



Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

Self & Community Care Bundle

14 Lessons for K-12 Students & Adults

Collected TeachableMoment lessons by:

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For Adults

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Self-Care for Educators & Caregivers

Self-care is key. We can't be available for our children if we don't have the energy or bandwidth ourselves. For this reason we've pulled together our resources at Morningside Center for you to have at your fingertips: 11 ways to best take care of yourself.

Tip #1: Pay attention to how you're feeling

Check in and recognize what's going on for you. Whatever you're experiencing, whether anxiety, sadness, worry, or fear, remember it's okay not to be okay. This is a normal response to stress-inducing conditions. Rather than trying to make yourself and others "feel better," it's often more helpful to tune in and actually experience your feelings—uncomfortable though that might be. Pushing feelings down and ignoring them doesn't serve anyone, least of all you. It may help to let go of the notion that when you're feeling pain, sadness, or fear of any kind, you're weak. Recognize feelings, instead, as a natural part of being human. Try to be present with them. And if people sincerely ask how you are, you may want to let them know how you're feeling, for real.

Tip #2: Limit your news intake

It's understandable that you want to stay informed, but consuming news all day long, especially during tumultuous times, tends to increase stress and anxiety levels. Do stay abreast by tuning in to reputable news sources at set times but don't get caught up in the endless news cycle, especially not right before bed. Remember that your thoughts produce your feelings and that those thoughts can be shaped by an overexposure to negative media stories. So be intentional about the information you consume. As Mr. Rogers said: "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'" Paying attention to this kind of news may help generate a different set of feelings.

Tip #3: Be forgiving, embrace do-overs

Though continued high expectations, no matter the setting, are important for the sake of ourselves and our children, we also need to recognize that we do not necessarily have all the tools or supports we need to ensure that everything goes smoothly. So remember to be gentle and kind with yourself. Forgive yourself when things aren't going the way you'd hoped or planned. Do-overs are part of learning for us as well as our children. They can be

an opportunity to model what do-overs look like—with grace, if you can! When conditions are challenging, we can all be learners together, making mistakes and being patient with one another as we all adapt, adjust, and make mistakes.

Tip #4: Practice kindness, generosity & compassion with others

In times of high stress, living and working in close quarters with others can be especially trying. Try to see the best in others and the situation you find yourself in. Practice kindness, compassion, and generosity with others as best you can, while having realistic expectations of who they are and what they're capable of. And if you live by yourself, practice that same kindness, compassion, and generosity with yourself. Consciously choose to see the best in yourself and others.

Tip #5: Remember to breathe

Throughout it all, remember to breathe. Simple though it may sound, breathing deeply from your stomach is not something that comes naturally to many of us. Natural, deep breathing involves the large muscle in your abdomen known as the diaphragm. It causes your stomach to expand on the in-breath and fall on the out-breath. Try it by placing your hand on your stomach as you slow down and deepen your breath. By breathing this way from your stomach, you signal your nervous system to calm down, which can help to combat your stress and anxiety.

Tip #6: Focus on gratitude

Practicing gratitude on a regular basis has been associated with lower levels anxiety, stress, and depression. First thing in the morning (or at any point in the day), think of some things you're grateful for. It could be anything, large or small, like feeling gratitude for waking up in a warm bed, having hot water for your morning shower, or having a good cup of coffee to start your day. You might feel gratitude for your family, supportive colleagues, your children, or your health. Whatever it is, direct your mind to go there. Then check into how it makes you feel. Take a few minutes to sit with that feeling before moving on to the rest of your day. Actually practicing gratitude can brighten our day. Take a minute to spread some of the joy you experience. Who in your life are you grateful for? Reach out to let them know.

Tip #7: Keep a journal

Some people like to keep a gratitude journal, or use journaling in general to help them slow down, daily. Morningside Center Senior Program Manager Daniel Coles shares a variation on journaling called morning pages, a free-write journaling practice for right after you wake up. It is about committing to paper (yes this is about old-fashioned longhand!)

whatever it is that crosses your mind first thing in the morning. Free writing in this way can help us clarify for ourselves what is happening and how we are feeling, and can sometimes lead to helpful problem-solving.

Tip #8: Maintain a contemplative practice

There is a range of contemplative practices that you may already be using to be more intentionally present, in the moment, full of curiosity, and without judgment. These are important to keep us grounded and connected. Research shows that a regular mindful practice can trigger hormones that relieve stress and anxiety, while improving our mood, self-awareness, mental concentration, and emotional self-regulation. They can also help us regulate psychological and emotional swings. A few minutes of mindful breathing, prayer, or practices such as yoga and tai chi, several times a week, can make a noticeable difference.

Tip #9: Move & exercise daily, if you are able

As much research has established, staying active helps us to stay fit not only physically, but mentally. It can help lift our mood, improve our cholesterol, lower our blood pressure, improve the quality of our sleep at night and manage our stress. So build some movement into your daily schedule, with or without your children.

Tip #10: Seek out nature, fresh air, & sunlight

Studies indicate that it's good for us to spend time in nature. Being in nature lowers stress, combats depression, and promotes positivity. It is good self-care practice to spend time outdoors. Of course, this is easier for some of us than others, depending on where we live. But whether you are able to go for a hike outdoors, head into the yard or simply open your windows to hear the birds, seek out your own slice of nature. And if you're looking for things to do with kids, you might want to do some planting, in the yard or on your windowsill.

Tip #11: Nourish your body and soul

Remember to eat as healthily as you can, and drink plenty of water. If cooking is something you enjoy, consider cooking as a contemplative practice—fully present and with intentionality, you can chop, sauté, stir, taste, season, cook, or bake. It's a great way to slow down. And if you do not have that association with food or its preparation, think about what does bring a smile to your face. Is it music, poetry, scented baths, hot showers, petting a dog or cat, listening to birds outside your window, gatherings with friends or family, virtual dance parties? Then build that into your daily schedule.



Self-care for Educators & Caregivers

Self-care is key. We can't be available for our children if we don't have the energy or bandwidth ourselves.

- 1 Pay attention to how you're feeling.
- 2 Limit your news intake.
- 3 Be forgiving, embrace do-overs.
- 4 Be generous with yourself and others.
- 5 Remember to breathe.
- 6 Focus on gratitude.
- 7 Keep a journal.
- 8 Maintain a regular contemplative practice.
- 9 Move & exercise daily, if you are able.
- 10 Seek out nature, fresh air, and sunlight.
- 11 Nourish your body and soul.

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C is for Communal Care

Self-care isn't just an essential part of communal care, it is what makes community possible.

By Dionne Grayman

I joined a few Teacher Twitter groups at the start of the school year so I could connect to, be inspired by, learn from, and be in genuine community with educators who were returning to classrooms during a time unlike any other in the last 100 years.

I absolutely expected to hear about the challenges, the barriers, the hurt, the fear, and the exhaustion. I definitely had high hopes for restorative practices and self-care to be offered as ways to ameliorate heartbreak, soothe spirits, and center joy.

What I was surprised to hear was the ways in which self-care came under fire, how it was deemed completely ineffective in relieving the burdens of teaching at a time of multiple, ongoing pandemics.

One educator shared in a post that self-care was being weaponized by the school district in which they worked. When I asked for an example to better understand how that was possible, another educator responding to my inquiry said that a massage won't change the system.

And it struck me, then, that some people had a decided lack of clarity around the origin story of self-care. For friends who already know, feel free to go on ahead and use this time for your self-care. But for those who don't:

The powerfully brilliant Audre Lorde, a self-described “(B)lack, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet” talked about the criticality of self-care while she was actively dying from cancer. For her, self-care wasn't using a massage to fix the system. It was the recognition that one owed it to life to pay attention to things (and people) that cause over-exertion, to what we put into our body, to what (and whom) we allow to enter into our head and heart spaces. Because to survive a system that was designed to dehumanize, diminish, denigrate, and dismiss your being, you need ways to BE.

One new source of learning for me is Emelyne Museaux, a certified self-love coach. She frames self-care versus self-indulgence as a nuanced juxtaposition of rest instead of avoidance and of protecting yourself instead of limiting yourself.

If you've never had to hold fast to hope in the face of the crushing, dysregulating weight of systemic oppressions that are brought to bear against who you are, where you live,

what you do, and how you look, your approach to self-care may heavily rely on a certified green, repurposed form of self-indulgence.

The most harmful part of this misalignment with self-care is the glaring omission of UBUNTU, a philosophical point of view from the Zulu tribe in South Africa that centers humanism, dignity, and justice. Simply summed up, “I am because you are” is a way to understand communal care as a beneficiary of self-care. Self-care isn’t just an essential part of communal care, it is what makes community possible.

Self-care fuels resilience, communal care drives resistance. Self-care allows one to thrive and creates pathways in the community for hyphenated identities to flourish, because as abolitionist educator and professor Bettina Love reminds us, we want to do more than just survive.

So, no, massages aren’t systemic fixes. But massaging scalps while cornrowing hair, singing spirituals about freedom while under an unrelenting sun, preserving legacies of sorrow and celebration to be passed down in whispers or written on scraps of paper hidden between pages of scripture to be read aloud to future generations at family gatherings were all forms of self-care that lifted up the necessity of communal care.

If one person failed to have the scale record the designated poundage, everyone suffered. One person alone may have been hoisted to a tree branch to receive a soul-splitting lash from an unrepentant whip, but entire enslaved populations were often forced to watch, to cut down the body and tend to it, one way or the other.

To endure unimaginable horrors, to receive constant reminders of the preciousness and uncertainty of life in the face of physical and psychological violence, self-care is more than deep breathing, it is the very act of being able to breathe in the first place. Self-care was never about \$300 cashmere-lined slippers and fancy moisturizers with French-sounding names. As poet Lucille Clifton urges us, “come celebrate with me that every day something has tried to kill me and has failed.”

As schools continue to struggle to find purchase in a still ever-changing and unfamiliar landscape, we can think more deeply about how to build and include self-care practices and spaces into every facet of school life. From building ease into schedules to reimaging rooms and hallways, a proactive, just, and equitable approach can ensure that community members feel seen and heard and experience the humanizing power of care.

A Little Teapot

Self-care is about more than candles and Epsom salt baths and exercise and sleep and saying no, says Morningside trainer Dionne Grayman.

By Dionne Grayman

I remember being younger, a little person, probably in Pre-K, and singing this song:

*"I'm a little teapot, short and stout
Here is my handle, here is my spout
When I get all steamed up, hear me shout
Just tip me over and pour me out!"*

I'm sure—or at least I'm hoping – that this had some connection to whatever the term for “social and emotional learning” was back then. Because today, in my adult mind, the image of a teapot and steam is pointing me towards the critical importance of self-care.

I know, I know. It has become one of those THINGS that everybody is “doing.” And as THE THING to do, it may also be generating guilt and shame if you are someone who is unclear or unsure about self-care, or believes that it isn't for you. You won't ask about this, of course, because then somebody will know you don't know – and as an educator, not knowing something is a cardinal sin.

My first offering to you is to be gentle with yourself and give yourself “grace” (yet another term that some folks are struggling with because IT has also become a thing). Simply, don't beat yourself up for messing up, missing a step, not knowing everything. Those self-talk strategies that you've been sharing with your students also apply to you.

My second offering goes back to the teapot. Before the pandemic shutdown, I had a conversation with a woman who was talking to me about the state of depletion. She had me imagine that I was holding a teacup and saucer (old school). She said that whatever was in the teacup was for me and me alone and whatever spilled over into the saucer was what I had to share with others. She called that abundance. If the saucer was empty and I had to pour into others from my cup, that was depletion.

I had been in the habit of pouring into others from the cup because I wasn't even aware that I should have had a saucer in the first place. See, I thought self-care was about candles and Epsom salt baths and exercise and sleep and staying hydrated and saying no. And, honestly, none of that was happening consistently. (Say no???)

Feeling depleted was my normal, my default operating system. But because I was constantly pouring into others from my cup as a demonstration of love, care, commitment, responsibility, and obligation, I thought I was doing something, doing “the work.” Until that woman told me I was acting from a place of depletion and doing so was not the demonstration of love, care, commitment, responsibility, and obligation that I thought. I know, right? We’re just going to pause right here. Take some breaths.

Friend, that breath was self-care. Self-care is simply giving yourself what you need so that you can pour into others from the saucer, not the cup. Sometimes it’s a breath, it’s a candle, it’s a call with someone who makes you smile. It’s a hug, a plant, a pet. It’s turning off notifications, it’s walking outside with a colleague or your team for a meeting.

It’s setting boundaries and saying no when your gut tells you to say no even as your mind is trying to put it all together (I see you!). It’s taking a nap, watching “Big City Greens” or listening to Beyonce as you commute because Beyonce is always the right answer. It’s reconnecting to play and remembering the things that give you joy.

I have a coloring book, crayons, colored pencils, and a set of old school metal jacks with the pink rubber ball that my cousin the trucker found at some truck stop out west somewhere. If your only reference to jacks are the multi-colored plastic ones, you were cheated as a child and you have my sympathy. It’s the songs we learned in kindergarten, at camp, on the block, or house of worship. Sing them wrong and strong if you must, but sing them.

Since August, I have been reading heartbreaking posts on Teacher Twitter about feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, burnout, and depletion – and it’s just September. Schools here in New York City just reopened; the largest and last system in the country to do so. And two teachers I know personally quit on the first day.

We are in crisis, period. And yet, we are also in a place of great opportunity. We can transform. We can be practical and radical in our need for healing, for connection, for the unlimited possibilities of what we could and should become. I see you and want to be seen by you as someone who is here to support you from a place of abundance.

This is the first time I’ve written since May of 2020 and doing so now is giving me much joy. Thank you.

About Self-care with Students

In the process of engaging young people in social and emotional learning (SEL) and mindful awareness practice, we naturally begin to teach them about self-care. One of the core competencies of SEL is “self awareness.” With increased self-awareness, students can begin developing practices and skills that they can employ to take care of themselves. This can include learning how to center themselves, stay grounded and present, calm themselves down, gain insight and perspective, and decide on possible next steps to meet their needs – all while recognizing and respecting the needs of others.

Rather than telling young people what to do and how to do it, our goal should be to support students in cultivating the awareness, skills and practices, that they find useful. They need to be able to make their own choices in the moment about how to handle themselves and the situation at hand – whether we, as adults, are around or not.

Before we continue, you might consider the [tree of contemplative practices](#) created by the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. Consider the multiple branches as ways to practice different kinds of self (and community) care and healing.

Think about your own practices. What has worked for you? How did you come to that practice? Now think about your students, their life experiences, their personalities, and who they are in the world. What might work for them? Have you asked? Have you given them opportunities to try different ways, to share practices that have worked for them perhaps?

Consider this series on self-care as a joint exploration with your students so that you can all learn together.

For Elementary Students

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Teaching Self-Care for Grades K-2: Music

Music can be healing, uplifting, and calming for both adults and children. This lesson has young people experience how we can use music to care for ourselves during times of stress.

Brainstorm: Things That Help Us When We Feel Sad, Angry, Anxious ...

Consider beginning this brainstorming activity by having students watch a segment of the cartoon on “[Emotions](#)” by StoryBots that begins at 2:07 and ends at 4:10. It includes two parts: The first includes advice from young people when one of the bots is feeling blue, the second is a song about different ways to handle feeling blue.

Next (or to begin with), let students know that our feelings are “all okay.” And there are many things we can do to when we feel sad, angry, or anxious. Brainstorm with students a list of things we can do when we’re feeling this way. Ask students what works for them.

You may want to chart what students share, if you can. You might end up with a list that reads:

- Getting a hug from my mom (or others)
- Petting my dog
- Playing with my cat
- Having a good cry
- Listening to the birds outside my window singing a happy/sad song
- Listening to music
- Singing (ask students if they have a particular song)
- Dancing
- Yoga
- Taking deep breaths or belly breaths
- Counting to 10
- Counting backwards
- Squeezing and releasing different muscles
- Remembering the things I love about myself
- Having a parent tuck me in at night
- Keeping my nightlight on

- Playing with my baby sibling
- Having a snack
- Drawing a picture (of how I feel)
- Throwing a ball or Frisbee with a sibling or parent, kicking a ball, running around the courtyard outside
- Going to the park (while keeping our distance from others)
- Staring out the window
- Doodling on a piece of paper, etc.

Note: Make sure that the things on the list are helpful in that they don't cause harm in the short or long term, like punching walls, or eating too much junk food.

And if it's hard to get students to start brainstorming, consider coming up with a list of your own and invite students to respond by standing up, raising their hands or finding other creative ways that work for your students to show that this is something they do or have tried before.

Facilitate a discussion about what students have tried before and how that's worked out for them. Ask students if they're interested in doing some of the things on this list together in the coming weeks? Maybe different students can share out with their peers how they practice these different things and then they can practice together.

And while it's important to ask young people for the practices that work for them and give them opportunities to share with peers, you can also introduce a range of helpful practices to your students. The lesson below focuses on self-care through music, movement and connection.

Music, Movement and Connection

Music can be soothing. It can lift our spirits, hold us in our sadness, and even assuage our fears. Music can be both rejuvenating and relaxing.

As elementary school teachers, we know that the right kind of music can help generate excitement in our students and get them moving. It can also shake out some of their wiggles, concerns, and anxieties. At the same time, music can sometimes be an effective noise cancellation tool, offering children a way to filter out the distracting, sometimes unwelcome, sounds around them.

Sing-alongs can help our students connect with their teachers and their peers, which is important. Social connection is increasingly seen as a core human need and research is showing that absence of connection can actually cause distress and disease in people. Whether through music or in other ways, social connection is now recognized as being essential to nearly every aspect of health and well-being.

So music can be nurturing and healing. Throughout history, singing (in community) has also been a way to empower, protest, and resist. Music and song can be used as a direct form of resistance and show of resilience. According to indigenous scholar and media maker [Jarrett Martineau](#): "It's ... the opportunity for us to come together and elevate and amplify what's happening on the ground, to the community, and also to inspire people for change."

In these many diverse ways, music holds power and has health benefits. The right kind of music, moreover, can help us to slow down and center ourselves, which can help with focus. Of course, simply turning down the stimulation for the youngest of our students doesn't mean they will magically slow down, calm and center themselves. Students need practice to help them do that. Music can help with that, too.

Move to the Music

To practice self-regulation, you can start by encouraging students to simply listen and/or move to some soothing jazz, a slow blues number, or some rhythmic Samba or Bossa Nova, in a seated or standing position. You can invite them to close their eyes, if they're comfortable doing so. If not, simply ask them to pick a spot on the floor or wall in front of them to rest their gaze.

If using movement, invite students to slowly make their movements bigger as you turn the music up. As you slowly turn the music back down, students' movements should get smaller. Model how it's done by participating yourself if possible. Turn the music all the way up, with big movements, and all the way back down making movements smaller and smaller.

When the music is turned down all the way, this is the sign for you and your students to quiet your bodies fully, sitting or standing in place without moving.

Consider a few different "rounds" of this, inviting students to move along according to the volume of the music. And as you wrap up (with our without movement) ask students

what that was like for them? How did they feel at the start? How do they feel now?

Using Music to Shake Out Your Wiggles and Sillies

If you'd like to motivate students to shake out their wiggles and sillies, consider some of the following artists with their shaking-out sing-alongs:

- The [Super Shaker Song](#) by The Culture Queen
- [Shake Your Sillies Out](#) by Jose Paolo Liwag
- [Dinosaur Rap](#) by Barefoot Books
- [Arriba, Abajo, Up Down](#) (English-Spanish) by Basho & Friends

Of course if you want your students to settle after shaking out their wiggles, you may need to intentionally slow down their movements, their bodies and their heartbeat, as they sit down and possibly take some deep, slow breaths.

- A song that allows students to get some of their wiggles out, while transitioning into a calmer, more focused space, is Nancy Kopland's "[Walk Around](#)."

Sing-Alongs and Drumming to Connect with Peers

Sing-alongs and whole-body drum-alongs can help promote connection and harmony among students.

Ask them for their favorite songs and/or consider introducing some of the following for students to hum, sing, and move along to, in community:

- [Ubuntu Train](#) by Gigi Gumspoon
- [Gotta Be Me](#) by Secret Agent 23 Skidoo

- In [I'm Doing the Hambone](#) Uncle Devin teaches us the Hambone, an African American rhythm technique that uses the whole body as a “drum set” to produce different sounds and rhythms.
- [Over in the Meadow](#) and [Knick, knick, Paddy, Whack](#) are counting songs that both have beautiful Barefoot Books imagery in the video. [The Animal Boogie](#), [Walking through the Jungle](#) and [The More We Get Together](#) are other sing along songs that use colorful Barefoot Books imagery.

Get Student Feedback

After each sing or drum along, consider asking students questions like:

- What was that like for you?
- How did singing/drumming together make you feel?
- How did you feel before the singing/drumming? How do you feel now?

Use student feedback to guide you in what songs and/or other self care practices to introduce going forward. And if time allows and energy remains, ask:

- How did you feel about the words we sung together?

Following the Ubuntu Train song you may ask students:

- Who has heard of the word Ubuntu? What does it mean?

The concept of **Ubuntu** comes from the Zulu language of Southern Africa. It is often translated into English as: “I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours. I am because we are.” According to Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa: Ubuntu speaks to the interconnectedness of humanity. It is the essence of being human. You can explain to young people that it’s about us all being connected to each other and to the world.

Following the Gotta Be Me song you may ask students:

- What makes you you?
- What makes you feel good about you? What makes you proud?
- What makes us the same?
- What makes us different?

Following any of the Barefoot Books songs, ask students also about the imagery, what they noticed, liked, and what it made them think of.

Note to the teacher:

Remember that when using music with young students, you don't need to limit yourself to music specifically composed for them. There is a range of beautiful and inspiring music from different cultures that we can use to expand young people's horizons and/or have students see their heritage reflected in your teaching.

Consider playing jazz classics, blues greats, inspirational songs of the civil rights movement, soothing reggae songs, South and Central American rhythms, folk, rock, or other music that allows your students explore music from around the world in all its richness.

A master teacher in Atlanta, Mr. Holingworth, often put on [Ain't No Stopping Us Now](#) by McFadden and Whitehead right after his pre-K class had nap time. Slowly his students would rise from their cots, rubbing their eyes, stretching a little. Then they made their way to the rug and started bopping along with the music. As the words kicked in, they used gestures they'd been taught along with the lyrics: They put up their right hand for "ain't no stopping us now," made a running in place motion for "we're on the move," and wiggled their hips and arms for "we've got the groove." It was heartwarming to see these little people find such joy in this inspirational classic.

Teaching Self-Care for Grades 3-5: Music

Music can be healing, uplifting, and calming for both adults and children. This lesson has young people experience how we can use music to care for ourselves during times of stress.

Brainstorm: Things That Help Us When We Feel Sad, Angry, Anxious ...

Consider beginning this brainstorming activity by having students watch a segment of the cartoon on “[Emotions](#)” by StoryBots that begins at 2:07 and ends at 4:10. It includes two parts: The first includes advice from young people when one of the bots is feeling blue, the second is a song about different ways to handle feeling blue.

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You might chart what students share, if you can. You might end up with a list that reads:

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- Petting my dog
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- Having a good cry
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- Listening to music
- Singing (ask students if they have a particular song)
- Dancing
- Yoga
- Taking deep breaths
- Talking belly breaths
- Counting to 10
- Counting backwards
- Walking the dog
- Squeezing and releasing different muscles
- Affirmations, alone or with a family member
- Having a parent tuck me in at night

- Keep my nightlight on
- Playing with my baby sibling
- Having a snack
- Drawing a picture (of how I feel)
- Throwing a ball or Frisbee with a sibling or parent, kicking a ball, running around the courtyard outside
- Going to the park (while keeping our distance from others)
- Staring out the window
- Doodling on a piece of paper, etc.

Note: Make sure that the things on the list are helpful in that they don't cause harm in the short or long term, like punching walls, or eating too much junk food.

And if it's hard to get students to start brainstorming, consider coming up with a list of your own and invite students to respond by standing up, raising their hands or finding other creative ways that work for your students, to show that this is something they do, or have tried before.

Facilitate a discussion about what students have tried before and how that's worked out for them. Ask students if they're interested in doing some of the things on this list together in the coming weeks? Maybe different students can share out with their peers how they practice these different things and then they can practice together.

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noise cancellation tool, offering children a way to filter out the distracting, sometimes unwelcome, sounds around them.

Sing-alongs can help our students connect with their teachers and their peers, which is important. Social connection is increasingly seen as a core human need and research is showing that absence of connection can actually cause distress and disease in people. Whether through music or in other ways, social connection is now recognized as being essential to nearly every aspect of health and well-being.

So music can be nurturing and healing. Throughout history, singing (in community) has also been a way to empower, protest, and resist. Music and song can be used as a direct form of resistance and show of resilience. According to indigenous scholar and media maker [Jarrett Martineau](#): "It's ... the opportunity for us to come together and elevate and amplify what's happening on the ground, to the community, and also to inspire people for change."

In these many diverse ways, music holds power and has health benefits. The right kind of music, moreover, can help us to slow down and center ourselves, which can help with focus. Of course, simply turning down the stimulation for the youngest of our students doesn't mean they will magically slow down, calm and center themselves. Students need practice to help them do that. Music can help with that, too.

Move to the Music

To practice self-regulation, you can start by encouraging students to simply listen and/or move to some soothing jazz, a slow blues number, or some rhythmic Samba or Bossa Nova, in a seated or standing position. You can invite them to close their eyes, if they're comfortable doing so. If not, simply ask them to pick a spot on the floor or wall in front of them to rest their gaze.

If using movement, invite students to slowly make their movements bigger as you turn the music up. As you slowly turn the music back down, students' movements should get smaller. Model how it's done by participating yourself if possible. Turn the music all the way up, with big movements, and all the way back down making movements smaller and smaller.

When the music is turned down all the way, this is the sign for you and your students to quiet your bodies fully, sitting or standing in place without moving.

Consider a few different “rounds” of this, inviting students to move along according to the volume of the music. And as you wrap up (with or without movement) ask students what that was like for them? How did they feel at the start? How do they feel now?

Using Music to Shake Out Your Wiggles and Sillies

If you want to motivate students to further shake out their wiggles and sillies, consider some of the following artists with their shaking-out sing-alongs:

- [Move and Freeze](#), a brain break action song, by the Learning Station
- [The Good Day, Cha, Cha](#) by Narwhals & Waterfalls (Good Morning song for kids)
- [Trolls: Can't Stop The Feeling](#), by Go Noodle
- [Learn African Dance Moves for Beginners](#), by Hip Shake Fitness
- [Arriba, Abajo, Up Down](#) (English-Spanish) by Basho & Friends.

Of course, if you want your students to settle down after shaking out their wiggles, you may need to intentionally slow down their movements, their bodies, and their heartbeat, as they sit down and possibly take some deep, slow breaths.

- [I Am Here](#) by Narwhals & Waterfalls (SEL Movement Song for Kids) allows students to move at a slightly slower pace, transitioning students into a calmer, more focused space.
-

Sing-Alongs and Drumming to Connect with Peers

Sing-alongs and whole-body drum-alongs can help promote connection and harmony among students.

Ask students for their favorite songs and/or consider introducing some of the following for students to hum, sing, and move along to, in community:

- [The Mood Song](#) by Narwhals & Waterfalls (SEL Song for Kids)
- [Gotta Be Me](#) by Secret Agent 23

- [Secret Superhero](#) by Secret Agent 23
- [Alpha Four](#), Body Percussion by Jim Solomon
- In [I'm Doing the Hambone](#) Uncle Devin teaches us the Hambone, an African American rhythm technique that uses the whole body as a “drum set” to produce different sounds and rhythms
- [A Hole in the Bottom of the Sea](#), [\[LM1\] Space Song Rocket Ride](#) and [The More We Get Together](#) are other songs that use the beautiful Barefoot Books imagery.

Get Student Feedback

After each sing or drum along, consider asking students questions like:

- What was that like for you?
- How did singing/drumming together make you feel?
- How did you feel before the singing/drumming? How do you feel now?

Use student feedback to guide you in what songs and/or other self care practices to introduce going forward. And if time allows and energy remains, ask:

- How did you feel about the words we sung together?

With The Mood Song you may ask students:

- What is your mood today? (Consider asking this before and after the song and see if it changed?)
- Are there moods in the song that students can relate to?
- Talk about a time recently that you felt one of these moods?

Following the Gotta Be Me song you may ask students:

- What makes you you?
- What makes you feel good about you? What makes you proud?
- What makes us the same?
- What makes us different?

Following the Secret Superhero song, you may ask students about superpowers.

- What superpowers did they like in the video?
- What superpowers do they have?
- What superpowers would they like to have.

Following any of the Barefoot Books songs, ask students also about the imagery, what they noticed, liked, and what it made them think of.

Note to the teacher:

Remember that when using music with young students, you don't need to limit yourself to music specifically composed for them. There is a range of beautiful and inspiring music from different cultures that we can use to expand young people's horizons and/or have students see their heritage reflected in your teaching. As an example, you might consider the new covid era variation on Miriam Makeba's 1967 classic Pata Pata, a song the BBC recently called "one of the most infectious songs ever made" and possibly "the world's most defiantly joyous song." A global compilation of song and dance can be found at [Pata Pata by Angélique Kidjo | UNICEF](#)

Also, consider playing jazz classics, blues greats, inspirational songs of the civil rights movement, soothing reggae songs, South and Central American rhythms, folk, rock, or other music that allows your students explore music from around the world in all its richness.

A master teacher in Atlanta, Mr. Holingworth, often put on [Ain't No Stopping Us Now](#) by McFadden and Whitehead right after his pre-K class had nap time. Slowly his students would rise from their cots, rubbing their eyes, stretching a little. Then they made their way to the rug and started bopping along with the music. As the words kicked in, they used gestures they'd been taught along with the lyrics: They put up their right hand for "ain't no stopping us now," made a running in place motion for "we're on the move," and wiggled their hips and arms for "we've got the groove." It was heartwarming to see these little people find such joy in this inspirational classic.

Teaching Self-Care for Pre-K-5: Breathing

This lesson has young people explore how we can use breathing to care for ourselves during times of stress – and reflect on how that works for different people.

Introducing Students to the Breath

Simple breathing exercises can help students transition from one space into another, from one activity into the next, especially when they need to focus their attention. Exercises that help students breathe more mindfully can also help them regulate their feelings. Breathing of this kind can help kids deal with their stresses, frustrations, fears, and concerns. It can help to ground them and be more present in the moment.

Consider talking young people through the process of why taking some deep breaths, in through the nose, and out through the mouth, can be useful.

First, explain what happens in the brain when we experience stress, using some of the following language:

There is a part of the brain called the amygdala. It is always on the lookout to make sure we are safe. When the amygdala notices something scary, stressful, or worrisome, it sets off alarm bells. When this happens, our bodies respond with what we call “fight, flight, or freeze.” Sometimes this response can help keep us safe, but other times it just makes it hard for us to think straight.

[Fight, Flight, Freeze – A Guide to Anxiety for Kids](#) is a useful video to explain what happens in the brain when we experience anxiety or stress and our “fight flight or freeze” response is triggered.

You can also try to explain the “fight, flight or freeze” response yourself, especially for some of your youngest students, using some of the following language:

Think about a peaceful place or something that makes you feel peaceful. Try to go there in your mind. Think about what you see there. What colors and shapes do you see? What sounds do you hear? Are there other people? Who? Check in with yourself. How does your body feel? It’s likely to feel calm and relaxed. Check your heart rate. It’s likely to be slow and steady. What about your breathing? It too is likely to be slow and steady.

Now think about the last time you surprised or startled someone, maybe you got startled yourself. How did they react? How did you? Some people react by leaning in. They might look angry. This is what we call a fight response. Others might turn or back away. This is the flight response. Still others may just stand there speechless and shocked. This we call the freeze response.

These are not things we choose to do. They are automatic responses to the amygdala setting off our brain's alarm system. When this happens, our heart beats more quickly, we might get flushed, with sweaty hands and start breathing more quickly. We all have "fight, flight or freeze" responses, though most people have one reaction more often than others.

One of the ways to counteract "fight, flight or freeze" is to take a few deep breaths in through the nose. This may take practice for some of us because, since we were very little, many have lost the practice of breathing deeply in through the nose. We may instead have learned to use shallow breathing from the chest and breathe mostly through our mouths.

The deeper breathing is known as "belly breathing." Some of today's breathing exercises will help us work up to belly breathing. If we practice, we may get better at it, so that we can use it to help us when stress or anxiety kick in.

Note to the teacher about deep breathing for students with high chronic stress:

Deep belly breathing is a soothing practice for many, but not for all. Students living with chronic stress or PTSD may have developed coping mechanisms that have stopped them from breathing (and feeling) too deeply. It can be overwhelming to go inside a body that is holding too much hurt and anxiety. For these students, being asked to breathe deeply, especially for longer periods of time, can be triggering, disorienting, or anxiety-provoking – the opposite of the relaxation we're going for. Be aware of this possibility when introducing breathing exercises to your students, and be sure to take it slow and observe students' reactions.

The breathing activities we provide below are short, no more than a few minutes, so as not to push students too far or too deep all at once. In addition, several of the breathing activities use touch and visuals, in addition to the breath. This allows students to use what we call an "external anchor," a place to focus their attention that is not inside, where the hurt and anxiety reside.

Just remember, for some people deep breathing takes time, because they first need to feel safe in their own bodies. So don't push students to breathe too deep, too soon.

On a similar note: Never tell students what kind of mindful awareness practice they should adopt or be rigid about how the practices are done. Always use invitational

language and provide options. For example, if you think having students close their eyes for an activity might be helpful, don't tell them to close their eyes. Instead, you might say, "I invite you to close your eyes," or "You can close your eyes," or "Maybe close your eyes," or "If you like, you can instead rest your gaze on the rug or wall in front of you." It is important for people, young and old, to find their own way, go at their own pace, and to be in charge of their own practice.

Take Five or Five-Finger Breathing

Talk students through the Five Finger Breathing method.

- First invite them to stretch their hand out like a star. Show them how by holding up your hand in this way, palm facing the screen.
- Have the pointer finger of your other hand ready to trace your fingers up and down. Start by placing the pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb.
- Invite students to do the same and as you invite them to breathe in through their nose, have them slowly slide their pointer finger up their thumb, as you do the same.
- Then as they breathe out through their mouth, have them slide their pointer finger down the thumb on the other side, as you do the same.
- Breathing back in through their nose, show them how to slide their pointer finger up the opposite pointer finger, and as they breathe back out through their mouth, down that same pointer finger.
- Keep going until you're done tracing every finger, including the thumb.

Ask students at the end:

- How did that make you feel?
- Would you like to do another cycle or two?

If you'd prefer to have a video guide you and your students in this process, consider this one:

- [Take 5 Breathing: A Breathing Exercise for Kids](#)

Box Breathing or Square Breathing

Box breathing is a powerful relaxation technique that can help us to return our breathing to its normal rhythm. It is a way of resetting the breath and can help people deal with stressful situations.

The practice involves inhaling to a count of four, holding the breath for four counts, exhaling to a count of four, and again holding it for four counts. (The activity is called box or four-square breathing because the four steps can be visualized as the four sides of a box.) The count can be faster or slower depending on where your students are at.

Repeat the process 4 to 5 times to start with as you familiarize students with this form of breathing. As you introduce box breathing more often and it becomes a practice, you can slow down the count, or work up to a 5 or 6 count box breathing.

You can invite young people to close their eyes, as you talk them through the practice, or have them rest their gaze on the floor, wall, or screen in front of them.

You can have them trace an imaginary box with their pointer finger in the air in front of them or use the outline of a window in their room. Some kids might find the physical edges of an item (like a picture frame, small box, a book, a post-it, or the computer monitor) easier to trace. [A square on the screen](#) in front of them might help, as well. Of course, students can also print out a square breathing image or draw their own to trace on paper during the breathing exercise.

show a video to follow on their screens.

- [Meditation Breathe GIF](#)
- [Box breathing animation](#)

If this resonates with young people, consider triangle, star, and figure eight breathing as well.

Bubble Breathing

Another way to practice breathing that can help us slow down and calm ourselves is the “bubble blowing” or “bubble breathing” technique.

If possible, have your students show up to “class” with soap solution and a bubble wand. (If that’s not possible, or some students don’t have these items, you can blow imaginary bubbles using an imaginary wand and soap solution.)

Practice blowing bubbles together, as a way to learn to breathe well. Explain that this kind of breathing can help us to manage our stresses and anxiety.

As students dip their wand into the solution, invite them to breathe in slowly through their nose, then lift the wand up to their mouths and blow out slowly and continuously through the hole in the wand to create bubbles. Have students practice like this for a minute or so, using these slow, calming breaths.

Next, even if everyone has wands and soap solution, practice “blowing bubbles” without these tools. Talk students through this practice yourself or use one of the breathing apps/videos, below.

To talk students through:

- Explain that we can imagine blowing bubbles like this any time we’re feeling stressed, worried, scared, or anxious.
- Start by taking a deep breath in through your nose, then slowly out through your mouth, pursing your lips, as you imagine blowing bubbles, lots of pretty bubbles.
- Remember, we have to do this slowly because we don’t want your bubbles to pop.
- So take a deep, slow breath in through your nose, maybe hold it for a second as you pretend to lift the wand to your mouth, then slowly breathe out through your mouth, imagining the bubbles you’re creating.
- Continue this practice for a minute or so.

Videos and apps to consider using for this practice:

- [LitUp Mind Bubble breath deep breathing video-aided](#) (3 minutes)
- [The Best Tee – Bubble Breath](#) (2:20 minutes) in English and Spanish
- [Breathe In Calm App | Breathing Exercise Sea](#) (2:11 minutes)
- [Breathe In Calm App | Breathing Exercise Jungle](#) (2:18 minutes) with pause

Self-Care: Self-Talk for Elementary School

Activities to help elementary students develop the key self-care practice of positive self-talk, from affirmations to gratitude.

Introducing Students to Self-Talk and the Brain

Self-talk is one of many self-care practices that can help us and our students both prevent and respond to stress. (See our units on [intentional breathing practices](#) and music ([K-2](#), [3-5](#)), two other [self-care strategies](#) that can help us deal with stressful times.)

Self-talk is a powerful tool that can help us get through challenging situations and create some distance from them. It can even enable us to rewire our brains! While we used to believe that our brains were fixed in adolescence, in recent years neuroscientists have discovered that we can continue to grow and (re)shape our brains well into old age. It's what's referred to as neuroplasticity.

Say you're a complainer. You're always looking for what's wrong with a person or situation. You might be beating up on yourself. Not only does this negative outlook impact how you feel, your accompanying thoughts manifest as a neural pathway in the brain. And as you travel down this negative path more and more often, new connections between neurons are created to facilitate this particular thought process. Eventually the pathway may even be insulated, through a process called myelination, which further increases the speed with which these neurons fire together.

But if instead you turn your thoughts to what's good about a particular moment, a different set of neurons start to fire together. With practice, the connection between them is strengthened and a new neural pathway comes into being. This more traveled path becomes the default as the "what's bad about the person or situation" path is pruned back, in a process called "synaptic pruning." Over time, the physical structure of the brain is re-wired.

Rewiring the brain using positive self-talk has the additional benefit that it can help us boost our self-esteem, strengthen our emotional resilience, and, like regular breathing practices, protect us from anxiety and stress. Self-esteem in turn has been said to boost our emotional immune system.

“Negativity Bias”

From an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense that our brains are wired to focus on what’s negative. It is a survival mechanism that was intended to keep early humans safe. Their more primitive brains developed systems to zero in on threat and danger, sending messages at lightning speed to their bodies to react and get to safety. In modern humans, those ancient brain systems are alive and well, even if we may not face the same dangers we did in ancient times.

This “negativity bias” spills into the classroom, in that positive and negative feedback are weighted differently for those receiving it. We are wired to experience criticism more intensely than praise. As a result, if we want to help young people develop their emotional immune systems, our feedback needs to significantly tilt towards the positive (research suggests a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative messaging).

Of course, some of this, students can be empowered to do on their own. This is where working with them on positive self-talk comes into play. Self-talk is an important tool for emotional regulation. It can help boost our confidence and belief in ourselves. It can also help us gain a more positive outlook on life and increase choices to respond to situations more effectively. Negative self-talk, on the other hand, can lead to anxiety and depression, and is more likely to narrow our options when it comes to decision-making.

Early Messages

Often how we feel about ourselves and our responses to the world around us depend on our early programming. Many of the beliefs we hold about ourselves are a reflection of the early messages we received from the people we grew up with—our parents, peers, teachers, neighbors, faith leaders, and others in the community. No matter how positive some of their messages about us may have been, we all grew up in a larger society that devalues and degrades women, BIPOC, poor people, disabled people, and many other groups who are deemed (and often referred to and treated) as “less than” by mainstream society. We can’t avoid absorbing these negative messages. They surround us, everywhere, like the air we all breathe.

These messages can weigh on a person’s spirit, and become a heavy emotional burden if they are not countered and dismantled. They impact how students feel about themselves

and respond to the world around them. Helping students replenish their spirits, and teaching them ways to do so themselves, is crucial, especially in challenging times like these.

With awareness and practice, negative self-talk can be transformed to generate positive feelings and self-worth.

1. Positive Affirmations

As we slow down, breathe deeply, relax, and become more aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can learn to transform our negative thoughts and feelings about ourselves, our ability, and our performance. Research tells us that our thoughts are as real to the brain as what's happening in our outer lives. This is one reason why positive affirmations can be so effective. Positive affirmations work best when you:

- use the present tense and the first person (as in, "I am enough," "I am lovable" or "I am a good friend")
- frame them in the positive (instead of "I am not weak," try "I am strong")
- speak them as if they are fact and truth (no mights, shoulds, or coulds)
- repeat them confidently to yourself multiple times a day, especially before going to sleep or right before a difficult conversation or test

You can reinforce positive affirmations with physical touch. Tap the back of your hand, gently caress your arm or apply pressure to your temples as you state your affirmation. Consider positive affirmations that have four syllables (e.g. "I am calm now," "I can do this," "I am ready," etc.) so that you can squeeze your thumb and fingers together one syllable at a time, from your index finger, through to your pinky, several times over.

Modeling Positive Affirmations: We know that children learn best by example – the idea of "do as I do, not just as I say." So as the adult in the (virtual) room, it is important you let them know what affirmations look and sound like. Share some of your favorite affirmations, and talk about their impact. And if affirmations are not part of your daily practice, now is a great time to start.

Try positive affirmations first thing in the morning. It helps having a consistent time of day, to turn this into a regular, empowering self-care practice. Consider some sentence starters, like:

- I ... matter, have got this, figured it out all by myself, etc.
- I am ... loved, powerful, blessed, etc.

- I can ... do this, sit in discomfort, make a difference, etc.
- I choose ... love over fear, compassion, generosity, etc.

Also affirm your students, modeling language that they, in turn, can use to affirm themselves. Use their names and look them in the eye as you tell them:

- Marissa, you matter.
- You are loved, Tamir.
- Rosa, you are smart.
- Class/friends, you can do this, you've got this, you are persistent.
- Congrats Louis. Your efforts paid off; you figured it out!

What we know is that our self-talk is shaped by the way caregivers speak to us. As an influential adult in students' lives, you can help transform their negative self-talk into more positive, affirming messages over time. That, or you can further affirm the positive self-talk they've already been practicing.

Brainstorming and Putting Positive Affirmations to Use: If affirmations aren't part of your practice, you can choose to build one alongside your students.

- Ask if they use positive self-talk in their lives. If so, what are their favorites?
- Brainstorm a list of positive affirmations for all to draw on, as you all practice getting better at positively affirming yourself and others in the classroom.
- Ask students what it feels like to positively affirm themselves. Accept the feelings that come up, from weird, uncomfortable, and embarrassing to happy, exciting, warm, and fulfilling, and everything in between.

Call and Response Affirmations (to start or end your lesson): Ask students to repeat after you a set of affirmations, in a call and response way, e.g.

- You: "I am enough" Class: "I am enough"
- You: "I am powerful" Class: "I am powerful"
- You: "I am lovable" Class: "I am lovable"

Repeat a second or third time, as you see fit. As this becomes part of your classroom rituals, invite student volunteers to lead the call and response, coming up with their own positive affirmations over time.

Consider using the following video for call and response affirmations, set to music: [33 Positive Affirmations for Kids' Self-Esteem](#)

Positive Affirmation Songs: Songs are yet another way to introduce positive affirmations into the early childhood classroom:

[Sesame Street: I Wanna Be Me Song](#)

After listening to the song, talk about what message Cecile is trying to send.

How does Cecile feel when other people are telling her how to be or who to be?

How does she feel about being herself?

[Yes, I Can! | Animal Song For Children | Super Simple Songs](#)

After listening to the song, talk about the different things the animals can do. Next, have students finish their own sentence starter: I can ... [fill in some of the things they can do].

How does it make them feel to list all the things they can do?

[I Am Smart: Positive Self-Talk that gives Children Self Confidence](#)

Consider playing this song in two parts. The first part touches on different affirmations (called affies in the song). The second part touches on being smart.

[Sesame Street: Will.i.am Sings "What I Am"](#)

After listening to the song, talk about the different things that Will.i.am can do.

- What do the animals tell him he is?
- How does Will.i.am feel?
- Why do you think that is?
- Next, have students finish their own sentence starter: I am ...
- How does it make them feel to list all the good things they are?

2. Gratitude Practice

Research shows that one way to take stress down a notch is to cultivate gratitude as a nurturing self-care practice. Practicing gratitude on a regular basis has been associated with enhanced optimism, better sleep, fewer physical ailments, and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Try it yourself so you can more authentically guide your students:

- Think of something you are grateful for. It could be anything, large or small. Consider, for instance, feeling grateful for waking up in a comfortable bed, having hot water for your morning shower, or having a good cup of coffee to start your day. You might be grateful for having a job, for your family, for supportive

colleagues or the students in your class. Whatever it is, direct your mind to go there.

- Consider how it makes you feel. Take a few moments to sit with that feeling before moving on to the rest of your day.

Taking charge of our thoughts in this way can shift our feelings in a positive direction. Those more positive feelings can lead to a shift in behavior—we might become more calm and thoughtful, for instance. And that can result in a calmer environment in our classrooms that can lead to improved outcomes. Just imagine being grateful for those outcomes ... and feel your stress levels drop!

Modeling Gratitude: Similar to the affirmations above, modeling gratitude, showing how it's done, can help students direct their brains to go to what they're grateful for.

Gratitude Prompts: And if it's hard for students to get started on a gratitude practice consider using gratitude prompts. Some of the ones below can help students get started.

- I'm grateful for [a person or persons in your life]
- I'm grateful for [a pet, or animals in your life]
- I'm grateful for [things in your home or in your building]
- I'm grateful for [things in your yard, your street or the park]
- I'm grateful for [things in your neighborhood]
- I'm grateful for [things you enjoy doing]

You can focus on the senses:

- I'm grateful for [something you can hear]
- I'm grateful for [something you can see]
- I'm grateful for [something you can touch/feel]
- I'm grateful for [something you can smell]
- I'm grateful for [something you can taste]

Or colors:

- I'm grateful for [something blue]
- I'm grateful for [something green]
- I'm grateful for [something red]
- I'm grateful for [something yellow]
- I'm grateful for [something orange]
- I'm grateful for [something in your favorite color]

Or whatever else you think students might be grateful for in their lives. You can also ask them to explain why.

A Gratitude Journal: Keeping a gratitude journal, for the older grades, is another way for us to direct our brains to go to what's going well and what we appreciate, so as to counter the negativity bias that our brains are wired for. Writing a journal in longhand can help us slow down and reflect more deeply on the things we're grateful for. Perhaps journaling before going to sleep works for some students, but keeping a journal at the start of class for a few minutes, might be another way of having students practice. And remember, like any practice, focusing on what you're grateful for comes easier with time.

Gratitude Drawing: Consider having the younger grades draw what they're grateful for and maybe write a word or more to explain what they drew. Have them show their drawing to the rest of the class and explain what they're grateful for.

Create a (Virtual) Gratitude Jar: This practice can have a profound impact on your students' and classroom's well-being. Get a jar and decorate it in an appealing way. Have students share one thing they're grateful for every day. Collect all the things students are grateful for, write them on index cards, and put them in the jar. The jar will fill up with the many things your students are grateful for, while cultivating their gratitude practice. When a student is having a rough day and needs a pick-me-up, they can ask for a card or two from the jar to help focus on what's good in life. You can also have students make their own jars that they fill up themselves and are able to draw on when they need it.

Opening or Closing The Day With Gratitude: Inviting young people to reflect on what they're grateful for can be turned into a collective self-care practice. Invite students one after the other to share what they're grateful for. After everyone has shared, ask them to check in with themselves, and recognize how that made them feel. When doing this activity with groups, I often feel the energy in the room shift as smiles appear, and nodding shows how people connect to the things other people in the group are grateful for as well. It's a great way to start or close out the day.

Appreciations: You can also invite students to share what they appreciate about others in their class. Encourage them to focus on substantive appreciations that make this activity more meaningful. Instead of, "I appreciate Sam for being my friend," ask them what it is about Sam that makes them a good friend. Or when students share that they

appreciate someone for their humor, ask them to talk about a specific time and how it made them feel. This kind of story-telling is an important part of building community, as well as empathy. Of course, it may take some time for students to get comfortable enough with their peers to open up. As always, as the teacher, modeling more meaningful appreciations can help push students to make theirs more meaningful as well.

Songs Focused on Gratitude and Appreciations: Songs are yet another way to introduce gratitude practice into the early childhood and higher elementary classroom. Listen to some of the following songs, then reflect on them by drawing, writing or discussing in pairs, small groups and/or the full class.

[Thank You Chant | Thank You Song for Kids | Gratitude Song | Preschool Educational Videos](#)

[If You're Thankful and You Know It Song for Kids | Thanksgiving Songs for Children | The Kiboomers](#)

[The Thank You Song](#)

[Thank You | Kids Dance Music | Didi & Friends Kids Songs to Dance](#)

[What a Wonderful World, Bob Thiele and George David Weiss](#)

Gratitude Yoga. [Yo Re Me Kids](#) combines kid-friendly affirmations with yoga practice aimed at keeping children's minds and bodies healthy.

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Teaching Self-Care for Middle & High School: Music

This lesson has young people explore how we can use music to care for ourselves during times of stress - and share music they find calming with their peers.

Music, Movement and Connection

Music can be soothing. It can lift our spirits, hold us in our sadness, and assuage our fears. Music can be both rejuvenating and relaxing.

We know that the right kind of music can help generate excitement and get us moving. It can help us shake out some of our concerns, anxieties, and stress as well. At the same time, we can use music as a noise cancellation tool, as a way to filter out the distracting, sometimes unwelcome, sounds around us.

Coming together in song can help our students connect with their teachers and their peers, it can help us build and maintain community remotely, as different communities around the country and world have shown these past few months. Cities have encouraged sing alongs: in [Chicago](#) (skip ad) and in New York [here](#) and [here](#). Resistance choirs have organized as well (such as [here](#) and [here](#)).

Music in general can bring people together, which is important. Research has shown that absence of connection can cause distress and disease in people. Social connection, the antidote, is a core human need. In fact, social connection is increasingly recognized as being essential to nearly every aspect of health and well-being.

Throughout history, singing (in community) has also been a way to empower, protest, and resist. Music and song can be used as a direct form of resistance and show of resilience. According to indigenous scholar and media maker [Jarrett Martineau](#): "It's ... the opportunity for us to come together and elevate and amplify what's happening on the ground, to the community, and also to inspire people for change."

In these many diverse ways, music holds power and has health benefits. The right kind of music, moreover, can help us to slow down and center ourselves, which can help with focus. Of course, simply turning down the stimulation may not be enough sometimes.

Regular practices like listening to music, moving to music, and coming together in song can help us with uncertainties.

Opening Ceremony

Invite students to spend some time watching or just listening with eyes closed to a video of nature sights and sounds (such as [this one](#)), which many might find calming. You might start with just a few minutes if it's hard for students to be still.

Alternatively, consider simply playing some relaxing music for students to sit with and listen to.

Defining Self-Care

Ask students what the term “self care” means to them. Does it conjure up the idea of buying somethings to pamper yourself? Or does it mean something else to you?

Work with students to come up with a definition that includes some of the following ideas:

“Self care refers to a series of activities and practices that we engage in on a regular basis to calm, heal, and preserve ourselves, physically and psychologically, and to reduce stress in our lives so we can be our best selves under any given circumstances.”

Brainstorm Different Ways of Self-Care

Brainstorm a self-care list with students.

- Ask, what are they doing to keep sane and fit during this time? Chart students' responses.

Get a show of hands of how many students practice self-care on a regular basis. Ask how that is working for them.

Note: Make sure that the things on the list are helpful in that they don't cause harm in the short or long term, like punching walls or eating too much junk food.

If it's hard to get students to start brainstorming, consider coming up with a list of your own and inviting students to respond by standing up, raising their hands, or finding other

creative ways that work for your students to show that this is something they do or have tried before.

Facilitate a discussion about what students have tried before and how that's worked out for them. Gauge student interest in practicing some of the things on the list together in the coming weeks.

Maybe student volunteers can share out with their peers how they practice specific forms of self-care, so that they can practice together as a community.

And while it's important to ask young people for practices that work for *them* and give them opportunities to share with peers, over the coming weeks, we'll also be sharing different practices for you to explore with students. Part 1, below, touches on self-care through music.

Moving, Singing & Connecting through Music

Before coming together for this session, ask students to think about the music that has helped them during the pandemic so far, or during other difficult times. It might be music that helps lift their spirits, holds them in sadness, or assuages their fears. Music perhaps that's rejuvenating or relaxing, or simply serves as a noise cancellation tool.

Also ask them to think about songs that they like to sing along to, that they like to sing with others, or that they think the class might like to sing together. Ask them to find, if they can, a link to a video of the song, or just the lyrics to share with the class.

Introduce music to students as a means of self-regulation. Encourage students to simply listen and/or mindfully move along to some soothing jazz, a slow blues number, or some rhythmic Samba or Bossa Nova, in a seated or standing position.

Alternatively, consider some of the following ways in which we, with our students, can possibly shake out or move with some of our sadness, fears, concerns and anxieties:

- [Learn African Dance Moves for Beginners](#) by Hip Shake Fitness
- [Mindful movement, dance and meditation](#) by Marjolein Burgerhout

And if movement is not where your students are at, consider **listening to music while watching time-lapse visuals** of flowers (or other soothing imagery online):

- [Flowers can Dance](#) with more upbeat music (1:46 minutes)
- [Blooming Flowers Time Lapse](#) with calming piano music (2:41 minutes)
- [Time Lapse Dandelion Flower to Seed Head](#) with calming strings (1:40 minutes)

Consider showing the following BBC report [The Social Movement to Sing against Coronavirus](#) to introduce and frame the idea of coming together in music and song.

- Ask students to think about what was shared in the video about how the coronavirus is affecting people and how music can support us.

Now ask students to share songs they thought of that ahead of time that they'd like to play and perhaps have everyone sing along to. Have students introduce the songs they picked and invite them to speak to what the music has meant to them. Share the lyrics and **sing, hum and/or move together in virtual space.**

Other songs to consider, that have been used to bring people together in cities across the country are:

- New York, New York by Frank Sinatra, watch snippets on social media [here](#).
- Lean on Me by Bill Withers, watch snippets on social media [here](#) and [here](#).
- You've Got a Friend by Carole King, watch a clip [here](#) on Fox9 in Minneapolis.

And if you want to combine song with dance, consider a new covid era variation on Miriam Makeba's 1967 classic Pata Pata, a song the BBC recently called "one of the most infectious songs ever made" and possibly "the world's most defiantly joyous song"

- A global compilation of song and dance can be found at [Pata Pata by Angélique Kidjo | UNICEF](#)

You may also use one of the virtual choir and musical cast postings on the internet to sing along with. Consider starting with [The Aelolians Oakwood University Alumni 2020 "We Shall Overcome"](#) and reflect on and discuss the introduction and images at the start of the video:

- [Rise Up](#) a collaboration of the Boston Children's Choir, with Denver Children's Choir, Children's Chorus of Washington, DC, Gondwana Choirs, Sydney, and Cincinnati Boychoir. Lyrics can be found [here](#).
- [You'll Never Walk Alone](#), from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, Carousel, performed by 300 people from 15 different countries in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyrics can be found [here](#).
- [True Colors](#) by Camden Voices, and lyrics can be found [here](#).
- [You've Got a Friend](#) by the worldwide cast of BEAUTIFUL for The Actors Fund.
- [You've Got a Friend](#) by London Voices Choir, campaigning for Women's Aid. Lyrics can be found [here](#).
- [Alexander Hamilton](#) by Original Broadway Cast and guests. Lyrics can be found [here](#).

Note: If students are interested in making a virtual choir video like the ones above, check out these resources:

- [12 Amazing Virtual Choirs to Come Out of Covid-19](#)
- [Virtual Choirs: Two Reasons We Hate Them \(and the Benefits of Them\)](#)

If your students are more interested in **connecting through rhythm**, consider some of the videos below. And remember, get students engaged in the sharing and the teaching. Some of these videos are complex and can be intimidating for some of us. Invite young people to step into the teacher's shoes by engaging their peers in ways they may not have considered before:

- [Body Percussion](#) by Rhythm Works
 - [Body Percussion](#) by The Percussion Show
 - [Body Percussion - The 6/8 Time](#) by Rhythm and Body Percussion
 - [The Cup Game / Beat - How to Play - "Cups"](#) by Pitch Perfect
-

Closing

After any of these experiences with music, get a sense from students what it was like for them. Ask them:

- What was the activity like for them?
- How did they feel before the activity and how they feel now?

This series is meant for students to explore different kinds of self-care, so reflecting on what works, what doesn't, and why is important.

Teaching Self-Care for Middle & High School: Breathing

This lesson has young people explore how we can use breathing to care for ourselves during times of stress – and reflect on how that works for different people.

Introducing Students to the Breath

Simple breathing exercises can help students transition from one space into another, from one activity into the next, especially when they need to focus their attention. Exercises that help students breathe more intentionally can also help them regulate their feelings. Breathing of this kind can help kids deal with their stresses, frustrations, fears and concerns. It can help to ground them and be more present in the moment.

Consider talking young people through the process of why taking some deep breaths, in through the nose, and out through the mouth, can be useful.

First off: [Fight Flight Freeze – Anxiety Explained for Teens](#) is a useful video to explain our “fight, flight or freeze” response.

If you can’t or don’t want to use the video, you can elicit and explain yourself what happens in the brain when we experience stress, using some of the following language:

There is a part of the brain called the amygdala. It is always on the look out to make sure we are safe. When the amygdala notices something scary, stressful or worrisome, it sets off alarm bells. When this happens, our bodies respond with what we call the “fight, flight or freeze” or “stress” response. Sometimes this response helps to keep us safe, but other times it just makes it hard for us to think straight.

Think about a peaceful place or something that makes you feel peaceful. Try to go there in your mind. Think about what you see there. What colors and shapes do you see? What sounds do you hear? Are there other people? Who? Check in with yourself. How does your body feel? It’s likely to feel calm and relaxed. Check your heart

rate? It's likely to be slow and steady. What about your breathing? It too is likely to be slow and steady.

Now think about the last time you surprised, startled someone, maybe you got startled yourself. How did they react? How did you? Some people react by leaning in. They might look angry. This is what we call a fight response. Others might turn or back away. This is the flight response. Still others may just stand there speechless and shocked. This we call the freeze response.

These are not voluntary responses. They are automatic responses to the amygdala setting off our brain's alarm system, in response to threats or perceived threats. When this happens our heart rate goes up, we might get flushed, with sweaty palms, while our breathing speeds up and gets more shallow. This is how our body gets ready for "fight, flight or freeze." We all have this response, so that we can keep ourselves safe in threatening situations (or situations that the brain perceives as threatening), though most people have one reaction more often than others.

One of the ways to counteract "fight, flight or freeze," is to take a few deep breaths in through the nose, and back out through the mouth. This may take practice for some of us because, since early childhood, many have lost the practice of breathing deeply in through the nose. We may instead have learned to use shallow breathing from the chest and breathe mostly through our mouths.

The kind of breathing from the primary breathing muscle called the diaphragm, is also known as belly, or abdominal, breathing. Some of today's breathing exercises will help us work up to that, in the hope that with practice, we'll get better at it so that it will be more accessible when stress or anxiety kick in.

Note to the Teacher (Chronic Stress and Trauma):

Deep belly breathing is a soothing practice for many, but not for all. Students living with chronic stress or PTSD may have developed coping mechanisms that have stopped them from breathing (and feeling) too deeply. Telling them to breathe deeply, especially for longer periods of time, can be triggering, disorienting, and anxiety provoking, the opposite of the relaxation we're going for. Keep this in mind when introducing breathing exercises to your students.

For people who live with chronic stress or PTSD, having what is known as an internal anchor when practicing any kind of mindful awareness can be problematic. It is hard to go inside a body, that is holding much hurt and anxiety. It can be overwhelming.

For this reason several of the breathing activities below use touch and visuals, in addition to the breath. This allows students to use, what we call an external anchor, a place to

focus their attention that is not inside, where the hurt and anxiety reside. Moreover, the breathing activities below are short, no more than a few minutes, so as not to push students too far or too deep all at once.

Just remember, for some people deep breathing takes time, because they first need to feel safe in their own bodies. So don't push students to breathe too deep, too soon.

And while we're on the topic, never tell students what or how to do any kind of mindful awareness practice. Always use invitational language and provide options, e.g. don't tell students to close their eyes. If you think it might be beneficial for the activity, consider some of the following language instead: "I invite you to close your eyes ..." "You can close your eyes ..." "Maybe close your eyes ..." "or you can find a spot on the rug or wall in front of you to look at." It is important for young people to find their own way, go at their own pace, and be in charge of their own practice.

Take Five or Five Finger Breathing

Five Finger Breathing brings several of the senses together at the same time. You watch and feel your fingers, while you're also paying attention to your breath. This requires multisensory and it multi locational awareness – you're feeling two of your fingers, one on each hand, as well as your breath. This takes a lot of brain capacity, easily crowding out any worry thoughts you might be having. As you do this for a minute or two, you also calm your physiology, so that if (when) those worry thoughts come back they won't take hold in the same way because they won't have the same emotional charge as before.

Talk students through the Five Finger Breathing method, by inviting them to stretch their hand out like a star. Show them how, by holding up your own hand in this way, palm facing the screen. Have the pointer finger of your other hand ready to trace your thumb and fingers up and down. Start by placing the pointer finger at the bottom of your thumb. Invite students to do the same. And as you ask them to breathe in through their nose, have them slowly slide their pointer finger up their thumb, following your lead. Then as they breathe out through their mouth, have them slide their pointer finger down the thumb on the other side, again following your lead. Breathing back in through their nose, show them how to slide their pointer finger up their other pointer finger, and as they breathe back out through their mouth, have them slide their finger down that same pointer finger. Keep going until you've traced every finger. Consider going back again to the thumb for a slightly longer activity.

Ask students at the end:

- What was that like for them?
- How did they feel at the start? How do they feel now?
- Would they like to do another cycle, or two?

And if you'd prefer to have a video guide you and your students, in this process, variations are:

- [Simple Mindfulness Strategy – Take Five](#)
- [Take 5 Breathing: A Breathing Exercise for Kids](#)

Different Shapes to Help Us Breathe

Triangle breathing is a simple breathing technique that can help reduce stress and improve our moods. Imagine a triangle or if your students do better with a visual, one can be found [here](#) or at [Coping Skills for Kids](#). Start at the bottom left of the triangle. Breathe in through your nose for three counts, as you trace up the side of the triangle in your mind's eye, or with your pointer finger in the air in front of you. Hold the breath for three counts, as you trace down the other side of triangle. And breathe out through your mouth, for three counts as you go along the bottom of the triangle back to the starting point.

Continue the breathing and tracing, another 4 or 5 times to start with. Consider having students print or draw their own triangle they think they'd do better with a hard copy to trace.

Videos to consider using for triangle breathing are listed below:

- [Triangle Breathing](#) (1 min)
- [Relaxation for Caregivers: 03 Triangle Breathing](#) (3 minutes)
- [Breathe In Calm App ... Breathing Exercise Jungle](#) (2:18 min). The bubble in this app is used to guide us through an actual "triangle breath."

Star Breathing is a variation of triangle breathing but rather than starting anew with the triangle after each breath, you can keep going. Consider using a [star breathing image](#) as your guide. Another image can be found at [Coping Skills for Kids](#) or you can have your students draw their own.

In your mind's eye start with any (breathe in) side of the star. Maybe imagine using your finger to trace the star, if you think that would help. As you breathe in through your nose for three counts, trace up the (breathe in) side of the star to the point. Hold the breath for three counts on the point. Then breathe out through your mouth for three counts as you

trace down the (breathe out) side. Going up to the next point of the star, breathing in through your nose, for three counts. Hold the breath for three counts. And trace back down the other side of the point for three counts as you breathe out through your mouth. Continue this process until you get back to where you started.

Box or square breathing is another simple breathing technique that can help reduce stress and improve our moods. It slows down the breath a bit further as we move to a four count with two pauses.

Box breathing invites us to inhale to a count of four, holding the breath for four counts, exhaling to a count of four, and again holding it for four counts. The count can be faster or slower depending on what works for your students. Repeat the process 4 to 5 times to start with as you familiarize students with this form of breathing. As you introduce box or square breathing more regularly, and it becomes a practice, you can slow down the count, or work up to a 5 or 6 count box breath.

You can invite young people to close their eyes, as you talk them through the practice, or have them rest their gaze on the floor, wall or screen in front of them. You can also have them trace an imaginary box with their pointer finger or the outline of a window in their room. Some kids may find it helpful to trace the physical edges of an item (like a picture frame, small box, a book, a post-it, or their computer monitor). Tracing a [square on the screen](#) or piece of paper can also help. Invite students to print out a square breathing image or they can draw their own, to trace on paper during the breathing exercise.

Videos to consider using for box breathing are listed below:

- Introduction to Square Breathing: [Square Breathing Technique](#) (1:11 min)
- [Square Breathing Technique](#) (1:15 min)
- [Breathing Exercise Square](#) (2:10 min)
- [Audio Meditation – Equal Breathing](#) (5:51 min)
- [Box Breathing GIF](#)

If students find it hard to breathe in, out, or hold their breath, for a full four seconds, consider the following videos that use a slightly faster count, in different places, to get started. Don't feel you need to use the full length of the longer videos right from the start. Longer breathing sessions may be something to work up to as you practice triangle, star, box or any other breathing that resonates with your students:

- [Box Breathing Exercise](#) (2:33 min)
- [5-minute Anxiety Relief – Guided Box Breath](#) (4:41 min)
- [Guided Box Breathing – 5 Minute Meditation \(4-4-4-4\)](#) (5:25 min)

Breathing with Imagery and Sound

Having practiced some of the other breathing exercises, with your students over time, you might try the following guided breathing meditations as you work with students towards slowing and deepening their breath. Invite students to keep their eyes open if they like to focus on the clouds, river or waves.

The videos below use imagery and sound as focal points

- [Guided Candle Meditation // Meditation for Stress and Anxiety](#) (5:50 min)
- [Guided Meditation \(ASMR\) The River Flows – Calming ripples & my voice](#) (8:30 min)
- [Guided Breathing Exercise \(Clouds\)](#) (4:51 min)

And if guided meditation doesn't work with you students, maybe simply sitting with some soothing video imagery and sound for a few minutes will help them relax and slow down their breath. Try the following videos for however long makes sense for your students:

- [Relaxing Ocean Waves](#) (5:00 min)
- [Relaxing Water Flow | Gentle Waterfall](#) (5:03 min)
- [Rainfall 5 Minute Meditation](#) (4:27 min)

Have students check in with themselves at the end of any of these breathing activities by asking:

- What was that like for you?
- How did you feel before? How do you feel now?

And:

- Out of the various practices, we've tried together, which worked for you?
- Which would you be interested in trying again/more of?

Self-Care: Self-Talk for Secondary School

Activities to help middle and high school students develop the key self-care practice of positive self-talk, from affirmations to gratitude.

Introducing Students to Self-Talk and the Brain

Self-talk is one of many self-care practices that can help us and our students both prevent and respond to stress. (See our units on intentional breathing practices and music, two other self-talk strategies that can help us deal with stressful times.)

Self-talk is a powerful tool that can get us through challenging situations and create some distance. It also enables us to rewire our brains!

While we used to believe that our brains were fixed in adolescence, in recent years neuroscientists have discovered that we can continue to grow and (re)shape our brains well into old age. It's what's referred to as neuroplasticity.

Say you're a complainer. You're always looking for what's wrong with a person or situation. You might be beating up on yourself. Not only does this negative outlook impact how you feel, your accompanying thoughts manifest as a neural pathway in the brain. And as you travel down this negative path more and more often, new connections between neurons are created to facilitate this particular thought process. Eventually the pathway may even be insulated, through a process called myelination, which further increases the speed with which these neurons fire together.

But if instead you turn your thoughts to what's good about a particular moment, a different set of neurons start to fire together. With practice, the connection between them is strengthened and a new neural pathway comes into being. This more traveled path becomes the default as the "what's bad about the person or situation" path is pruned back, in a process called "synaptic pruning." Over time, the physical structure of the brain is re-wired.

Rewiring the brain using positive self-talk has the additional benefit that it can help us boost our self-esteem, strengthen our emotional resilience, and, like regular breathing practices, protect us from anxiety and stress. Self-esteem in turn has been said to boost our emotional immune system.

“Negativity Bias”

From an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense that our brains are wired to focus on what’s negative. It is a survival mechanism that was intended to keep early humans safe. Their more primitive brains developed systems to zero in on threat and danger, sending messages at lightning speed to their bodies to react and get to safety. In modern humans, those ancient brain systems are alive and well, even if we may not face the same dangers we did in ancient times.

This “negativity bias” spills into the classroom, in that positive and negative feedback are weighted differently for those receiving it. We are wired to experience criticism more intensely than praise. As a result, if we want to help young people develop their emotional immune systems, our feedback needs to significantly tilt towards the positive (research suggests a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative messaging).

Of course, some of this, students can be empowered to do on their own. This is where working with them on positive self-talk comes into play. Self-talk is an important tool for emotional regulation. It can help boost our confidence and belief in ourselves. It can also help us gain a more positive outlook on life and increase choices to respond to situations more effectively. Negative self-talk, on the other hand, can lead to anxiety and depression, and is more likely to narrow our options when it comes to decision-making.

Early Messages

Often how we feel about ourselves and our responses to the world around us depend on our early programming. Many of the beliefs we hold about ourselves are a reflection of the early messages we received from the people we grew up with—our parents, peers, teachers, neighbors, faith leaders, and others in the community. No matter how positive some of their messages about us may have been, we all grew up in a larger society that devalues and degrades women, BIPOC, poor people, disabled people, and many other groups who are deemed (and often referred to and treated) as “less than” by mainstream society. We can’t avoid absorbing these negative messages. They surround us, everywhere, like the air we all breathe.

These messages can weigh on a person’s spirit, and become a heavy emotional burden if they are not countered and dismantled. They impact how students feel about themselves and respond to the world around them. Helping students replenish their spirits, and

teaching them ways to do so themselves, is crucial, especially in challenging times like these.

With awareness and practice, negative self-talk can be transformed to generate positive feelings and self-worth.

1. Positive Affirmations

As we slow down, breathe deeply, relax, and become more aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can learn to transform our negative thoughts and feelings about ourselves, our ability and our performance. Research tells us that our thoughts are as real to the brain as what's happening in our outer lives. This is one reason why positive affirmations can be so effective. Positive affirmations work best when you:

use the present tense and the first person (as in, "I am enough," "I am lovable" or "I am a good friend")

frame them in the positive (instead of "I am not weak," try "I am strong")

speak them as if they are fact and truth (no mights, shoulds, or coulds)

repeat them confidently to yourself multiple times a day, especially before going to sleep or right before a difficult conversation or test

You can reinforce positive affirmations with physical touch. Tap the back of your hand, gently caress your arm or apply pressure to your temples as you state your affirmation. Consider positive affirmations that have four syllables (e.g. "I am calm now," "I can do this," "I am ready," etc.) so that you can squeeze your thumb and fingers together one syllable at a time, from your index finger, through to your pinky, several times over.

Modeling Positive Affirmations: We know that children learn best by example – the idea of "do as I do, not just as I say." So as the adult in the (virtual) room, it is important you let them know what affirmations look and sound like. Share some of your favorite affirmations, and talk about their impact. And if affirmations are not part of your daily practice, now is a great time to start.

Try positive affirmations first thing in the morning. It helps having a consistent time of day, to turn this into a regular, empowering self-care practice. Consider some sentence starters, like:

I ... matter, have got this, etc.

I am ... loved, powerful, blessed, etc.

I can ... do this, sit in discomfort, change my ways, make a difference, etc.

I choose ... love over fear, compassion, generosity, etc.

Also affirm your students, modeling language that they, in turn, can use to affirm themselves. Use their names and look them in the eye as you tell them:

Marissa, you matter

You are loved, Tamir

Rosa, you are smart

Class/friends, you can do this, you've got this

Congrats Louis. Your efforts paid off; you figured it out!

What we know is that our self-talk is shaped by the way caregivers speak to us. As an influential adult in students' lives, you can help transform their negative self-talk into more positive, affirming messages over time. That, or you can further affirm the positive self-talk they've already been practicing. Watch this short clip of three-year-old Ayaan reciting positive affirmations on his way to school. Clearly it is never too early to start.

Brainstorming and Putting Positive Affirmations to Use: If affirmations aren't part of your practice, you can also choose to build one alongside your students.

Ask if they use positive self-talk in their lives. If so, works for them?

Brainstorm a list of positive affirmations for all to draw on, as you all practice getting better at positively affirming yourself and others in the classroom.

Ask students what it feels like to positively affirm themselves. (Accept the feelings that come up, from weird, uncomfortable, and embarrassing to happy, exciting, warm, and fulfilling, and everything in between)

Call and Response Affirmations (to start or end your lesson): Ask students to repeat after you a set of affirmations, in a call and response way, e.g.

You: "I am enough" Class: "I am enough"

You: "I am powerful" Class: "I am powerful"

You: "I am lovable" Class: "I am lovable"

Repeat a second or third time, as you see fit. As this becomes part of your classroom rituals, invite student volunteers to lead the call and response, coming up with their own positive affirmations over time.

Consider playing part of the following video for call and response affirmations, set to music: [33 Positive Affirmations for Kids' Self-Esteem](#)

Positive Affirmation Songs: Songs are yet another way to introduce positive affirmations into the classroom.

2. Gratitude Practice

Research shows that one way to take stress down a notch is to cultivate gratitude as a nurturing self-care practice. Practicing gratitude on a regular basis has been associated with enhanced optimism, better sleep, fewer physical ailments, and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Try it yourself so you can more authentically guide your students:

Think of something you are grateful for. It could be anything, large or small. Consider, for instance, feeling grateful for waking up in a comfortable bed, having hot water for your morning shower, or having a good cup of coffee to start your day. You might be grateful for having a job, for your family, for supportive colleagues or the students in your class. Whatever it is, direct your mind to go there.

Consider how it makes you feel. Take a few moments to sit with that feeling before moving on to the rest of your day.

Taking charge of our thoughts in this way can shift our feelings in a positive direction. Those more positive feelings can lead to a shift in behavior—we might become more calm and thoughtful, for instance. And that can result in a calmer environment in our classrooms that can lead to improved outcomes. Just imagine being grateful for those outcomes ... and feel your stress levels drop!

Consider using some of the following videos to introduce Gratitude Practice to your Students:

[Gratitude Is So Good For You](#)
[The Gratitude Experiment](#)

Modeling Gratitude: Similar to the affirmations above, modeling gratitude, showing how it's done, can help students direct their brains to go to what they are grateful for.

Gratitude Prompts: If it's hard for students to get started on a gratitude practice consider using gratitude prompts. Some of the ones below can help students get started.

I'm grateful for [a person or persons in your life]

I'm grateful for [a pet, or animals in your life]

I'm grateful for [things in your home or in your building]

I'm grateful for [things in your yard, your street or the park]

I'm grateful for [things in your neighborhood]

I'm grateful for [things you enjoy doing]

You can focus on the senses:

I'm grateful for [something you can hear]

I'm grateful for [something you can see]

I'm grateful for [something you can touch/feel]

I'm grateful for [something you can smell]

I'm grateful for [something you can taste]

Or whatever else you think students might be grateful for in their lives. You can also ask them to explain why.

Gratitude Journal: Keeping a gratitude journal, is another way for us to direct our brains to go to what's going well and what we appreciate in our lives, so as to counter the negativity bias that our brains are wired for. Writing a journal in longhand can help us slow down and reflect more deeply on the things we're grateful for. Perhaps journaling before going to sleep works for some students, but keeping a journal at the start of class for a few minutes, might be another way for students to get into this. And remember, like any practice, focusing on what you're grateful for comes easier with time.

Consider using the following video to introduce keeping a gratitude journal: [How to: Gratitude Practice](#)

Gratitude Drawing: Consider doing an art project around gratitude, a virtual collage perhaps, or individual pieces, put up in a virtual gallery.

Create a (Virtual) Gratitude Jar: This practice can have a profound impact on your students' and classroom's wellbeing. Get a jar and decorate it in an appealing way. Have

students share one thing they're grateful for every day. Collect all the things students are grateful for, write them on index cards, and put them in the jar. The jar will fill up with the many things your students are grateful for, while cultivating their gratitude practice. When a student is having a rough day and needs a pick-me-up, they can ask for a card or two from the jar to help focus on what's good in life. You can also have students make their own jars that they fill up themselves and are able to draw on when they need it.

Opening or Closing The Day With Gratitude: Inviting young people to reflect on what they're grateful for can be turned into a collective self-care practice. Invite students one after the other to share what they're grateful for. After everyone has shared, ask them to check in with themselves, and recognize how that made them feel. When doing this activity with groups, I often feel the energy in the room shift as smiles appear, and nodding shows how people connect to the things other people in the group are grateful for as well. It's a great way to start or close out the day.

Appreciations: You can also invite students to share what they appreciate about others in their class. Encourage them to focus on substantive appreciations that make this activity more meaningful. Instead of, "I appreciate Sam for being my friend," ask them what it is about Sam that makes them a good friend. Or when students share that they appreciate someone for their humor, ask them to talk about a specific time and how it made them feel. This kind of story-telling is an important part of building community, as well as empathy. Of course, it may take some time for students to get comfortable enough with their peers to open up. As always, as the teacher, modeling more meaningful appreciations can help push students to make theirs more meaningful as well.

Videos, Reflection Questions and Practice with Self-Talk

[Your brain is wired for negative thoughts. Here's how to change it](#)

Discuss the video using some or all of the following questions:

Let's start with the question the video left off on: How do you get out of negative thinking? What did the video tell you about negative thinking?

What are your thoughts and feelings about the strategies described?

[Jim Kwik: How to End Negative Self-Talk](#)

After watching the video, ask students to reflect on it. Next, encourage students to do the activity outlined in the video using "ABRA" (the first four letters of "Abracadabra" from Aramaic meaning "I create as a I speak" or Hebrew "It will be created in my

words”). Have them start by thinking a negative thing they tend to say to themselves, then:

A - acknowledge the negative self-talk

B - breathe, to calm down

R –release, letting go of what you do not want

A –align to what you really want, use your imagination to create positive self-talk

Ask students what that was like for them. Encourage them to make this part of their daily practice.

[An Experiment on Gratitude | The Science of Happiness](#)

Discuss the video using some or all of the following questions:

What are your thoughts and feelings about the video?

How did the people in the video feel going through the experiment? Why?

Who are you grateful for?

What would you want to tell them?

Consider inviting students to talk about and write about a person they are grateful for. Then ask:

How does it feel to think/write about this?

Ask students to consider getting in touch with their person (if that is possible) to share their gratitude statement with them.

Two Quick Techniques for Calming Down

These practices can help both young people and adults stay grounded when anxiety arises.

It can be helpful for us, and for our students, to learn simple practices we can use to calm ourselves when we are feeling tense or anxious.

The activities described below, 5-Sense Memory and 2:1 Breathing, both activate the body's parasympathetic nervous system, which decreases heart rate, blood pressure, and muscular tension, preparing the body for rest, sleep, or digestion.

Consider doing these two activities together, in either order.



5-Sense Memory

This is a good technique for grounding yourself during moments of anxiety.

Keep your eyes open and go through this process whenever needed, in whatever space you're in.

Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor, your hands on your legs, your spine comfortably straight. Close your eyes if you can. Otherwise, focus on a spot in front of you. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Repeat.

Imagine one of your favorite places from any part of your life. As you remember it, start to walk toward it in your mind.

As you walk into it, find...

5 things that you can see

4 things you can touch

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste

Acknowledge and take in all of the positive feelings this place holds for you.

Know that it is forever with you and you can come back here anytime you want to.

As you back away from this memory, take the gifts of this memory with you to help and sustain you today.

2:1 Breathing

2:1 breathing is simply exhaling for twice as long as one inhales. For example if you inhale on a count of 3, you would exhale for a count of 6. If you inhale for 4, exhale for 8, etc.

- Sit in a comfortable position with your feet flat on the floor, spine comfortably straight. Hands can be in your lap or resting gently on your belly. You can close your eyes or not. If your eyes are open, try to focus on a point in front of you.
- To begin, take a couple of deep gentle abdominal breaths. Don't worry about what the count is at this point. The objective is to just calm the breath.
- Now, take a deep gentle abdominal breath in for 3 seconds. Hold it for a count of 1. Then release it for a count of 6. Hold for a count of 1 and then repeat for at least 3 breaths. Do the counting in your mind and let the numbers flow softly and easily.
- To help extend the exhale, make sure to use your abdominal muscles to gently push out all of the air. Your shoulders should not be helping you breathe. They move as a consequence of being on top of your abdomen, not to help you draw in a breath.
- As you exhale, let the tension in your body leave with your breath. Let it drain down from your head, your shoulders, your hands, your legs, your feet.
- As you inhale, bring in calm, peaceful energy.

Variations

If this activity follows the 5-Sense Memory, breathe in the positive feelings from that memory.

As you inhale, you can breathe in your intent for the rest of the day, and let it fill you. Each breath in of your intent will fill you further. Fill your arms, your legs, your hands, feet, neck, and face.

When doing the activity with a group of people, model the technique, then tell participants that you'll be doing the activity for a certain range of breaths (perhaps 3-4) - and ask them to find their own rhythm.

Fostering Joy & Building Strength in Today's Moments

This lesson for middle and high school students is intended to offer joy and inspiration, and the opportunity to be in community with peers.



Carina Nebula, from NASA's [James Webb Telescope](#).

Introduction

Opening Quote

Share with students the following words from author Cole Arthur Riley (aka @Blackliturgies):

“Grief is not the destroyer of beauty. It's okay to look up from the debris long enough to catch your breath on something beautiful.”

Student Share

Use one or both of the following questions to invite students to reflect and share with regards to the quote. This can be done as an independent journaling activity, or journaling followed by a share out.

1. In response to the quote, what are your IFETS (impressions, feelings, expressions, thoughts, sensations), and/or any connections to the quote?
2. What is a thing of beauty that you have experienced recently? This could be beauty in any form, and utilizing any of the senses.

Activities

Engage students in one or more of the following activities.

Nature

Nature can help us to remember that we are a part of something greater than ourselves, and that there are wondrous and beautiful elements in the world for us to discover and to be inspired by.

1. Look at the following links from NPR, depicting the [images](#) and accompanying [story](#) on the James Webb Space Telescope.
 - o Invite students to share their thoughts on why such elements and phenomena in nature resonate with so many people.
2. Have students pick a post that speaks to them from the @Nature account on Instagram, and share out about it.

News Headlines

While progress toward racial justice can feel nonexistent or slow at best, sometimes we hear a story that provides a glimmer of hope.

1. This update on [Tulsa race massacre survivors](#) reminds us of one reason why we must keep fighting for justice.
 - o Invite students to share their thoughts on “the difference between generosity and justice,” which is mentioned in the article.
 - o What are students’ thoughts on what justice could look like in this case?

2. Read about the descendants of Charles and Willa Bruce and their fight to regain the land taken from their family, [here](#), and in this short post on [Upworthy](#).
 - o Why is it important to continue fighting for justice, restitution, and reparations? And why specifically in this case?

Good News

The social media accounts *@so.informed* and *@upworthy* share posts featuring good news, weekly and daily, respectively. Have students browse the accounts and share out about a story that resonates with them.

Poetry & Words

Share one of the following with students and invite them to share IFETS and connections that come up for them.

1. Elizabeth Acevedo's [Dreaming for Them](#)
2. Toni Morrison's phrase, "You are your best thing."

Closing

Share this 1-minute [video](#) that Adrienne Maree Brown recorded in May 2022, following a racist massacre in Buffalo. In it, she reminds us, when facing tough times, to "[harness] anger into things that can keep us safe."

Invite students to consider what and who allows them to feel safe, and to journal or share out as they feel comfortable.

Extended learning

1. Invite students to share responses to the question/s:
 - o What keeps you going?
 - o What have you come across that made you instantly happy, wondrous, dreamy, etc.?
2. In another video from Adrienne Maree Brown, she invites us to ask ourselves, "Who am I in relationship with? Who can I reach out and hold onto? Is there a skill that I need to learn?" as well as the reminder, "Don't let terror take your time." Allow students to journal or share out in response, if they would like.

Music as Fuel for the Struggle

This activity invites students to listen to and share music that can inspire and sustain them as they explore ways to battle oppression and push to survive and thrive during these challenging times.

To the teacher:

Amid civil unrest spawned by ongoing human rights violations, systemic racism and inequality, it may be tough for young people, and for us adults, to find the energy to stay motivated from day to day. We're often reminded of the need to focus on self-care, take breaks, and to step away from it all.

But sometimes we want to stay in the fight, and we need to be energized in order to do so. Music speaks to our hearts and souls. It connects us to one another, encourages us to keep going, and fuels our passions. Sometimes we don't want to be tamed; sometimes we want to turn up.

Following is an activity that invites students to listen to and share music that can inspire and sustain them as they explore ways to battle oppression and push to survive and thrive during these challenging times.

Note: *Songs may express strong views and opinions, and may contain strong language/profanity. This lesson plan is intended for high school students.*

Opening

Welcome students to your gathering.

Remind them that music has always played a key role in our country's periods of revolutionary change.

Share the quote:

Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything. – Plato

Encourage students to think about the relationship between music, motivation, and action with responses to the following prompts:

- What is one song you always put on when you need to get pumped or motivated?
 - What do you need from a song during these moments? What qualities does your song choice have?
 - When you think of protest music, anti-establishment music, or a song with a powerful message, what songs comes to mind?
-

Listen and observe

Play snippets of songs for students to listen to. You may decide to provide them with the song lyrics as well. While they listen, have students record their thoughts on the following:

- What did you hear in the song? What was the main message?
- What was the mood of the song? How did you feel while listening to it?
- What lyrics stood out or resonated with you?

Songs to consider

The Beast - Fugees

If I Ruled the World - Nas & Lauryn Hill

A Song for Assata - Common & C-Lo Green

Soldier - Erykah Badu

We the People - A Tribe Called Quest

Get Up Stand Up - Bob Marley

Alright - Kendrick Lamar

Changes - Tupac

So Much Things to Say - Lauryn Hill / Bob Marley

What's Going On - Marvin Gaye
The Colored Section - Donnie
Police State - Dead Prez
Fight the Power - Public Enemy
6 Summers - Anderson Paak
Hands Up - Vince Staples
Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud - James Brown
The Revolution Will Not be Televised - Gil Scott Heron

Pair share

Count off students in twos or threes, or arrange them into breakout rooms where they will discuss for 5-7 minute songs that get them motivated. Tell students to ask their small group members for permission to share what was discussed with the larger group.

Next, invite one student from each group/pair to share out with the larger group something that was discussed or one song that was mentioned.

After that, give students time to come up with their own "Music for the Revolution" playlist. Encourage them to diversify when possible, using songs in different languages, genres, etc. Allow them to share their list with the group, demonstrating the powerful overlap and variation that will occur. Students are likely to be inspired by each other's lists.

Closing

Have students share final thoughts on the quote:

“Can a mere song change a people's minds? I doubt that it is so. But a song can infiltrate your heart and the heart may change your mind.” – Elvis Costello

Thank students for participating in the circle and encourage them to stay active in the fight for justice, beginning with open, honest conversations with those closest to them. Remind them that sometimes our biggest impact is made in our own homes and communities.

Extended Learning

- Create a 7-10 song “Music for the Struggle” playlist to share with classmates. Consider using Spotify, I-Tunes, YouTube, or any other platform that all students have access to.
- While listening to music that inspires and motivates, ask students to think about what they can contribute to the movement for justice and human rights, and to share their thoughts with their peers.

Additional Resources

‘Revolutionary’ DJ Mixes:

[The Black Power Mixtape \(Spotify\) & related article](#)

[Music at Home: Songs of Resistance \(Spotify\)](#)

Jazzy Jeff’s The Magnificent Resistance on IGTV

Articles:

[5 Songs - Hip Hop's Presence in Politics](#)

[50 Protest Songs](#)