time between each question or statement for reflection.

1. Take a deep breath.
2. Turn your mental focus to the top of your head. Think about how the crown of your head feels. Do you feel any tension in your skull? Take a deep breath and relax your mind.
3. Focus on your forehead. Do you feel any tension in your forehead? Take a deep breath and relax your forehead.
4. Focus on your eyes. Do you feel any tension behind your eyes? Take a deep breath and relax your eyelids.

[Continue these statements for each of these body parts: jaw, neck, shoulders, lungs, abdomen, thighs, hands, and feet.]

Step 4

Ask students to slowly open their eyes. Explain that the breathing and mindfulness exercise they did served two purposes. First, the mindfulness part of the exercise (thinking of each part of their bodies) allowed them to recognize sensations that they might typically ignore. Second, the breathing part of the exercise helped them to relax and alleviate some of those stresses and sensations.

Step 5

Then tell students to look at their **Read Your Body** handout and to cross out any words they listed about pain, tension, or other sensations they no longer feel.

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They can also add other sensations they now notice (either negative or positive sensations).

Step 6

Explain that there are many things that they can do to encourage a balanced body and mind connection.

Show students the video [How to relax: 8 relaxation tips for your mental health](#).

Step 7

Have students use the **Relaxation Plan** handout to list things they can do each day to promote relaxation and balance body and mind wellness.

REFLECTION

Ask students to consider which things cause them the most stress on a daily basis or periodic basis, and how they might better address those stresses now.

ASSESSMENT

Explain to students that there are three daily occasions when they should focus on calming their minds.

- In the morning before the day begins: It's important to feel calm in the morning to get ready for the day—and not thinking about bad things that might happen.
- In the evening to wind down: End the day on a good and relaxing note.
- Reactively, when stressed out: When taking on a task that can be stressful (homework, job).

Have students write a brief three paragraph essay explaining how they personally can calm their minds in these three occasions.

EXTENSIONS

Encourage students to try new physical activities that encourage mindfulness and stress relief including [restorative yoga](#), [tai chi](#), and [meditation](#) classes designed for kids and teens.