

**Middle School**  
School Curriculum

**SOCIAL,  
EMOTIONAL  
& ETHICAL  
LEARNING**

*Educating the Heart and Mind*

# Middle School

School Curriculum

# SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL & ETHICAL LEARNING

*Educating the Heart and Mind*



Center for  
Contemplative Science and  
Compassion-Based Ethics



EMORY  
UNIVERSITY

Copyright © Emory University 2019.  
ISBN 978-0-9992150-1-2

Design by Estella Lum Creative Communications  
Cover by Estella Lum Creative Communications

Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning (SEE Learning) is a program of the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics, Emory University, Atlanta, GA 30322.  
For more information, please visit [compassion.emory.edu](https://compassion.emory.edu)

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction &amp; Acknowledgments</b>	2
<b>Chapter 1</b> Creating a Compassionate Classroom	13
<b>Chapter 2</b> Building Resilience	53
<b>Chapter 3</b> Strengthening Attention and Self-Awareness	121
<b>Chapter 4</b> Navigating Emotions	187
<b>Chapter 5</b> Learning About and From One Another	275
<b>Chapter 6</b> Compassion for Self and Others	311
<b>Chapter 7</b> We're All in This Together	351
<b>Capstone Project</b> Building a Better World	391

# Introduction and Acknowledgments

---

Welcome to the SEE Learning curriculum for middle school grades. This curriculum is designed to be used with the Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning program (SEE Learning), which was developed by the Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

Apart from developmental considerations, the middle school curriculum has many similarities to the elementary school curricula, and follows the same scope and sequence. This is because each version of the curriculum is designed to be the first engagement that students will have with SEE Learning. This means students do not need to have progressed through either elementary curriculum before beginning this one. If you have students who have already completed the elementary curriculum, you may wish to adapt the learning experiences you use from this curriculum so as to build on prior knowledge and avoid repetition of scenarios. A middle school curriculum for students who have already completed the elementary curriculum is planned as a future development.

Before implementing the SEE Learning curriculum, it is highly recommended that schools and educators first register with Emory University or one of its affiliates, and participate in the online “SEE 101: Orientation” course or the in-person version. Also, as you work your way through this curriculum, you are encouraged to participate in the worldwide SEE Learning community using the online SEE Learning Portal to share your experiences, learn from others, and engage in the ongoing professional development opportunities designed to help both you and your students.

In addition, educators are encouraged to read the SEE Learning Companion, which explains the overarching objectives, rationale, and framework of the program, and particularly the chapter on implementation, which has useful practical information on how best to use this curriculum. The curriculum is based directly on the SEE Learning framework found in that volume, which was largely inspired by the work of the Dalai Lama, as well as other thought leaders and education specialists. It provides a comprehensive approach for complementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) with the cultivation of basic human values, systems thinking, attention and resilience skills, and other important educational practices.

Over six hundred educators have participated in the SEE Learning program from 2016-2019. They have attended foundational workshops, engaged their classes in the SEE curriculum learning experiences, been visited and observed by members of the core SEE Learning team, and contributed their feedback and suggestions.

This curriculum was prepared under the supervision of Linda Lantieri, Senior Program Advisor for SEE Learning, Brendan Ozawa-de Silva, Associate Director for SEE Learning, and Lindy Settevendemie, Project Coordinator for SEE Learning. In addition, other chief curriculum writers include Ann McKay Bryson, Jennifer Knox, Emily Orr, Kelly Richards, and Christa Tinari. Numerous other educators and curriculum writers contributed in valuable ways to earlier versions of the curriculum, and nearly a hundred educators provided important feedback on individual learning experiences. As with all aspects of the SEE Learning program, the process was also overseen by Dr. Lobsang Tenzin Negi, Director of Emory University's Center for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics.

## Scope and Sequence

---

The SEE Learning curriculum consists of seven chapters (or units) and a final capstone project. Each chapter begins with an introduction that outlines the major content of the chapter, followed by three to seven learning experiences (or lessons). Each learning experience is designed to take from 20 to 40 minutes. The suggested time is considered the minimum time it would take to complete that learning experience and its components. However, learning experiences can always be expanded on a given day, or spread out over one or more days, for deeper and more graduated learning as time permits. Also, most learning experiences can readily be divided into two sections when time does not allow for an entire learning experience to be completed in one session.

Each learning experience has up to five parts. These are:

1. Check-In
2. Presentation / Discussion
3. Insight Activity
4. Reflective Practice
5. Debrief

The five parts of the SEE Learning experience correspond to SEE Learning's pedagogical model, which goes from received knowledge to critical insight to embodied understanding. In general, the Check-in provides the opportunity to ground oneself, in preparation for focusing on learning; the Presentation/Discussion section supports conveying received knowledge; the Insight Activity is aimed at sparking critical thoughts and insights; the Reflective Practice allows for deeper personal reflection that can lead to embodied understanding; and the Debrief guides learners in making thoughtful connections that anchor the learning. These are explained in greater detail in the introduction to Chapter 1 of the curriculum.

Care has been taken in designing the sequence of the chapters and learning experiences so that they gradually build on and reinforce one another, so we recommend that you do them in the order presented. Research has shown that educational programs like SEE Learning work best when they are implemented in a way that follows four principles, known by the acronym SAFE.<sup>1</sup> These are:

- **Sequenced:** Connected and coordinated activities to foster skills development.
- **Active:** Active forms of learning to help students master new skills and attitudes.
- **Focused:** A component that emphasizes developing personal and social skills.
- **Explicit:** Targeting specific social and emotional skills.

Facilitating individual chapters or learning experiences out of sequence can lead to confusion among your students. For example, many ideas introduced early in the curriculum (such as interdependence or using resilience skills to calm the nervous system) are then built upon later in the curriculum (such as when recalling interdependence to understand systems, or thinking back on what was learned about the nervous system to understand emotions). Since SEE Learning is a resilience and trauma-informed program, and resilience skills are taught to students in Chapter 2, skipping this chapter would result in a program that is no longer informed by best practices in this area. Providing your students with this journey of experiences one stepping stone at a time will help ensure that they have the foundational knowledge and skills to move with confidence and understanding through each subsequent section, leading to a sense of agency and ownership of the core ideas over time.

## Chapter 1: Creating a Compassionate Classroom

This chapter previews how systems thinking, compassion, and critical thinking are built into each chapter. At its core, SEE Learning is about students understanding how best to take care of themselves and each other, specifically with regard to what can be termed their social and emotional health and well-being. Therefore, all of SEE Learning can be seen as rooted in compassion: compassion for oneself (self-compassion) and compassion for others. One cannot, of course, simply tell students to be compassionate to others and to themselves; what is necessary is exploring the value of this mindset, experiencing a range of methods and providing a set of tools. As students come to understand the value of these tools and methods, they will begin to employ them for themselves. At that point, they become their own and one another's teachers.

---

<sup>1</sup> Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/approaches/>

## Chapter 2: Building Resilience

Chapter 2 explores the important role that our bodies, and in particular our nervous systems, play in our happiness and well-being.

In modern life, our bodies sometimes react to danger when there is no real threat to our survival, or hold on to a sense of danger after a threat has passed. This can lead to a dysregulation of the nervous system, in turn damaging students' ability to concentrate and learn, and can even compromise their physical health. Fortunately, students can learn to calm their bodies and minds and regulate their nervous systems. This chapter introduces students to resilience skills to enhance this type of self-care.

Many of these skills were developed through trauma and resilience work and they are based on a significant body of clinical and scientific research. It is possible that while exploring sensations of the body with your students, some of them will have difficult experiences that you may not be able to deal with sufficiently on your own, especially if they have suffered or are suffering from trauma. "Help Now! Strategies" can be suggested to the child in the immediate aftermath of an unexpected reaction. If you have counselors or school psychologists, or a wise administrator or colleague, we encourage you to seek assistance and further counsel as necessary. However, the approach taken in SEE Learning is a resilience-based approach that focuses on the strengths of individual students, not on treating trauma. These are general wellness skills that can be beneficial to anyone, regardless of their level of experience of trauma. Students will be well positioned to explore the next elements of SEE Learning, cultivating attention and developing emotional awareness, when they have more of an ability to regulate their nervous systems.

## Chapter 3: Strengthening Attention and Self-Awareness

In addition to "body literacy" and awareness of the nervous system, self-compassion and compassion for others are supported by "emotional literacy" and an understanding of how our minds work. For this, we need to be able to observe our minds and our experiences carefully and with close attention. This is the topic of Chapter 3, "Strengthening Attention and Self-Awareness."

Attention training has numerous other benefits for students as well. It facilitates concentration, learning, and the retention of information. It allows one to better control one's impulses. It calms the body and mind in ways that promote physical and psychological health. And while often told to "Pay attention!", students have rarely been taught the methods by which they can train and cultivate stronger attention skills. In SEE Learning, attention is not cultivated through force of will, but by repeatedly and respectfully cultivating opportunities for practice, just like any other skill.

Students generally do not have trouble paying close attention to things they find interesting. The problem is paying attention when things are less stimulating or when there are distractions. Chapter 3 takes a multi-pronged approach to attention training. First, it introduces the idea of attention training and its potential benefits. Second, it shows students that when we pay attention to things, we may find them more interesting than we initially thought. Third, it introduces attention exercises that are engaging and accessible. Lastly, it introduces attention training with objects of attention that are more neutral and less stimulating, like the simple act of walking or paying attention to one's breath. Throughout, students are invited to notice what happens to their minds and bodies when they are able to pay attention with calmness, stability, and clarity.

#### **Chapter 4: Navigating Emotions**

Adolescents are at a highly suitable developmental stage to engage in a deep exploration of emotions. This chapter explores emotions both directly and through mental models, so that students can develop what can be called a "map of the mind," meaning an understanding of different mental states, such as emotions, and their characteristics. This map of the mind is a kind of emotional literacy, contributing to emotional intelligence and helping students to better navigate their own emotional lives. Students explore emotion timelines: the sequence of the processes of emotion generation, emotion regulation, and behavior. They also explore emotion families and how to develop strategies for dealing with "risky emotions": those which can lead to problems for oneself and others if left unchecked. Through this, students can become better equipped to exercise restraint from behaviors that harm themselves and others, a key aspect of ethical intelligence. This can further lead to appreciating the value of cultivating good "emotional hygiene," which does not mean suppressing emotions, but rather dealing with them in a healthy way.

#### **Chapter 5: Learning About and From One Another**

With this chapter, the curriculum turns from the Personal to the Social domain, and the learning experiences here seek to help students turn their attention towards others. Changes in brain development mean that students in adolescence become increasingly oriented towards their peers, and gain much more developed capacities for perspective-taking and empathy. Far more than at any previous time in life, their identity comes to be formed relationally with peers, and not just with family members. This chapter therefore focuses on understanding others' emotions in context, perspective-taking, and empathy. It also introduces the practice of mindful listening and mindful dialogues, useful tools that you can use to explore many topics with your students. The underlying theme of the chapter is empathy: the ability to understand and resonate with another's situation and emotional state.

## Chapter 6: Compassion for Self and Others

This chapter focuses on how students can learn to be more kind to each other and to themselves. In adolescence, as students begin to compare themselves more with their peers, and form their social identities through peer relationships, they also come to face fears of social rejection and social isolation. A high number of students at this age struggle with anxiety, and self-esteem and self-worth issues. The expectations of society compound this and can be internalized in unhealthy ways. It is therefore an especially important time to introduce the practices of self-compassion and compassion towards others.

Principally this involves helping students increase their awareness of their own emotional lives and those of others. When students are able to understand others' emotions and behaviors in context, they will be better able to empathize with others. This in turn can lead to feeling more connected with others, and thus less isolated and lonely. Dr. Thupten Jinpa, a noted scholar on compassion, defines compassion as "a sense of concern that arises when we are confronted with another person's suffering and feel motivated to see that suffering relieved."<sup>2</sup> Compassion therefore depends on awareness of the other's situation and an ability to empathize with them, combined with a sense of caring towards that person. These qualities are also important for self-compassion. Psychologist Dr. Kristin Neff, one of the world's leading experts on the topic, writes that self-compassion means being "kind and understanding when confronted with one's personal failings."<sup>3</sup>

## Chapter 7: We're All In This Together

Chapter 7 of the curriculum focuses on systems and systems thinking. These are not entirely new topics, since they have been introduced throughout the curriculum. In Chapter 1, students drew an interdependence web, showing how many things are connected to a single item or event. In Chapters 3 and 4, they explored how emotions arise from causes and within a context, and that a spark can turn into a forest fire, affecting everything around it. Systems thinking is built into the entire curriculum, but in this chapter it is approached directly and explicitly.

SEE Learning defines systems thinking as: "The ability to understand how persons, objects, and events exist interdependently with other persons, objects, and events in complex networks of causality." Adolescents are at a perfect age to engage deeply in systems thinking, since their development places them at a time when they are often seeking ways to understand themselves in relation to others. This chapter re-introduces the concept of interdependence and then introduces

---

<sup>2</sup> Jinpa, Thupten. *A Fearless Heart: How the courage to be compassionate can transform our lives* (Avery, 2016), xx.

<sup>3</sup> <https://self-compassion.org/the-three-elements-of-self-compassion-2/>

simple ways to engage in systems thinking, including feedback loops. It then presents the iceberg metaphor as a way of looking at events not as isolated occurrences, but as manifestations of deeper structures.

### **SEE Learning Capstone Project: Building a Better World**

The SEE Learning Capstone Project is a culminating action activity for your students. Students reflect on what it would be like if their entire school were a school of kindness and self-compassion, engaged in the practices of SEE Learning. After imagining what that would look like, they compare their vision to what is actually happening at their school. They then choose a single area to focus on and determine a set of individual and collective actions. After engaging in these actions, they reflect on their experiences and share their knowledge with others.

The Capstone Project is divided into eight steps, each of which will take a minimum of one session to complete. This curriculum serves as a full school year's worth of content. As you plan for doing the entire curriculum and ending with the Capstone Project, it is recommended that you build in at least eight, and ideally 10-12, sessions for the completion of this collaborative project.

### **Adaptations**

Educators are the best judges of what's needed in their classrooms and schools. As such, you should feel free to change the names of characters in the stories and other specific details in the learning experiences to better align with the context of your group. If you are considering making more significant changes, we encourage you to first look carefully at the objectives for that learning experience, and to consider discussing the changes with a colleague to ensure that they do not unintentionally alter the intent, impact, or safety of the learning experience.

### **Abbreviated Version**

If you cannot implement the entire SEE Learning curriculum, we recommend doing the following abbreviated version, which cuts the number of learning experiences from 39 to 21 and omits the final project. It still includes critical elements from all chapters and progresses in a logical order so that later skills are being built upon a proper foundation. If the entire abbreviated version cannot be done, simply progress as far along it as time allows. If you find you have more time, add in some of the learning experiences that are not included in the abbreviated version.

**Chapter 1:** LE 1, LE 5, LE 6

**Chapter 2:** LE 1, LE 2, LE 4, LE 5

**Chapter 3:** LE 1, LE 2, LE 4

**Chapter 4:** LE 1, LE 2, LE 4

**Chapter 5:** LE 2, LE 4

**Chapter 6:** LE 1, LE 2, LE 4

**Chapter 7:** LE 1, LE 2, LE 3

# Effectively Implementing SEE Learning

---

The effective implementation of any SEL program plays a crucial role in influencing the outcomes and benefits for students.<sup>4</sup> Implementation refers to the ways a program is put into practice. It draws a picture of how to facilitate the program and is an essential component of intervention effectiveness.<sup>5</sup> High quality implementation of evidence-based SEL programming in schools is essential to achieve the specific outcomes targeted through the SEL program.

When implementing SEE Learning, it is critical to recognize the importance of completing all lessons and activities in the program (dosage) in the way it was designed by the program developers (fidelity), in order to maximize the likelihood of success in your own classroom environment. To achieve high quality implementation, be sure that the curriculum is facilitated through the established and theory-driven guidelines of the SEE Learning framework.

Research shows us that ongoing monitoring and supporting of the implementation process is vital. In their meta-analysis, Durlak and colleagues<sup>6</sup> found that the positive effects of Social and Emotional Learning interventions on academic gains, reductions in depression and anxiety, and reductions in conduct problems were approximately twice as large when implemented with full fidelity to design and dosage.

Although the importance of implementing the program and its individual components fully and as described and intended in the curriculum is widely accepted, contextualizing program implementation is fairly common in educational settings. For example, teachers may choose to adapt their facilitation of the curriculum to match their teaching style, or to address specific student interests and needs in their classroom. At times full implementation is impossible due to time constraints, but note that altering the intended implementation can compromise the fullness of the curriculum's effectiveness.

---

<sup>4</sup> The SEE Learning program is indebted to Prof. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl for contributing this and the following section to this introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Durlak, J. A. (2016). "Programme implementation in social and emotional learning: basic issues and research findings." *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 46, 333-345.

<sup>6</sup> Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). "The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions." *Child Development*, 82, 405-32.

Key concepts related to establishing high implementation quality include:

- **Fidelity:** the degree to which the major elements of the curriculum are delivered as designed.
- **Dosage:** how much of the program is delivered (how many lessons, and how completely)
- **Quality of Delivery:** how completely the implementation is conducted, and the extent of facilitator training and support.
- **Adaptation:** any ways in which the program was altered or adapted
- **Participant Engagement:** the degree to which students engaged in the activities<sup>7</sup>

## Effectively Implementing SEE Learning

---

The SEE Learning framework builds on the innovative work done in Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and other educational initiatives that seek to introduce holistic education into schools. Social and emotional learning, or SEL, involves the processes through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage their emotions, feel and show empathy for others, establish and achieve positive goals, develop and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions, so that we can handle ourselves, our relationships, and our work effectively and ethically.<sup>8</sup>

SEL competencies are viewed as “mastery skills” underlying virtually all aspects of human functioning. Moreover, SEL offers educators, students, families, and communities relevant strategies and practices to better prepare for “the tests of life, not a life of tests.”<sup>9</sup> SEL competencies comprise the foundational skills for positive health practices, engaged citizenship, and academic and social success in school and beyond. SEL is sometimes called “the missing piece,” because it represents a part of education that is inextricably linked to school success, that may not have been explicitly stated or given much attention until recently. SEL emphasizes active learning approaches in which skills can be generalized across curriculum areas and contexts when opportunities are provided to practice the skills that foster positive attitudes, behaviors, and thinking processes. The good

---

<sup>7</sup> Durlak, J. A., & DuPre, E. P. (2008). “Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation.” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 41, 327–350;

Durlak, J. A. (2016). “Programme implementation in social and emotional learning: basic issues and research findings.” *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 46, 333-345.

<sup>8</sup> Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future. In J. A. Durlak, C. E. Domitrovich, R. P. Weissberg, & T. P. Gullotta (Eds.), *Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning: Research and practice* (pp. 3–19). New York, NY: Guilford.

<sup>9</sup> Elias, M. J. (2001). Prepare children for the tests of life, not a life of tests. *Education Week*, 21(4), 40.

news is that SEL skills can be learned through intentionally providing nurturing and caring learning environments and experiences.<sup>10</sup>

## A Note about “Mindfulness”

---

The term “mindfulness” has become very popular over the past decade and is now applied to a variety of strategies and practices, some of them quite distinct from historical origins. One of the most popular current definitions of mindfulness describes it as a type of non-judgmental awareness of the present moment. Many have argued over whether mindfulness is a spiritual practice, a secular one, or both; or whether it necessarily involves meditation or can be cultivated without meditation. While some may question the universality of the term “mindfulness,” there is no question about the universality of attention.

In SEE Learning, “mindfulness” therefore refers to keeping in mind something that is helpful. It is similar to the idea of retention, or not forgetting. For example, if one needs to remember one’s keys, it is mindfulness that helps one do so; if one forgets one’s keys, it is because one had a lapse of mindfulness. What is most important here is that students will develop an understanding that one can also be mindful of one’s values and commitments. Indeed, this is vital to developing ethical literacy. Mindfulness is one of the key elements that helps us stay true to our values and act accordingly, whereas “forgetting ourselves” is a common cause of acting out of alignment with our values.

SEE Learning also retains the term “mindfulness” in describing well-known practices such as “mindful listening,” “mindful walking,” etc., because they are common conventions. If your school prefers, however, you can substitute other terms such as “active or attentive listening,” “attentive eating,” or “attentive walking.” Whichever term you find best for your situation, what is important is that students come to understand the value of cultivating attention and using that attention to develop discernment with regard to their internal and external situations.

---

<sup>10</sup> Greenberg, M. T. (2010). School-based prevention: Current status and future challenges. *Effective Education*, 2, 27–52.

## Thank You

---

We thank you for your interest in SEE Learning. We hope it provides a useful resource for you and your students, and hope that you will share your experiences and insights with the SEE Learning community in your region and worldwide.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

CHAPTER 1

# Creating a Compassionate Classroom



## Overview

---

At its core, SEE Learning is about students learning how best to take care of themselves and each other, specifically with regard to what can be termed their emotional and social health. Therefore, all of SEE Learning can be seen as rooted in compassion: compassion for oneself (self-compassion) and compassion for others. It is not enough, however, to tell students to be compassionate to others and to themselves; what is necessary is showing a range of methods and providing a set of tools. As students come to understand the value of these tools and methods, they will begin to employ them for themselves. At that point, they become their own and each others' teachers.

For this reason, Chapter 1, "Creating a Compassionate Classroom," introduces the foundational concepts of kindness and compassion. "Kindness" is the term employed for younger students, whereas "compassion" is employed for older students. Although there may be subtle differences between these terms, for the purpose of SEE Learning, the important thing is to introduce these concepts and explore them with your students so that they eventually develop their own rich understanding of the concepts and what they look like in practice. All the subsequent chapters of SEE Learning then build upon this foundation by exploring self-compassion in the personal domain with regard to the body, the mind, and emotions (Chapters 2 to 4); compassion for others (Chapters 5 and 6); and compassion in a systemic context (Chapter 7). In some ways, therefore, this first chapter begins to introduce the "what" of SEE Learning and the remaining chapters fill out the "how."

Learning experience 1, "Exploring Compassion," introduces the concept of compassion, explores what it means, and investigates why we need it. It also explores the relationship between compassion and happiness by using two activities: a step in/step out activity and a drawing of a moment of kindness. It is important for students to explore the connection between kindness and happiness, which is the topic of learning experience 2, "Exploring Happiness". If students begin to recognize that our universal wish to be treated with kindness by others (rather than with cruelty) is rooted in our wish for well-being and happiness, then they can recognize that this tends to hold true for others also. Therefore if we want to be treated with kindness, it only makes sense for us to also treat others with kindness. This is the principle of reciprocity.

Learning experience 3, "Class Agreements," provides an opportunity for students to create a list of class agreements that they will strive to abide by in order to create a safe and kind classroom for all. The creation of agreements by students helps them explore kindness in a direct way that shows the clear implications of our need for kindness within the context of a shared space with others.

Learning experience 4, "Practicing Kindness & Compassion," returns to the classroom agreements with an intention to make the classroom agreements more concrete in the minds of your students. First, the students engage in an insight activity whereby they translate the class agreements into

practical examples that can be acted out. Then they act out those examples in front of each other and reflect on what they experienced. This process of embodied understanding should continue as the school year goes on and will make it easier to refer to the class agreements concretely throughout the year.

Learning experience 5, “Compassion as an Inner Quality,” aims to deepen students’ understanding of kindness through a few stories that are then discussed. We easily associate kindness with external activities, like giving someone food or money, saying sweet words to someone, or helping someone up when they fall. But if the intention behind those actions and words is to take advantage of the other person, then we do not see that as real or genuine kindness; nor do we see it as genuine help. The aim of SEE Learning is not to tell students what to do externally or to get them to behave “appropriately;” rather, it aims at helping students develop genuine internal motivation to seek the best in themselves and the best for others. Therefore, it is important that students gradually learn the importance of inner qualities and not just external behaviors. For this reason, it is important that students gradually learn that kindness goes deeper than just external actions but also refers to a state of mind and heart: one’s intention to bring help and happiness to another person. Based on this understanding, students then develop their own definition of compassion, which they can later add to and amend as their understanding develops in sophistication.

The chapter concludes with learning experience 6, “Recognizing Compassion and Exploring Interdependence,” which involves a further exploration of compassion, this time incorporating the idea of interdependence, which overlaps with the concept of gratitude, which will be explored in greater detail later in the curriculum. The idea here is that although we are surrounded by acts of kindness every day, we often do not recognize these acts of kindness or we take them for granted. By looking deeper at everyday activities and seeing the various ways kindness is involved, students can practice appreciating kindness as a skill that grows over time. Eventually they will be able to see more acts of kindness around them and they will get better at recognizing and appreciating their own acts of kindness. Practicing the skill of recognizing compassion in its various forms can lead to a deeper appreciation for how essential kindness is to our everyday life, our happiness, and even our very survival. In this learning experience, students will also be introduced to the concept of interdependence and how their own accomplishments and objects around them are made possible through the kind acts of others, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of interdependence and gratitude later in the curriculum.

It happens that some students find it difficult to recognize kindness in themselves and others. Acts that appear to us as kind, such as someone holding the door open for another person (or even the act of teaching!), may not appear as kind acts to some of your students. Be patient and allow your students to explore these concepts gradually. Hearing other students express what they see as kind

can be helpful, as can having some students share kind acts that they noticed that were done by fellow students. It may take time, but it is likely that over time you will see perspectives slowly shift towards a greater ability to recognize kindness in its many forms.

### **The Components of a SEE Learning Experience**

You will notice that each learning experience begins with a check-in, and that these check-ins change and develop over time. The check-ins provide a way of transitioning into the SEE Learning experience and signaling a shift in the day, but they are also a way to strengthen skills through repeated practice. You are welcome and encouraged to use the check-ins at other times, even when you do not have enough time to do a full learning experience.

Some learning experiences involve discussions or presentations that give students a basic knowledge of a term or idea. This is for the purpose of received knowledge. The learning experiences also include insight activities, which are designed to be short activities that can move received knowledge into the realm of critical insights, personal “a-ha” moments when a student realizes something for themselves. Whenever possible, received knowledge is incorporated into the insight activities (rather than as a separate presentation) so that students can learn by doing.

In addition, learning experiences include reflective practices. These are for moving from critical insight into embodied understanding; they are for deepening the experience. In some cases there is not a sharp distinction between insight activities and reflective practices, because a reflective practice can lead to insights, and an insight activity can be repeated and deepened to encourage further reflection and internalization. Both insight and activities are sometimes marked with an asterisk. This symbol indicates that you are encouraged to do that particular activity more than once if you feel it would be helpful.

Finally, each lesson ends with a debrief, which is an opportunity for students to reflect on the learning experience as a whole and share their thoughts, feelings, and questions.

### **Time and Pacing**

Each learning experience is designed to be a minimum of 30 minutes. It is recommended that you take longer than this if time allows and if your students are capable of it, spending more time on the activities and reflective practices especially. If you have less than 30 minutes, you can choose to only do one of the activities or a part of the activity, and finish the learning experience in the following session. However, remember that check-ins and insight activities are important to include regardless of time.

### **Setting Up a Peace Corner**

You may wish to set up a peace corner, where students can go when they are upset or need some time to themselves. This will also serve as a good place to post artifacts created by your students,

including charts and artwork that they create and posters or other materials that are supportive of SEE Learning. Some classrooms have pillows, a stuffed animal, special pictures, a poster of the resiliency zone (explained in Chapter 2), snow globes and hourglasses, music, story books, and other such resources. Explain to your class that the peace corner is a place where they can show kindness and compassion to themselves and practice some of the things they are learning in SEE Learning. Over time, just going to the peace corner may prove helpful for your students when they need to settle themselves or return to a place of well-being in their bodies, as they come to associate the peace corner with safety and well-being.

### **Student Personal Practice**

Your students will be learning personal practices that they can use and each student will connect with a different set of practices. SEE Learning scales up into practices gradually, recognizing that if not approached skillfully, some practices may actually make students feel worse, rather than better. Chapter 1 sets the stage for personal practice by establishing a safe and caring environment. Chapter 2 then introduces practices that calm and regulate the nervous system. Chapter 3 then introduces practices involving the cultivation of attention (and what are commonly called “mindfulness” practices). Chapter 4 then introduces practices involving emotions. It is advised that you follow this sequence as best as you are able, as that way your students will be well prepared for each additional type of practice and will be able to return to the simpler forms of practice in case they become upset or dysregulated. Students will also start a journal they can use throughout the curriculum for drawings and written exercises.

### **Teacher Personal Practice**

It is highly recommended that you begin some of the practices in Chapters 2 and 3 before you start teaching them to your students if you do not already have familiarity with them. Even a slight bit of personal practice (such as a few minutes each day) will make your teaching more effective when you reach those sections. Starting early will allow you to get in as much practice as you are able before working on the practices with your students.

### **Further Reading and Resources**

If you have not yet completed reading the SEE Learning Framework, contained within the *SEE Learning Companion*, you are encouraged to read that up to and through the Personal Domain.

Also recommended is Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge’s short book *The Triple Focus*, and Linda Lantieri and Daniel Goleman’s book *Building Emotional Intelligence: Practices to Cultivate Inner Resilience in Children*.

## Letter to Parents and Caregivers



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent or Caregiver,

Your child is beginning a program in **Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) Learning**. SEE Learning is a K-12 educational program created by Emory University to enrich young people’s social, emotional, and ethical development. SEE Learning adds to existing social-emotional learning (SEL) programs by including a focus on attention training, compassion and care, an awareness of broader systems, and ethical engagement.

At its core, SEE Learning is about students learning how best to take care of themselves and each other, specifically with regard to what can be termed their emotional and social health. SEE Learning is rooted in compassion: compassion for oneself (self-compassion) and compassion for others. Compassion is not taught as a dictate, however, but through the cultivation of specific skills, such as learning to regulate one’s nervous system and deal with stress, learning about one’s emotions and how to deal with them constructively, learning social and relationship skills, and learning to think in a broader way about the communities and societies we exist in. The aim of SEE Learning is to provide tools for students’ current and future well-being.

### Getting Started with Chapter 1

SEE Learning is divided into units or chapters. Chapter 1, “Creating a Compassionate Classroom,” introduces the foundational concepts of kindness and compassion. “Kindness” is the term employed for younger students, whereas “compassion” is employed for older students. Compassion refers to the ability to care for oneself and others, and is taught as source of strength and empowerment, not a sign of weakness or an inability to stand up for oneself or others. A growing body of scientific research (referenced in the *SEE Learning Companion*) points to the positive health and relationship benefits that can come from cultivating compassion.

### Home Practice

You are encouraged to take an active role in your child’s experience of SEE Learning. The curriculum is available for you to read, as is a volume called the *SEE Learning Companion*, which includes the Overview and framework used by the program and references to the scientific research that the program is based upon.

For this first chapter, try asking over a meal or at another time, what acts of kindness each person in your household noticed and/or took part in that day. At other times, point out and recognize moments of kindness and compassion to your child when you come across them, and encourage them to do the same. This builds the skill of recognizing and valuing kindness and compassion.

### Further Reading and Resources

You can access SEE Learning resources on the web at: [www.compassion.emory.edu](http://www.compassion.emory.edu).

Also recommended is Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge’s short book *The Triple Focus*, and Linda Lantieri and Daniel Goleman’s book *Building Emotional Intelligence: Practices to Cultivate Inner Resilience in Children*.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher/Educator Signature

Teacher/Educator Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Educator Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_



Center for  
Contemplative Science and  
Compassion-Based Ethics

EMORY UNIVERSITY

## Exploring Compassion

## PURPOSE

The focus of this first learning experience is to introduce students to SEE Learning through an exploration of kindness and why we need it. The foundation of SEE Learning is compassion and kindness. From the start, it is important for students to explore what compassion is, and why we want it for ourselves and need it. We all want kindness and compassion shown to us, because we all want happiness and well-being, and none of us wants sadness, troubles, and difficulties. If we recognize this, we can understand why we should show compassion

to others, because they too, like us, want to be happy and don't want to be sad. (Note: The next two learning experiences will use this understanding of our shared need for kindness and happiness to create a mutually agreed-on list of class agreements that will support a safe, productive learning environment.)

\*The asterisk by a practice denotes that it can be repeated multiple times (with or without modifications).

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Explore whether we all want happiness, kindness, and compassion
- Explore the relationship between kindness and happiness.
- Create a personal drawing of kindness that they can use as a resource.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



**Interpersonal  
Awareness**

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- The prompts provided below
- A journal for each student and pencils
- Markers or pens for drawing

## LENGTH

30 minutes

## CHECK-IN | 3 minutes

- *“This year we will be spending some time each week doing SEE Learning: Social, Emotional, and Ethical Learning. SEE Learning uses science, activities, discussions, and reflections to explore our world of thoughts, emotions, our relationships with each other, the decisions we make, and the impact those decisions have on ourselves and others.*
- *We’ll be learning about how to deal with strong emotions and stress, how to take care of ourselves and gain a better understanding of our bodies and minds, and how to get along better with other people or deal with things when we have trouble getting along with others.*
- *SEE Learning is divided into chapters, and in this first chapter we’ll be exploring the concept of compassion and how we can make this classroom a safe, happy, and compassionate environment where we all feel respected, valued, and capable of learning and growing together.”*

---

## INSIGHT ACTIVITY 1 | 12 minutes

### Step In, Step Out Activity

#### Overview

Students will step in and out of a circle depending on whether the prompts the teacher reads apply to them. Then students will take a moment to notice who is on the inside and who is on the outside. This shows who shares that same trait or experience, and who doesn’t.

## Content/Insights to be Explored

We have many differences, but wanting happiness and kindness is something we share in common.

## Materials Required

Script of prompts, provided below

## Instructions

- Students form a circle.
- Using the prompts in the sample script below, ask students to step in if the prompt applies to them.
- Ask students to notice who is on the inside and who is on the outside. Discuss.
- At the end of the prompts tell them:
  - *“Let’s look around. It seems we all feel happier when people are kind to us. Just like we can connect over things that we like or things that we have, like the same number of brothers and sisters, we can connect over something that brings our whole class together: our desire to be happy and for people to be kind to us.”*

## Teaching Tips

- You will want to have a large enough area for students to gather in a large circle to step in and out of. You may need to move desks/tables. An option would be to do this activity outside, or in the gymnasium.
- Instead of having students step in and step out of a circle, you can have students form a circle of chairs and have them stand up or

remain seated. Or you could have them raise their hands instead of stepping in. Whichever method you choose, make sure that students can see each other, so they can see how their classmates answer each question.

- In addition to the questions given below in the sample script, add additional questions as you see fit and as time allows. You can also adapt the questions as necessary to your particular students. The point is to begin with things that the students do not all have in common, such as preferences or aspects of their identity, but then move towards what we all have in common: that we want happiness and prefer kindness.
- Pay attention if some students don't step in when asked the final few questions: they may not have understood the questions. But do not feel the need to make students step in or to accept your conclusions: subsequent learning experiences will continue to explore the ideas of happiness and kindness in greater depth, so their views and feelings may change as their understanding progresses.

### **Sample Script**

- *"Let's all form a circle. This circle is a safe circle. People are free to think and feel independently without comment or judgment from others.*
- *If I say something that's true for you, then you'll step into the middle. We are going to try and do this without talking, but instead just noticing what is going on around you.*

- *Let's start.*
- *Step in the center if you have a brother or sister.*
- *Now, stop and take a look and see who else has a brother or sister, or who else doesn't. Now step back please.*
- *Now, we're going to think about some things that you like.*
- *Step in if you like pizza.*
- *Now, take a look and see who else likes pizza. Step back please.*
- *Step into the center if you like to play video games.*
- *Take a look and see who else likes to play video games. Now step back please.*
- *Step in the center if you like playing sports or big active games.*
- *Take a look and see who else likes those things. And step back please.*
- *Who noticed they had a similarity with someone? What was it? [These questions are crucial as this way kids start to connect more and are ready for the next step.]*
- *I notice that only some people step in each time. Let's see what happens if I ask this: Step in if you like to be happy rather than sad.*
- *Now, take a look around. What do you notice about this?*

- *Ah, look! All of us (or most of us) are in the center! It seems that we all like to be happy rather than sad. Now let's step back.*
- *Step in if you feel better when you're happy than when you're sad.*
- *Let's look around. How many of us are here?*
- *Step in if you like it when people are kind and compassionate to you, rather than mean.*
- *Let's look around. Are we all here?*
- *It seems we like it when people are kind and compassionate to us. Now let's step back.*
- *Step in if you feel happier when people are kind and compassionate to you, rather than when they are mean.*
- *Let's look around. It seems we all feel happier when people are kind and compassionate to us.*
- *Just like we can connect over things that we like or things that we have, like the same number of brothers and sisters, we can connect over something that brings our whole class together: our desire to be happy and for people to be kind and compassionate to us.*

---

## **REFLECTIVE PRACTICE** | 12 minutes

### Remembering and Drawing Kindness\*

#### **Overview**

Students will produce a drawing of when someone was kind to compassionate to them with some sentences underneath explaining the scene and how they felt.

#### **Content/Insights to be Explored**

- We can recall memories or imagined acts of kindness and compassionate.
- Kindness and compassion adds to our happiness.
- We all want to be happy.

#### **Materials Required**

- A journal for each student
- Pencils, markers, or pens for drawing

#### **Instructions**

- Ask students to silently imagine a time when someone was kind or compassionate to them.
- Ask the student to draw the image in their SEE Journal. Then ask them to write a few sentences to answer these questions about the memory/image:
  - What did it look like? What did it feel like? What did you look like? What did you feel like?
- Give students a few minutes to draw and write, guiding individual students as necessary. When it seems that most students are ready, invite them to share.
- When they are sharing, ask them what it felt like when they were shown kindness.
- If students share moments that were not kind, or that made them feel bad, remind them that kindness is something that makes us feel happier when we receive it from others, and ask them to think of another time when they were shown kindness and felt happy receiving that kindness.

- Allow as many students to share as time allows, drawing their attention to the simple fact that we all want kindness and compassionate, because they add to our happiness, and we all want to be happy.

### Teaching Tips

- You can do this activity sitting at tables or desks or together as a whole group, sitting in a circle. The script below is written for students sitting at tables or desks.
- Have a few students share their moment of kindness in case others are stuck as this will give some more scaffolding.
- You may want to have the writing prompts written out on the board or on chart paper.
- You may want to model with a drawing you have made with some answers to the prompts for your image.
- Depending on the size of your class and reluctance of some students to talk in a large group, you might ask them to pair up to talk first.
- You can also ask other students what they feel when they see another student sharing their kindness moment, as it may also make them feel happy, or it may remind them of a time when they received a similar kindness.
- This drawing activity can be done more than once in different class sessions, but make sure to save at least one copy of the drawings as they will be used again in later learning experiences. The students can save their own drawing, you can hang them up on the wall, or you can collect them and distribute them again later when they are needed. This activity can be repeated at least once a month.

### Sample script

- *"Let's go back to our desks.*
- *Remember how we saw that we all like it when people are kind to us?*
- *Let's be silent for a moment and think about a moment when someone was kind or compassionate to us. Sometimes it is easier to bring memories to our mind if we close our eyes or look at the ground. I'll keep my eyes open.*
- *It could be something very special, or it could be something very simple.*
- *It could be someone helping you, or someone saying something nice to you.*
- *It could be a friend who played with you, or someone giving you a toy or present.*
- *Raise your hand if you've thought of a time when someone was kind to you. [Have a few students share in case others are stuck - this will give some more scaffolding.]*
- *Now we're going to draw and write what happened when someone was kind to us.*
- *We are going to have special journals to record our learning and ideas. Sometimes we will ask you to draw in these journals, sometimes we will ask you to write, sometimes*

both. Today you are going to turn to the first page of your journal and begin drawing and writing.

- Answer these questions about your moment of kindness and compassion: what did it look like? What did it feel like? What did you look like? What did you feel like? [Give students a few minutes to draw and write, guiding individual students as necessary. When it seems that most students are ready, invite them to share.]
- Who would like to share their drawing and tell us about that time?
- These drawings will be available to you in your journal as a resource to come back to if you need a reminder of a kind moment. You are always welcome to look back at what we've done and bring positive feelings forward."

- In one word or sentence, is there anything you learned today about kindness and compassion?" (Invite individual students to share out.)

---

#### **DEBRIEF** | 3 minutes

- "What do you think: do we all want to be happy? Do we all like kindness and compassionate more than meanness?
- How do we feel when people are kind and compassionate to us? How do we feel when people are mean?
- This year we're going to be helping each other create a caring classroom. If we all want to be happy, and we all like kindness, then we should learn to be kind and compassionate to each other. So that's what we're going to do.

## Exploring Happiness

## PURPOSE

The focus of this learning experience is to explore how we all want happiness and well-being, and how this is a basic orientation in our life and is something that we share in common with all human beings and even animals. Understanding that we all want happiness is fundamental to understanding our need for compassion, since as social beings we depend on others for our happiness, and appreciate it when they show consideration for our well-being and happiness.

However, it is not always evident to us that our wish for happiness and to avoid unhappiness underlies our motivations, emotions and actions, and that this is the same for others as well. It takes insight to see that even when people do things that appear to be leading to pain and distress, their underlying motivation is often relief, happiness and well-being. This understanding in turn creates a powerful support for the future topics of self-compassion, empathy, and compassion for others.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Investigate whether they want happiness and don't want distress.
- Explore how universal the wish for happiness and to avoid distress is.
- Explore how this basic orientation underlies human activities, motivations, and emotions.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS

Interpersonal  
Awareness

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Enough space for students to move around an imagined continuum line
- A sign that reads "Yes" and one that reads "No" that can be placed on either end of a line
- Printouts of the "Happiness" sheet—one for each student

## LENGTH

30 minutes

### CHECK-IN | 3 minutes

- *“Who can remind us what we did last time in our SEE Learning session?”*
  - *(Last time we learned about what we have in common when it comes to compassion and happiness. We did the step in, step out activity and we also drew a moment when we experienced compassion.)”*
- 

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY 1 | 15 minutes

#### Stand by Your Experience\*

#### Overview

In this activity, students will be given prompts that will encourage them to think about their wish for happiness, how universal it is, and the role it plays in their motivations and actions. They will be able to agree or disagree with the prompts and then explain why they feel the way they do with others and with the class.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

Our wish for happiness and to avoid unnecessary hardship plays a significant role in our lives and in the lives of others, and it underlies our actions, motivations, hopes, and fears.

#### Materials Required

- Enough space for students to move around an imagined continuum line
- A sign that reads “Yes” and one that reads “No” that can be placed on either end of a line (the line can be imaginary or can be created with colored tape on the ground)
- The prompts noted below

#### Instructions

- Place the Yes and No signs at opposite ends of a continuum. Allow students to stand wherever they like to begin.
- Let students know that they will be sharing their thoughts with each other and that while this activity is leading them in the direction of making official class agreements together, in the meantime, we need to be respectful of each other’s voices and be kind to each other in our interactions. Ask for a consensus vote on the matter.
- Read the first prompt below.
- Give students 10 seconds to think about it and ask them to think of an example before they move to stand by their answer. Tell them to stand anywhere on the continuum that fits with their experience.
- Once students are in place, ask them to turn and talk to one or two others who are near them and share where they are standing and why. (If a student is standing alone, the teacher should be her partner.)
- Invite 3-4 students from one end of the spectrum to the other to share out in order with the class. Encourage others to maintain an open mind.
- Invite students to move if they have changed their mind. Invite those who move to share what changed for them.
- Continue with the remaining prompts. Make sure all voices have been heard at least once if possible, and be careful of dominating voices.

## Teaching Tips

This activity may lead to rich discussions that take time, and if you find you are having a rich discussion during the insight activity, consider extending the activity, eliminating the reflective practice, and ending the session with the debrief. Then come back to the activity the next time you meet, do the remaining prompts, and finish off the second time with the reflective practice.

## Sample Script

- *"For this activity, we will be sharing our experiences with each other. Though we don't have formal class agreements with each other yet, this activity is going to help us make them together. Can we agree to be open-minded, kind and to listen to each other's voices during this activity? (Ask for thumbs up to agree, thumbs down to disagree, and thumb in the middle if you're not sure.) If you have consensus, proceed. If not, ask those who disagree or aren't sure what other agreements they need to feel safe during this activity.*
- *I'm going to read you a statement about happiness. I want you to take 10 seconds to think about the statement, your experience with the statement, and an example you might talk about once you move.*
- *Read statement and wait 10 seconds.*
- *Now move to stand on the continuum where your experience is reflected. If you agree completely, stand by Yes. If you disagree completely, stand by No. If you're undecided or if you're somewhere between those two,*

*then stand along the line in the middle or closer to Yes or closer to No.*

- *Turn and talk to the people close to you on the line. Why are you standing there? What experiences have you had that make you think or feel the way you do?*
- *Let's come back together as a whole group - who would like to share? Let's go from one end of the spectrum to the other. We have time for about 3-4 people. As you are listening to your peers share, think about if your answer is changed. I will give you a chance to move if you would like to.*
- *Please move now if your answer has changed. How and why did your answer change? If it did not, speak about why you think that is.*
- *Repeat the above with the remaining prompts below.*
- *Debrief in a brief discussion: how did this activity change or reinforce your initial ideas about happiness?"*

---

## HAPPINESS STATEMENT PROMPTS

- Everyone wants happiness.
- I know exactly what I need to make me happy.
- If I got what I think I need to make me happy, I would be happy forever.
- I can think of a time when something I thought would make me happy did not actually make me happy in the end.

- Sometimes people do things to be happy, but they end up hurting themselves or others in the process.
- Everyone wants to avoid distress and unhappiness.
- Our wish for happiness motivates us to do everything we do.

---

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 8 minutes

### Our Aspirations and Our Wish for Happiness

#### Overview

In this reflective practice, students will work to connect to a basic orientation towards happiness with those things they find most important and meaningful in their lives.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

Our wish for happiness and to avoid unnecessary hardship plays a significant role in our lives and in the lives of others, and it underlies our actions, motivations, hopes, and fears.

#### Materials Required

- Printouts of the “Happiness” sheet found at the end of this learning experience – one for each student

#### Instructions

- Use the script below to lead the reflective practice.
- After students have shared, you can ask what they thought or felt when they saw other students sharing.

#### Teaching Tips

The point is not to try to convince students that each item they write down is connected to their underlying wish to be happy and avoid distress and unhappiness, but to invite a discussion and critical reflection about it.

#### Sample script

- *“It seems we all want happiness and don’t want distress, pain, and difficulties.*
- *Can we connect this to our own personal lives and what we want and don’t want in our lives?*
- *Sometimes we may not understand why we are doing what we’re doing, but if we connect it to our basic wish for happiness, it can make more sense. We see that the things we feel are most important to us are actually connected to our wish for happiness and well-being.*
- *(Provide handout with activities, hopes/dreams, and worries/concerns.)*
- *On this sheet we have three categories. We’re going to take a moment to silently think about what activities we like to do and think are important for us, like playing sports, being with friends, doing well in school, and so on.*
- *Then we’re going to think about our hopes and wishes for this year. What do we want to accomplish? If we could achieve certain things by the end of this year, what would we want that to be?*

- *The last column is for worries and concerns. If you think about this coming year, do you have any specific worries or concerns?*
- *As you think and write, you should know that this is for yourself and no one else needs to see this unless you want to show it to someone.*
- *Let's begin now and let's do this in silence so that we can concentrate and reflect.*
- *(Give 3-4 minutes for this. You may wish to tell them when they have 30 seconds remaining that you will be wrapping up in 30 seconds.)*
- *Now let's look at what we wrote and see if each of the items we wrote down is related to our wish for happiness and to avoid distress, unpleasantness, and unhappiness.*
- *If you see something that reflects this underlying wish, then you can circle it. If you see something that doesn't seem connected to your wish for happiness, or you're not sure, then you can put a question mark next to it.*
- *(Give one minute for this or more if necessary.)*
- *Would anyone be willing to share one thing that they circled, tell us what it is, and explain how it connects to their wish for happiness?*
- *Would anyone be willing to share one thing that they put a question mark next to?"*

After students have shared, you can ask what they thought or felt when they saw other students sharing.

### **DEBRIEF** | 3 minutes

- *"Let's take a moment to think about what we discussed today. Is there anything that you realized or heard that has stuck with you or seemed particularly important? If so, you can share it in a single word as we go around one by one. If not, you can pass.*
- *Is there anything that you still have a question about or would like to talk more about next time? If so, you can share it in a single word, or you can pass."*

# Happiness

Activities I Do that I Care About	My Hopes and Dreams for this Year	My Fears and Worries for this Year

## Class Agreements

## PURPOSE

The focus of this learning experience is to further explore the idea of kindness, compassion and consideration and how we all benefit from them by creating a mutually agreed-on list of class agreements that will support a safe, productive learning environment. The creation of agreements by students helps them explore compassion in a direct way that shows the clear implications of our need for compassion within the context of a shared space with others. It also increases

their own investment in what is seen as constructive and non-constructive behavior in the classroom, since they can see how the items in the list directly impact themselves and others. It also orients students towards attending to the reality of others' presence and their feelings and needs.

\*The asterisk by a practice denotes that it can be repeated multiple times (with or without modifications).

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Explore several practical implications of our need for compassion for how we act with each other.
- Identify agreements that can help create a compassionate, caring classroom.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS

Interpersonal  
Awareness

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- A piece of plain chart paper that can be hung on the wall with the header "In our classroom we agree to..."
- A board or a second piece of chart paper for scratch ideas
- Markers

## LENGTH

45 minutes, split into 2 days if possible  
(30 minutes on day 1; 15 minutes on day 2)

### CHECK-IN | 3 minutes

- *“Who can remind us what we did last time in our SEE Learning session?”*
- (Last time we talked about whether we all want happiness, whether we share this with all people, and how this orientation towards happiness underlies all our actions, hopes, and concerns.)
- *Does anybody remember some of the things we talked about and shared?*
- *Do you think the world would be different if we showed each other more compassion, kindness and consideration? How?*
- *What about our school experience? How might it be different if we showed each other more compassion?*
- *To do that we have to think a bit about how exactly we would do it. In this session of SEE Learning we’re going to think about how we want to be with each other as a class to support each other’s happiness and our collective happiness.”*

---

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 24 minutes

#### Creating Classroom Agreements

##### Overview

Students will consider what would contribute to happiness, kindness, and compassion in the classroom and make a list of class agreements.

##### Content/Insights to be Explored

- We all want compassion and happiness.

- There are specific actions we can take to support each others’ happiness.

##### Materials Required

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers

##### Instructions

- Ask students what we can agree on to do with each other so we have a fun, safe, caring, and happy class.
- Take lots of suggestions and start a list on a board or the piece of scratch chart paper where all the students can see it. If needed, you can prompt the students with possible ideas, such as:
  - kindness
  - having fun
  - not bullying
  - helping each other
  - sharing/taking turns
  - showing respect for each other
  - listening to each other
  - not being mean
  - not shouting
  - asking for help
  - paying attention
  - saying sorry

## Teaching Tips

You can allow any student to answer the follow-up questions, not just the one who made the initial suggestion.

## Sample script

- *“Let’s try to make a list of how we would like our class to be.*
- *We all want to be happy, so that’s something we all have in common.*
- *And we saw that one thing that makes us happier is when people are kind to us.*
- *So kindness might be one thing we would put on the list. What do you think?*
- *What else might we put on the list that we will agree to do as a class so that we can be happy and have a safe, caring classroom?*
- *When a student suggests something, use it as an opportunity to have the all students delve deeper by prompting them with one or two questions like:*
  - *What does that mean?*
  - *What does that look like?*
  - *What would happen if we all did that?*
  - *What would happen if we didn’t do that?*

[Continue this process as time allows.]

## INSIGHT ACTIVITY

15 minutes (another day, if possible)\*

### Creating Classroom Agreements, part 2

#### Overview

Students will continue to consider what would contribute to happiness and kindness in the classroom and make a list of class agreements.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

- We all want compassion and happiness.
- There are specific actions we can take to support each others’ happiness.

#### Materials Required

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers
- The list made in previous activity

#### Instructions

- Together, group the agreements and write them on the piece of chart paper that has the heading “In our classroom we agree to...”
  - For this, it’s important to put them into action statements that are in the affirmative, like “Be kind” or “Be helpful” or “Ask for help when we need it.”
- Read the agreements aloud together.
- It is helpful for kids to sign the agreements chart and hang it in the classroom.
- Remind students that you are making the agreements so we feel happier and safe here in our classroom.

## Teaching Tips

- If possible, complete this insight activity the day after the first one. Students often need time to let the ideas about their agreements settle and marinate; sometimes they even come up with more the next time you sit down together.
- If you are able to complete this activity a day after the first one, use the provided check-in below to get started.

## Sample script

- [Check-in if you are completing on a different day: *"Last time we met we came up with a big list of things we needed to feel safe and happy in our classroom space. Today we are going to look back at the list. If you realize there was something you wanted to add, let me know.*]
- *Maybe we can put some of these together if they are similar, so that we can have a few main agreements that we can remember.*
- *On this sheet it says, "In our classroom we agree to..." So we can put our agreements after that from the list we just created.*
- *I wonder if these go together?*
- *And we can put them in this form, "Be kind..."*
- [Continue this process as time allows.]
- *Now we have some agreements we can make with each other.*
- *Let's take a look at them and read them out loud together.*

- *We're going to try to do this for ourselves so we feel happier and safe here in our classroom.*
- *Let's keep thinking about this list until we meet again, when we might have more to add."*

---

## DEBRIEF | 3 minutes

- *"This year we are going to learn about how best to be kind, compassionate, and considerate to ourselves and others. We'll be learning ways to do this, and this agreement that we created together is our first step!*
- *In one word or sentence, is there anything you learned today that you might use another time to help yourself or someone else meet their needs?"* (Ask students to share out, or write in their journals.)

---

## EXTRA PRACTICE

- Over the next week or two have students write in their journals related to the class agreements. For example, if one agreement is "create a physically safe place for ourselves and others" a journal prompt could be: what does this look like, what would it look like if we didn't do this, why is this important.
- Another idea is to do an idea map/graffiti wall of the agreement. In small groups, students get one agreement and brainstorm words, short phrases, and pictures that come to their mind when they think of this agreement.

## Practicing Kindness and Compassion

### PURPOSE

The focus of this learning experience is to build on prior learning and engage in the actual modeling and practice of kindness for experiential and embodied understanding. This involves two steps: an insight activity whereby the students translate the class agreements into practical examples that can be acted out; and then a practice activity where they act out those examples in front of each other and reflect on what they experienced. By acting out the very same items they said they wanted in the classroom,

they will come to a better understanding of compassion, of their class agreements, and of how they look in practice. This process of embodied understanding should continue as the school year goes on and will make it easier to refer to the class agreements concretely throughout the year.

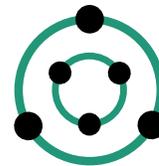
\*The asterisk by a practice denotes that it can be repeated multiple times (with or without modifications).

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Develop specific ways of exhibiting kindness based on the class agreements.
- Apply their understanding of kindness in concrete individual and collective actions.

### PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



**Relationship Skills**

### LENGTH

30 minutes (You will likely want to repeat this learning experience more than once so that you can get through all your class agreements.)

### MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Your class agreements listed on a piece of chart paper or on the board
- Your class agreements, each one on a separate sheet of paper

### CHECK-IN | 3 minutes

- *“Let’s take a moment to sit quietly and rest our minds and bodies so that we can think a bit. [Pause.] Maybe you are tired or full of energy, maybe it’s been a challenging morning (day) or an exciting one. Either way, it’s okay.*
  - *Now let’s all see if we can think of any moments of kindness or compassion in the day so far. Maybe something happened at home or on your way to school or as recently as just a minute ago. See what comes up for you. Don’t worry if you can’t think of something, you can always imagine a moment of kindness too. [Pause.]*
  - *Let’s sit with your moment of kindness for a little bit.*
  - *Would anyone like to share what they thought of?*
  - *How did that make you feel?*
  - *Anyone else?”*
- 

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 22 minutes

#### Turning Class Agreements into Helping Actions\*

##### Overview

In small groups, students will get act out one of the agreements. The rest of the class will guess which agreement they are modeling. You will likely want to repeat this learning experience more than once so that you can get through all your class agreements.

##### Content/Insights to be Explored

- We all want kindness and happiness.

- There are specific actions we can take to support each others’ happiness.

##### Materials Required

- Your class agreements listed on a piece of chart paper or on the board
- Each class agreement typed (or written) on separate sheets of paper

##### Instructions

- After you have agreed on your class agreements, put them each on an individual pieces of paper (one agreement per sheet).
- Divide your group into small groups (3-5 students each) and give each group one agreement.
- Tell them they will be in charge of acting out their agreement to show what it looks like in action. The groups will think of the best way to demonstrate the agreement and quickly practice before showing the class. Provide 3-5 minutes for deciding and practicing.
- When groups are ready, groups will act out the agreement in front of the rest of the class. Other students in the audience can even be asked to guess which of the agreements is being acted out instead of being told before each performance. If you run out of time, you can continue during the next class.

##### Teaching Tips

- Try this format with several of the class agreements. When you come to a good

stopping point, you can suggest returning to the rest of the agreements during other class meeting times. Eventually you will have specific ideas connected to each general agreement.

- It would be helpful to record these “skits” as references for the rest of the year.
- It’s important to have students act out positive behaviors instead of having them demonstrate less desirable behaviors.

### Sample script

- *“Last time we were together, we worked on class agreements. Why is it important for us to have these kinds of agreements with each other? [Allow several students to share.]*
- *If no one says it, add: We have these class agreements so we feel happier and safe here in our classroom.*
- *Today we’re going to act out what some of our agreements look like. First I’m going to divide you into small groups.*
- *Now that you are in small groups, I will give each group one of the agreements. As a group, you are in charge of acting out this agreement to show what it looks like in action. You will have just a short amount of time to brainstorm, agree, and practice your brief skit. Then you will act it out for the rest of the class. [Provide 3-5 minutes for deciding and practicing.]*
- *Ok, let’s have our first group present to the class. Those of you in the audience, be*

*prepared to guess which of the agreements is being acted out. If we run out of time, we can finish during our next class together.”*

- [Repeat for each small group until you make it through all the agreements.]

---

### DEBRIEF | 4 minutes

- *“Let’s take a moment to sit and think about what we just saw and felt.*
- *Did you notice how you felt when you saw people needing help or getting help?*
- *It often feels good not just to get help but to give it, and even to see someone being helped. It can make us feel happier and safer when we are helped by others and when they show us kindness.*
- *Is there anything you learned or practiced about kindness or compassion that you might like to use again sometime?*
- *Is there anything you think we should add to the class agreements after what we did today?”*

---

### EXTRA PRACTICE

- It’s important for students to be able to practice kindness and compassion in authentic situations. Over the next week, set a goal each day for students to practice one of the agreements (this can be set at the beginning of the day) and then check-in to see how it went. This can also be brought back throughout the year when students seem to be becoming lax about class agreements.

- In SEE journals, students can write about how they would respond if someone were violating a class agreement. For example, “if we saw someone not respecting classroom property, what could we do”. They can also journal about instances when they saw someone following the class agreements or when they personally did so.

## Compassion as an Inner Quality

## PURPOSE

The focus of this learning experience is to go further into the idea of kindness and compassion by exploring whether it is just outer actions or also something inside one's heart and mind. We easily associate kindness with external activities, like giving someone food or money, saying sweet words to someone, or helping someone up when they fall. But if the intention behind those actions and words is to take advantage of the other person, then we do not see that as real or genuine kindness; nor do we see it as genuine

help. For students to understand how to cultivate compassion as a disposition, which lies at the heart of SEE Learning, they will be aided by understanding that compassion goes deeper than just external actions but also refers to a state of mind and heart: one's intention to bring help and happiness to another person.

\*The asterisk by a practice denotes that it can be repeated multiple times (with or without modifications).

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

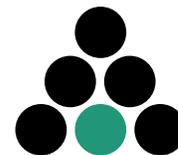
Students will:

- Explore compassion in the context of outer actions and inner intentions and motivations.
- Recognize the distinction between real (inner, genuine) kindness and apparent kindness.
- Develop their own definition of compassion.
- Provide examples of actions that might seem unkind, but are really kind, and vice versa.

## LENGTH

35 minutes

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



## Compassion for Others

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Chart paper with "compassion" written in the middle of each, enough for 1 piece per small group
- Markers
- Students' SEE Learning journals; writing utensils
- The scenarios provided below
- The kindness drawings made in learning experience 2

## CHECK-IN | 3 minutes

- *“Last time we talked about how we could create a kind, caring classroom and we created some classroom agreements. Does anybody remember some of the things we talked about and put on our list? [Allow time for sharing.]”*
- *“Today we are going to think about how we can practice compassion.”*

---

## INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 15 minutes

### Scenarios

#### Overview

In this activity, you will read one or more scenarios to the students that show how we all naturally prefer kindness, consideration, and compassion, because they make us feel safe and secure, but that we also want genuine kindness, not just apparent kindness. Our preference for kindness is something so basic that we even share it with birds and mammals, who prefer those who protect and feed them over those who threaten them. Scenarios are provided for you here to generate discussions around our preference for kindness and compassion, and how genuine kindness and compassion refer to inner qualities. If someone pretends to be compassionate, but really intends to take advantage of someone, then we do not see that as genuine compassion. If students come to understand that compassion is an inner quality, not just apparently kind actions, then they will realize that to cultivate compassion, we need to cultivate that inner quality, not just act outwardly in a particular way

or adhere to certain behaviors. The questions after the scenarios are intended to elicit these *critical insights*:

- We naturally prefer kindness and compassion and want to move towards them and away from meanness
- Kindness and compassion make us feel safer and more secure
- Compassion is an inner quality
- Pretend kindness (outward actions without a good intention) is not genuine compassion

Feel free to modify details from the scenario to suit your class and school. If you have time, it can be even more effective if you have some students act out the scenarios. The scenarios are provided as scripts at the end of the learning experience.

#### Scenario 1

##### The Rich Woman and the Charity

A representative from a charity goes to a wealthy woman (or man) to ask for a donation to assist people who are homeless.

“I know you’ve been very generous to charities in the past,” the representative said. “Please would you give us a donation? It would make a big difference to a lot of people who are in need.”

“How will I be recognized if I make a donation?” the woman asked. “It’s important that people know that I made the donation, not someone else.”

"The homeless people you help will all be so grateful, and they will all be told that it was you who helped them," said the representative.

"But I want other people to know too, not just the homeless people," she said. "Will it be in the news?"

"Oh yes," said the representative. "And if your donation is large enough, you will be specially honored at our annual party celebration with a trophy."

The woman smiled. "In that case, I agree."

## Scenario 2

### The Basketball Captain and the Recruit

The captain of the basketball (or another sports) team sees potential in a new student and really wants her (or him) to join the team, thinking it will help the team win the championship that year. The new student doesn't particularly want to join, though, and tells the captain this. The captain gets the members of the team to be really nice to the new student, giving her presents, saying all sorts of nice things to her.

## Scenario 3

### The Two Brothers and the Kitten

Two brothers were playing in a park one day and when they saw a beautiful little kitten. The older brother thought, "Oh, what a pretty kitten!" and he wanted to capture it for himself, so he threw a stick at it and started to chase it. The kitten got scared and tried to run away, but since it couldn't run very well yet, it had trouble escaping him.

The younger brother said, "Stop! Don't hurt the kitten! It's only a baby!" and he went to go and help the kitten and protect it. When he reached the kitten, he petted it and offered it some food. But the older brother got angry and kept trying to get at the kitten and catch it. Then their mother came by and said, "What's going on?"

"That kitten is mine," said the older brother, who wanted to capture it. "I saw it first! Make him give it to me!"

"No, don't give it to him," said the younger brother. "He tried to hurt it."

"I don't know what happened because I wasn't here to see it," said the mother. "Maybe we should let the kitten decide."

The older brother who had tried to hurt and capture the kitten tried to call to her sweetly. "Please come to me little kitten! I will take good care of you!"

The mother placed the kitten between the two boys to see who it would go to, and she said to it, "Who do you choose?"

## Discussion of Scenario(s)

- *"How do you think the different people in the scenario were feeling? (Go through the different characters in the scenario.) If they could talk to us, what would they be saying?"*
- *What do you think might happen next in the scenario?*

- *Did you see examples of kindness or compassion in the story? Why or why not?*
- *Is compassion just the outer action, like sweet words or making a donation, or is it also something inside us? An inner quality? What would we call it—an emotion, a motivation, a thought, an intention? Some or all of these? (Note that you are prompting thinking but not seeking a single “right” answer at this point, so welcome all thoughts.)*
- *Can you think of other examples where someone pretends to be kind, but their intention is not compassionate? (Someone helping or donating to charity just to look good, etc.)*
- *What about the reverse? Could something that looks unkind on the surface really be compassionate? Can you think of an example? (A parent saying “No” to their child to protect them; someone scaring away animals who are moving towards danger; someone taking away a dangerous object from a little child even though the child wants it; etc.)”*

reach all the insights at once, since they will be returned to continuously in future learning experiences.

These are a few sample questions you can use to have a discussion and encourage the students to explore the scenario and its various dimensions. Feel free to add your own questions and respond to the flow of the discussion. Allow them to share openly and remember that there are no right or wrong answers, but also keep in mind the critical insights (listed above) that you are orienting them towards. These insights have to come naturally, and it’s all right if not all the students

### Scenario 1

#### The Rich Woman and the Charity

**Narrator:** A representative from a charity goes to a wealthy woman (or man) to ask for a donation to assist people who are homeless.

**Charity representative:** "I know you've been very generous to charities in the past. Please, would you give us a donation? It would make a big difference to a lot of people who are in need."

**Potential Donor:** "How will I be recognized if I make a donation? It's important that people know that I made the donation, not someone else."

**Charity representative:** "The homeless people you help will all be so grateful, and they will all be told that it was you who helped them."

**Potential Donor:** "But I want other people to know too, not just the homeless people," she said. "Will it be in the news?"

**Charity representative:** "Oh yes. And if your donation is large enough, you will be specially honored at our annual party celebration with a trophy."

**Potential Donor:** [smiling hugely]: "In that case, I agree."

End

### Scenario 2

#### The Basketball Captain and the Recruit

**Narrator:** The captain of the basketball (or another sports) team sees potential in a new student and really wants her (or him) to join the team, thinking it will help the team win the championship that year..

**Team Member 1:** Hey, I wanted to give you this!

**New Student:** Thanks, but what for?

**Team Member 2:** Duh, because you're super cool and your basketball skills are awesome!

**New Student:** Thanks! You really think so?

**Team Member 1:** Of course! Your form is great and I've never seen you miss a free throw. You're a natural!

**New Student:** Gosh, thanks, you guys.

**Team Member 2:** Imagine just how much more fun you'd have if you joined our basketball team. I might even be able to get you another one of these if you did

**New Student:** Hm, that seems cool, but I was planning on focusing more on my art this year.

**Team Member 1:** Yeah! Just think about it; you, us, our other teammates, and our captain. We would be unstoppable.

## Scenario 2

### The Basketball Captain and the Recruit (continued)

**Team Member 2:** Since you're new here, this is a guaranteed way to be cool/popular. Plus, you shouldn't put your talent to waste. We could really use your skills. I think it's a valuable trade.

**New Student:** Thanks, you guys but really, I'm okay with my decision.

**Team Member 1:** Oh, come on! We've been pretty nice to you and we're kind of friends now. You can't let us down like that, especially with the championships coming up.

**Team Member 2:** Yeah, just think about it; winning the championships! Imagine not being there with us. Do you think you'll make any friends otherwise?

End

## Scenario 3

### The Two Brothers and the Kitten

**Narrator:** Two brothers were playing in a park one day and then they saw a beautiful little kitten. The older brother thought, "Oh, what a pretty kitten!" and he wanted to capture it for himself, so he threw a stick at it and started to chase it. The kitten got scared and tried to run away, but since it couldn't run very well yet, it had trouble escaping him.

## Scenario 3

### The Two Brothers and the Kitten (continued)

**Younger brother:** "Stop! Don't hurt the kitten! It's only a baby!"

**Narrator:** Then he went to go and help the kitten and protect it. When he reached the kitten, he petted it and offered it some food. But the older brother got angry and kept trying to get at the kitten and catch it. Then their mother came by

**Mother:** "What's going on?"

**Older brother:** "That kitten is mine! I saw it first! I wanted to capture it! Make him give it to me!"

**Younger brother:** "No, don't give it to him. He tried to hurt it."

**Mother:** "I don't know what happened because I wasn't here to see it. Maybe we should let the kitten decide."

**Narrator:** The older brother who had tried to hurt and capture the kitten tried to call to her sweetly.

**Older brother:** "Please come to me little kitten! I will take good care of you!"

**Narrator:** The mother placed the kitten between the two boys to see who it would go to.

**Mother:** [to the kitten] "Who do you choose?"

End

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 15 minutes

### Making and Reflecting on a Definition of Compassion

#### Overview

In this reflective practice, students will make a word map of the word “compassion.” This will be used to develop a simple definition of compassion (one or two sentences) for use in the classroom. The students will take moments for silent reflection during the making of this definition and after making it to allow this wider understanding of compassion to deepen in them.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

- We all prefer compassion and want to move towards compassion and away from meanness.
- Compassion makes us feel safer and more secure.
- Compassion is an inner quality.
- Pretend kindness (outward actions without a good intention) is not genuine compassion.

#### Materials Required

- Chart paper with “compassion” written in the middle of each (1 piece per small group)
- Markers
- Students’ SEE Learning journals
- Writing utensils
- The kindness drawings made in learning experience 2

#### Instructions

- Ask students to silently think about the scenarios and the discussion.
- Ask them to think about the word compassion and what it means to them. Next, divide them into small groups.
- Pass out chart paper with “compassion” written in the middle - one per group. In small groups, students will come up with ideas and words that explain compassion. Tell them to write their ideas around the chart paper.
- After 5-7 minutes, regroup all together. Have a big piece of chart paper with “compassion” written in the middle.
- Ask students to share some of their ideas and add them to the poster. New ideas may come up as they share.
- When you feel like enough has been shared (this can be done on a different day), ask students to move to sit on their own and take out their SEE Learning journal. Ask them to write one sentence that defines compassion.
- Students can share their sentences at the end of this activity or at a later point.

#### Teaching Tips

- Note: Many of the reflective practices in SEE Learning involve moments of silent reflection for students to think, ponder, and internalize their insights. How long these moments should be will depend on the classroom environment and your students. They can

be as short as 15 seconds or can be as long as a few minutes. You will be the best judge of the appropriate amount of time. You may find that with practice, the students will get more comfortable and familiar with these moments, and that you can prolong them for longer periods of time.

- You may consider asking students to do this small group portion of the activity in silence as a challenge - maybe for just a few minutes or half the time allotted.
- You may want to display their definitions of kindness in some way in your room as reference points - for example, students could make sentence strips of their definitions and they could be placed on the walls.

### Sample script

- *"I wonder if we could come up with one sentence to explain what compassion is so that if someone asked us "What does compassion mean?" we can tell them.*
- *Let's take a quiet moment to think about the story and our discussion about it.*
- *I'm going to divide you into small groups. Your group is going to get a piece of paper with the word kindness in the middle. You and your group will come up words that are like compassion that we can use to explain what compassion is. You may look at your kindness drawings to help you.*
- [Allow students to work in small groups for 5-7 minutes.]

- *Let's hear from each group. What shall we add to our classroom agreements?*
- *We have lots of good ideas up here. Now, as a last step is to come up with a definition of compassion. You are going to go back to you spot, with your SEE journal and write one sentence that defines kindness. You can even start the sentence with "compassion means...".*
- [Allow students to work in small groups for 3-5 minutes. If time allows, ask students to share their sentences.]

---

### DEBRIEF | 2 minutes

*"What is something you learned about compassion today?"*

## Recognizing Compassion & Exploring Interdependence

### PURPOSE

The focus of this learning experience is to practice recognizing compassion and exploring interdependence. Although students will already have some notions of what compassion looks like, by looking deeper at everyday activities and seeing the various ways compassion is involved, their appreciation for compassion can grow further. Similarly, though students may have some idea of the concept of interdependence, the simple activity of mapping an accomplishment and all the things that that accomplishment depended on can help them see interdependence more clearly. Interdependence refers to the fact that every object and event comes into being from a variety of causes, in the sense that it depends on other things. Exploring interdependence

can be a powerful tool for recognizing how we depend on others and others depend on us; it can underscore the importance of reciprocity; and it can serve as a foundation for gratitude and a feeling of connectedness to others. It also supports systems thinking, since interdependence is a feature of all systems.

In SEE Learning, capacities like our ability to recognize compassion and interdependence are approached as skills that, while innate, can also be strengthened and enhanced through repeated practice. Practicing the skill of recognizing compassion and interdependence can lead to a deeper appreciation for how essential they are to our everyday life, our happiness, and even our very survival.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Recognize acts of compassion in their day.
- Recognize interdependence as a feature of our shared reality.
- Recognize how the objects and events that we need come from the acts of countless others.

### LENGTH

35 minutes

### PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



#### Interpersonal Awareness

### MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers
- SEE Learning journals
- Writing utensils

## CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

- *“Can anyone remember what we said compassion means? We created a way of explaining it to others. Who remembers what we said?”*
- *Let’s look at our explanation of what compassion is now. I wrote it up on this piece of paper.*
- *Have any of you felt compassion today? Yes? What was it like? If you can’t think of a moment of compassion from today, you can imagine one if you like.*
- *Let’s take a moment to sit for a few seconds and remember what compassion feels like. If you are comfortable with it, close your eyes and really try to picture that moment when someone was kind to you or when you felt kindly towards someone else. Or if you are using your imagination, just imagine that moment. [Pause.]*
- *Thank you. Can some of you share some of the acts of compassion that you thought of?”*

### Teaching Tips

- Use your discretion in guiding this, as you know your own class. Encourage them to think of any moment - no matter how small. It could be the crossing guard who smiled at them, or they handed someone a marker when they needed it, or they smiled at someone they don’t usually pay attention to. Let your students know that it’s ok if they can’t think of a time, because they can imagine one. As you practice with this, it will get easier. Encourage

curiosity: the feeling that we’re all just exploring and wondering about this together.

- It’s possible you may wish to do the check-in during a morning meeting time, and then save the other parts of the learning experience for later in the day. That way, children will already be oriented towards thinking about compassion when you come to the activities.

---

## INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 5 minutes

### Recognizing Compassion\*

#### Overview

In this activity you will invite students to share moments of compassion that they observed or participated in during the day, guiding them to reflect on how it made them and others feel, and challenging them to recognize as many forms of compassion as they can.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

- We see countless acts of compassion around us every day, but we may recognize very few of them if we do not look deeply.

#### Materials Required

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers

#### Instructions

You can begin by asking them how many acts of compassion you think the class will come up with from just things that happened to them today and write the numbers they propose on the board. Then, at the end of the activity, ask

them if they think their original guesses were correct, too low, or too high.

### Teaching Tips

As in every insight activity, students may have other critical insights as you go along—if so, record them or note them on the board so that you can return to them later. This is a quick exercise that can be done many times throughout the year that reinforces that compassion is all around.

### Sample script

- *“So, I have a question for you. If you think about our day together in school, how many “compassionate acts” do you think you could count? 10? 20? [Let them make guesses and write the numbers on the board or chart paper.]*
- *Ok I’m going to write those numbers down on the board here so we can check them again later.*
- *Now, let’s see how many acts of compassion we can come up with. Who can think of something that happened today that was an example of compassion? Did anyone show you compassion today? Or did you do anything that was compassionate for someone else?*
- [Allow for student sharing. If you like you can write a single word or phrase that captures what was shared on the board so that a list begins to grow. After the student has shared, you can ask follow up questions, such as: Why was that compassionate? How did it make

you feel? How do you think it made the other person feel?]

- [You can ask these follow-up questions to other students as well, not just the student who shared, so that they can think about the various ways the action was kind and how it might have made others feel.]
- *Now let’s try to look more deeply. I wonder if we can find even more acts of compassion?*
- *Do you think there might have been compassion that we didn’t even know about or notice?*
- *We found a lot of acts of compassion when we looked deeply, didn’t we? How does it feel to know that we are surrounded by so many acts of compassion?*
- *Now, let’s see. How many did we find? Did we find more than we thought we would? (You can compare with the numbers the students suggested earlier and that you wrote on the board.)*
- *It seems we can find a lot of acts of compassion if we look for them. But if we don’t look, we might not see them.”*

---

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 20 minutes

### Recognizing Interdependence

#### Overview

In this activity students will form groups and draw a web of interdependence starting with a single accomplishment, event, or object.

### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Objects and events exist in a web of interdependence; they depend on countless other objects and events.
- We are connected to and depend on countless other people in a variety of ways, even if they are strangers to us.

### Materials Required

- A large sheet of paper for each group to draw on
- Markers

### Instructions

- If necessary for your group, model the activity to demonstrate what you want them to do in small groups. (The script below includes modeling at two different points in the activity.)
- Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 students each.
- Ask each group to identify an important accomplishment or event that they share in common or have all participated in in some way. Examples include going on a trip; learning to ride a bike; learning to play a game; learning to read and write; and so on. Provide 1 or 2 minutes for this.
- If they cannot think of an event or accomplishment that they all have in common, ask them to identify an object made by humans that they all need.
- Ask them to draw this accomplishment, event, or object in the middle of their sheet of paper.

This will be their subject.

- Ask them to create a first circle by adding (drawing or writing) anything their subject depends on or needs to exist. They can draw a line connecting these things to their subject. For example, if they chose “learning to ride a bike” as their subject, they might add a teacher, a friend, the bicycle, a flat surface to ride on, the person who invented bicycles, and so on. Or if they choose a pencil as their subject, they could add wood, lead, a factory, paint, and so on. Ask them to see if they can think of at least 10 people or things their subject depends on.
- Ask them to now add and draw what the items in that first circle themselves depend on. Again have them draw lines connecting the new items as they are added.
- Have them continue the process freely, selecting any item on the page and identifying things or people it depends on. Monitor each group to provide guidance as necessary. You can prompt them to think further by asking questions like, “This item here. Does it exist all by itself or does it need other people or things for it to exist?”
- When each group has had sufficient time to fill out most of the paper, stop the groups and ask them to estimate how many people in total are needed for their subject. For example, how many people in total are needed for that pencil to be made? Or how many people in total are needed for you to learn to ride a bike? Give them a minute to

calculate this and ask them to write it on their sheet of paper.

- Invite each group to share. They should explain their subject; show the various aspects of the interdependence web they created; and then share their estimate of how many people were involved.

### Teaching Tip

As in every insight activity, students may have other critical insights as you go along—if so, record them or note them on the board so that you can return to them later.

### Sample script

- *“We have done much investigation about compassion in our lives, and one insight that we might have seen is that compassion rarely involves just you - usually kind acts that occur in our lives involve at least one other person. We call this interdependence: we constantly depend on others. Interdependence is not limited to kind acts, but everyday things that we use or experiences that we’ve had.*
- *Today, we are going to investigate this idea of interdependence more deeply. In a small group, you and your peers will come up with an important accomplishment or event that you have in common: Examples for you might include going on a trip; learning to ride a bike; learning to play a game; learning to read and write; and so on. When your group has decided on one, draw or write it in the middle of your piece of paper that you will have. This will be your subject.*

- [Divide the class into small groups of 4-5 students. And have them complete the activity up through instructions you have given so far.]
- *Now, think about people and things that your subject depends on. Each time you think of something, write it down, circle it, and draw a line connecting it to the subject. First, let me show you how I did this. For my accomplishment, in my imaginary group of a few other adults, we chose “learning to drive a car” as our accomplishment that we all have in common. I’ll write/draw that in the center of the paper.*
- *Next, we discussed who and what that accomplishment depended on for each of us to achieve. I put down “my dad” because he had me drive his car in a parking lot to get some practice. Another person in my group said “the tires” because without the tires, I couldn’t have driven the car.*
- *Try and come up with 10 things that your subject depends on and write or draw them on your group’s paper. [Allow enough time for this to happen.]*
- *Draw a circle around each thing you wrote that your subject depends on. Now, we are going to take this even further. We are going to look at each item we have already written down and think, what does that item depend on? For my example, I will focus on “the tires.” The tires on the car would not exist if someone in a factory somewhere did not make them, so I will write “factory worker” out next to “the tires.”*

- Go ahead and add branches to each circle, writing or drawing what each thing depends on. Create appropriate branches as best you can. See how many connections you can make." [When this is finished, invite groups to share. If time does not allow this, the sharing part can be at a different time.]

---

### REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 5 minutes

#### Recognizing Interdependence in One's Life

##### Materials Required

- SEE Learning journals
- Writing utensils

##### Instructions

- Have your students take out their SEE Learning journal for some private journaling in silence. Explain that they do not have to share what they write if they don't want to.
- Ask them to choose something important in their life: an event, accomplishment, person, or object. This will serve as their subject. They will journal for 5 minutes about what their subject depends on. They can draw it out as an interdependence web, or they can simply write in sentences.

### DEBRIEF | 5 minutes

- "Look at your personal web of interdependence or your group's web. What does it feel like to think of yourself as a part of this web? What do you think about this idea?"
- How might reflecting on interdependence lead us to feel grateful? How is interdependence related to compassion?"

MIDDLE SCHOOL

CHAPTER 2  
**Building Resilience**

# Overview

---

Chapter 1 explored the concepts of kindness and happiness what they mean for us when we are together in the form of class agreements. Chapter 2 explores the important role that our bodies, and in particular our nervous systems, play in our happiness and well-being. It does so by introducing the following:

## The Resilient Zone

A way of describing when we and our nervous system are regulated (in homeostasis) and neither hyper-aroused (stuck in the high zone) nor hypo-aroused (stuck in the low zone). You can also refer to this as the “OK zone” or “zone of well-being.”

## Sensations

A physical feeling or perception within the body or using the five senses, as distinct from emotions and non-physical feelings (like feeling happy or sad).

## Tracking

Noticing and attending to sensations in the body in order to build up body awareness or “body literacy.”

## Personal Resources

Things one likes and associates with greater safety and well-being that can be brought to mind to return to or stay in one’s resilient zone.

## Grounding

Attending to the contact of one’s body with objects or the ground in order to return to or stay in the resilient zone.

## Help Now! Strategies

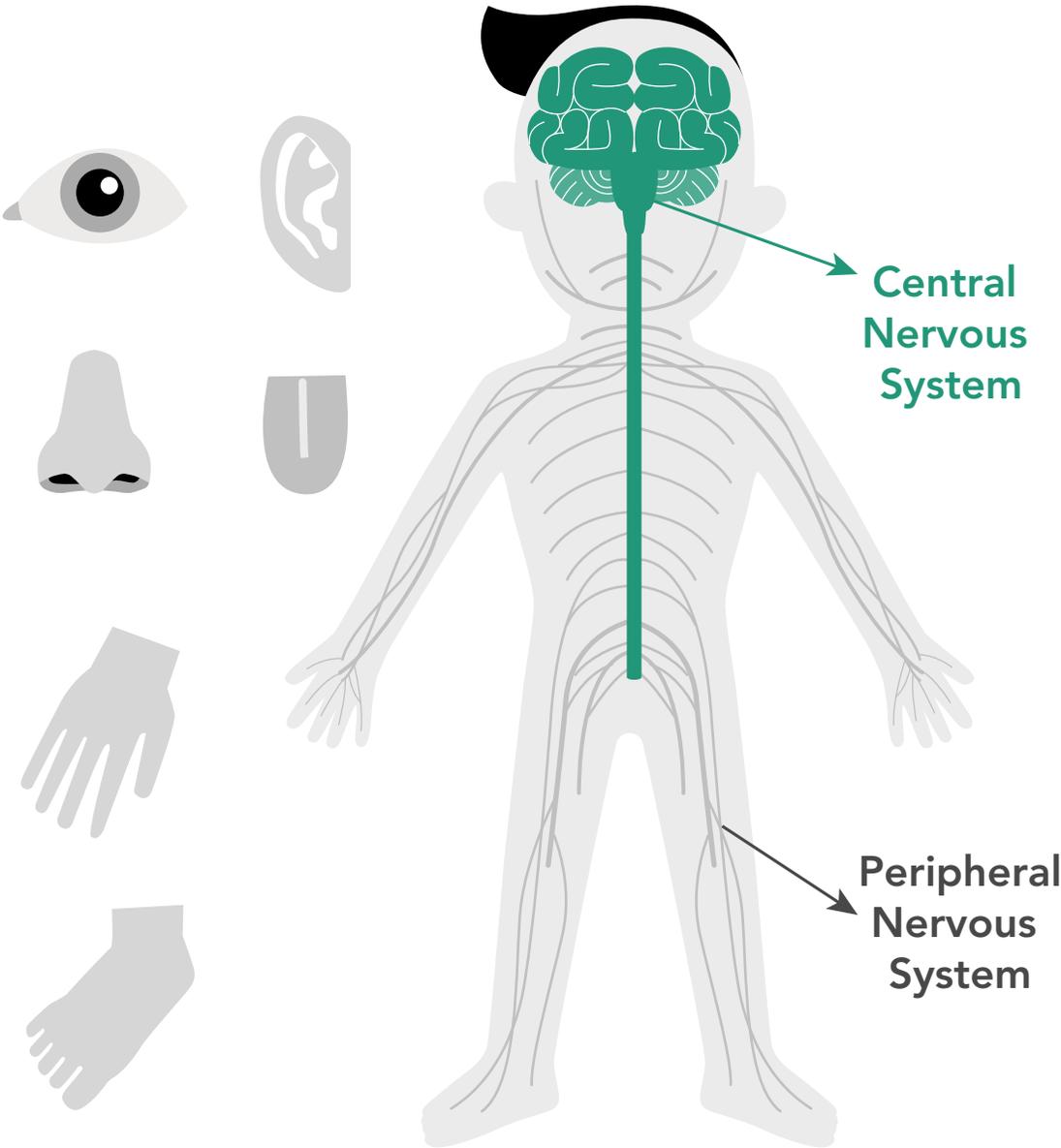
Simple and immediate techniques for helping students return to their resilient zone when they get “bumped out” of that zone.

---

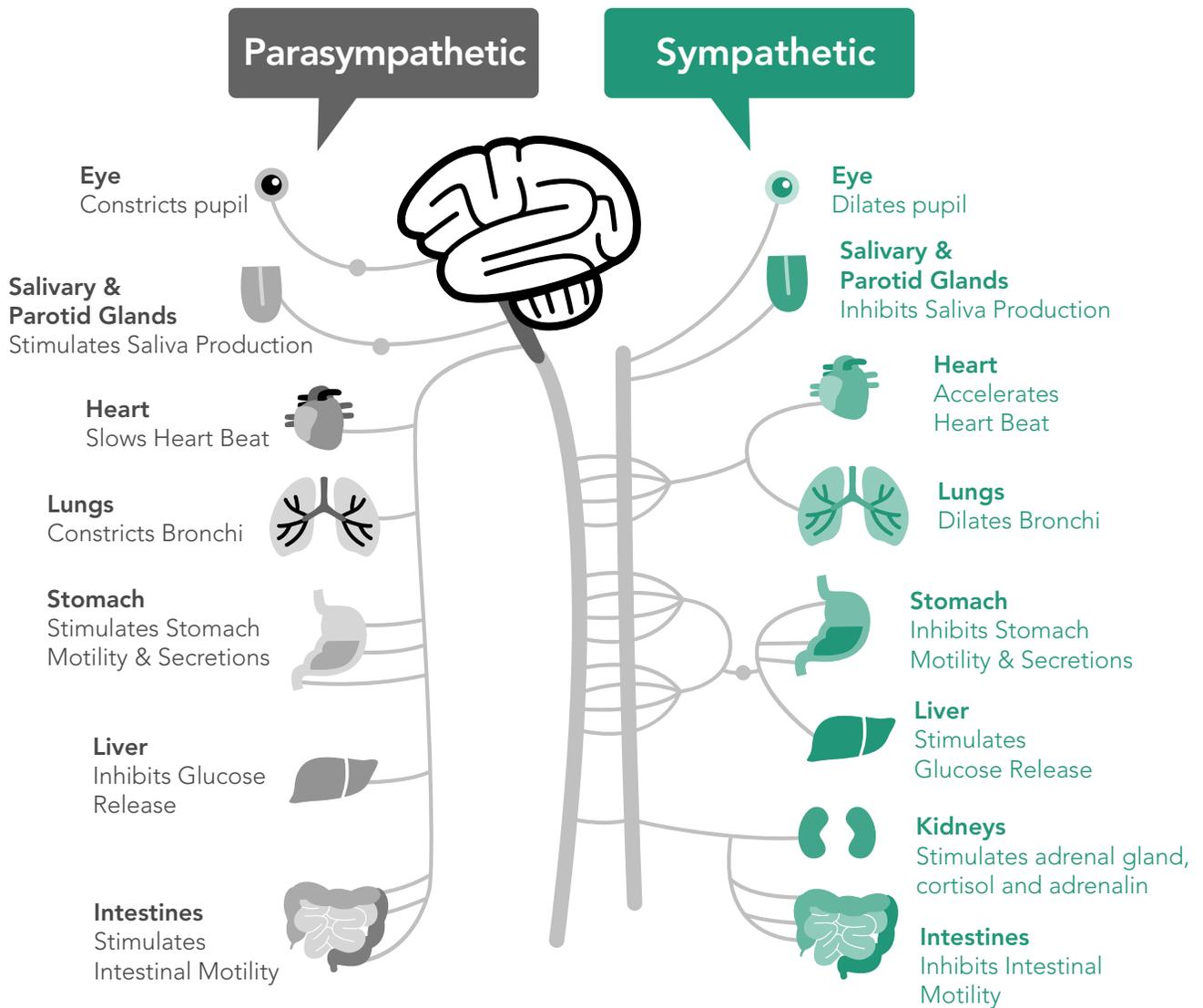
# The Nervous System

---

The Central and the Peripheral



# The Autonomic Nervous System



## The Nervous System

Our nervous system is an essential part of our body, and understanding it can be enormously helpful for enhancing our well-being. Our nervous system is made up of our brain and our spinal cord (called the central nervous system) and the network of nerves that connect our brain and spinal cord to the rest of our body, including our internal organs and our senses (called the peripheral nervous system).

A part of our nervous system runs automatically, without the need for conscious control: this is called the autonomic (literally, “self-governing”) nervous system (ANS). Our ANS regulates many body processes necessary for survival, including our heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, and digestion. It also regulates our internal organs such as our stomach, liver, kidneys, bladder, lungs, and salivary glands.

Since our nervous system’s chief function is to help keep us alive, it reacts very quickly to perceived threats or to perceived safety. Our autonomic nervous system has two pathways that activate based on whether we perceive danger (the “fight or flight” response) or safety (the “rest and digest” response). The fight or flight response triggers our sympathetic nervous system, turning off systems of digestion and growth and preparing the body for action and possible injury, while the rest and digest response triggers our parasympathetic nervous system, relaxing the body and allowing for functions like growth, digestion and so on to resume. This is why when we sense danger and have a fight or flight response, we notice changes in our heart rate, breathing, blood pressure, pupil dilation, and our internal organs. Then when we sense that the danger has passed and we are safe again, we notice changes in these same organs.

In modern life, our bodies sometimes react to danger when there is no real threat to our survival, or hold on to a sense of danger after the threat has passed. This leads to a dysregulation of the autonomic nervous system, meaning that its regular alternation between parasympathetic and sympathetic activation is disrupted. This nervous system dysregulation in turn leads to inflammation and a host of other problems. It is one of the main reasons why chronic stress is so damaging to our health and well-being.

Fortunately we can learn to calm our bodies and minds and regulate our nervous system. Since our nervous system is what senses things both on the inside (such as tension, relaxation, heat, cold, pain, and so on) and on the outside through the five senses, it is giving us constant information about the state of our body. This chapter focuses on the information and skills necessary to enhance this type of self-care.

## Sensations

The first learning experience, “Exploring Sensations,” helps students build a vocabulary of sensations as a guide to notice the state of our nervous system. Sensations (warmth, coldness, heat, tingling, tightness, etc.) are physical, and are to be distinguished from emotions (sad, angry, happy, jealous), which will be explored later in SEE Learning. Although feelings will be explored later, it is important to note that feelings, thoughts, and beliefs have a corresponding sensation or set of sensations within the body. Learning about sensations helps introduce another portal of understanding to ourselves and our children.

## Help Now! Strategies

Learning experience 1 then moves into Help Now! strategies. These are easy actions that can be practiced to quickly return our bodies and minds to the present moment, and thus function as useful ways to bring our bodies back to a place of balance if we get bumped into our high or low zones (states of hyper-arousal or hypo-arousal).

## Resourcing

Learning experience 2 “Resourcing” uses the individual kindness drawing created in Chapter 1 as a personal resource. Personal resources are internal, external, or imagined things, unique to each person, that bring about a sense of well-being, safety, or happiness when brought to present moment awareness. When we think of a personal resource (a wonderful memory, a favorite place, a loved one, a joyful activity, a comforting thought), this often brings about pleasant sensations in the body. If we then attend to those sensations consciously and give them a bit of space and time, they can deepen. This increases our nervous system’s sense of safety and brings about an ever greater sense of well-being and relaxation in the body.

## Tracking

Noticing sensations and keeping one’s attention on them is called “tracking.” We “track” or “read” sensations, since sensations are the “language” of the nervous system. This leads to body literacy: our understanding of our own body and how it responds to stress and safety. Although we all share the same basic structure of having a nervous system, our bodies react to stress and safety in slightly different ways. We may become tense in different parts of our body. We may also respond to well-being in different ways. We may experience a pleasant warmth in our chest or an opening and loosening in our facial muscles. Learning to track the sensations of our own body helps us understand when we are feeling relaxed, safe, and happy, or if we are having a stress response. This ability opens up “choice” so when we are distressed, we can choose to bring our awareness to

a sensation of well-being or neutrality within the body. This awareness can increase the sense and feeling of well-being.

Note that sensations are not inherently pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral for everyone or at all times: warmth, for example, can be experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral at different times. This is why it's important to ask whether the sensation is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Since tracking can lead to awareness of unpleasant sensations, which can then be triggering, tracking is always done in conjunction with resourcing, grounding, or a Help Now! strategy. The following strategy of "shift and stay" is also important to teach when introducing tracking.

### Shift and Stay

Part of tracking is noticing if the sensation is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. If we find pleasant or neutral sensations, resting our attention on that part of the body can sometimes allow the sensation to deepen and allow the body to relax and return to the resilient zone. However, if instead we become aware of an unpleasant sensation, we can "shift and stay." This means to scan our body to find a place that feels better (either neutral or pleasant) and then rest our attention on that new location.

### The Resource Kit and Resource Stone

Learning experience 3 "Creating a Resource Kit" builds on previous experiences by helping the students build up a personal "tool box" of personal resources that can be called upon whenever necessary. It then reinforces the skills of resourcing and tracking.

### Grounding

Learning experience 4 "Grounding" introduces the practice of grounding. Grounding is noticing the physical contact our body has with things, including things we touch or how we are standing or sitting. Grounding can be a very helpful tool for calming the body and mind. Typically, we have already unconsciously developed a number of grounding techniques that help us feel relaxed, secure, safe, and better. These may include things like sitting in a certain way, folding our arms in a certain way, holding objects we like, lying a certain way on a couch or in bed, and so on. However, we may not be aware of intentionally using these to calm our bodies and return to our resilient zone. Practicing grounding introduces new techniques and makes conscious ones that we have already developed, thereby making them more accessible when we need them.

## The Three Zones

Learning experience 5 “The Resilient Zone” introduces the “three zones” as a way of understanding how our body (and specifically our autonomic nervous system) operates. The three zones are the high zone, the low zone, and the resilient zone (or zone of well-being). Understanding this model can be very helpful for both teachers and students.

In this model, our body can be in one of three zones. Our resilient zone is our zone of well-being, where we feel calm and alert, and where we feel more in control and better able to make good decisions. Although we can go up and down in this zone and may feel a bit excited or have slightly less energy, our judgment is not impaired and our body is not in a state of harmful stress. Here our autonomic nervous system is in homeostasis, which can be defined as a stable physiological equilibrium. It is able to alternate between sympathetic and parasympathetic activation properly.

Sometimes we get bumped out of our resilient zone by life events. When this happens, our autonomic nervous system becomes dysregulated. If we get stuck in our high zone, we are in a state of hyper-arousal. We may feel anxious, angry, nervous, agitated, afraid, manic, frustrated, “amped up,” or otherwise out of control. Physiologically we may experience shaking, rapid and shallow breathing, headaches, nausea, tightness in our muscles, indigestion, and changes to vision and hearing.

If we get stuck in the low zone, we experience the effects of hypo-arousal. This can have us feeling lethargic, exhausted, lacking in energy, and not wanting to get out of bed or be active. We may feel isolated or lonely, numb, checked out, unmotivated, lacking in optimism, or uninterested in activities that we would normally enjoy. It’s important to note that since the high zone and low zone are both states of dysregulation, they are not opposites of each other: they may share physiological characteristics and when we are dysregulated we may bounce between high and low zones.

In learning experience 6, students will learn about these three zones through scenarios and then will give advice to each other on how to return to their resilient zone, based on the skills they have already learned (resourcing, grounding, tracking, and the Help Now! strategies).

Being able to monitor the state of our body is essential to our well-being and happiness because our autonomic nervous system can short-circuit other parts of our brain (harming decision making and bypassing executive function). When we learn to remain in our resilient zone there are many health benefits for our body, including being able to maintain peace of mind and greater control over our behavior and our emotional reactions.

Learning experience 7 “How Compassion and Safety Affect the Body” connects this chapter back to Chapter 1 and the themes of happiness, kindness, and the class agreements. Now that students know about the important role that their bodies play in their well-being and happiness, they can better understand why it is important to show kindness and consideration to one another. They begin to learn that being mean or inconsiderate of one another leads to stress and our bodies respond to that stress in unpleasant ways, hindering our ability to be happy. Students can explore the idea that since we are constantly relating to one another and share the same space, we can play a positive role in helping each other remain in our resilient zones, or return to them if we become out of balance.

In some cases, the activities in this chapter may not instantly yield the results and insights you wish. Don't be discouraged, as it is often hard even for adults to notice and describe sensations at first. It may take repeating some of the activities a few times before your students are able to describe sensations, notice if they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and use the skills of resourcing and grounding. Even if they do gain insights quickly, repetition is key in order for the skills to become embodied. Eventually, some of the students may begin practicing the skills spontaneously, particularly when facing challenging or stressful circumstances.

Many of these skills were developed through trauma and resiliency work and they are based on a significant body of clinical and scientific research. It is possible that while exploring sensations of the body with your students, some of them will have difficult experiences that you may not be able to deal with sufficiently on your own, especially if they have suffered or are suffering from trauma. Help Now! Strategies can be suggested to the child in the immediate aftermath of an unexpected reaction. If you have counselors or school psychologists, or a wise administrator or colleague, we encourage you to seek assistance and further counsel as necessary. However, the approach taken in SEE Learning is a resiliency-based approach that focuses on the strengths of individual students, not on treating trauma. These are general wellness skills that can be beneficial to anyone, regardless of their level of experience of trauma. Students will be in a good position to explore the next elements of SEE Learning: cultivating attention and developing emotional awareness when they have more of an ability to regulate their nervous systems.

### **Check-ins and Repeated Practice**

From Chapter 2 onwards, the importance of practice becomes even more important in SEE Learning. You will note that the check-ins for this chapter build, each incorporating skills and material covered in preceding Learning Experiences. Feel free to select which check-ins work best for your class and then use them on a regular basis even when you are not doing a full session of SEE

Learning. Although the Learning Experiences include “Reflective Practice” sections for developing embodied understanding, the repetition of the check-ins and the repetition of insight activities (with modifications as you see fit) will greatly aid this process of helping students internalize what they are learning to the point where it becomes second-nature.

### **Time and Pacing**

Each Learning Experience is designed to be a minimum of 30 minutes. It is recommended that you take longer than this if time allows and if your students are capable of it, spending more time on the activities and reflective practices especially. If you have less than 30 minutes, you can choose to only do one of the activities or a part of the activity, and finish the Learning Experience in the following session. However, remember that check-ins and insight activities are important to include regardless of time.

### **Student Personal Practice**

This is the stage in SEE Learning where it’s important to recognize that your students may be beginning their own personal practice, even in an informal way. As you support them in this, it’s helpful to recognize that each student is different, and that images, sounds, and activities that may be calming for some students can be activating for others. Even things such as the sound of a bell, an image of a cute animal, yoga postures, long moments of silence, or sitting and taking long breaths may be experienced as unpleasant by some of your students and may actually hinder their ability to be calm rather than promote it. You’ll come to know this by watching your students and by asking them what they like, and then by giving them options so that they can develop a personal practice around what works best for them.

### **Teacher Personal Practice**

Naturally, teaching your students these practices will be strengthened by your own familiarity with them. It is recommended that, if possible, you first try these practices on your own and with colleagues, friends and family as you are able. The more experiential knowledge you have, the easier it will be to do these exercises with your students. All the practices suggested in this chapter can also be done with older children and adults.

### **Further Reading and Resources**

Content for the learning experiences in this chapter has been adapted from the work of Elaine Miller-Karas and the Trauma Resource Institute with their kind permission. Teachers interested in learning more about the content and skills presented in this chapter are encouraged to read the book *Building Resilience to Trauma: The Trauma and Community Resiliency Models* (2015) by Elaine Miller-Karas, and to visit [www.traumaresourceinstitute.com](http://www.traumaresourceinstitute.com)

Also recommended is Bessel van der Kolk's book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (2015).

## Letter to Parents and Caregivers



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Parent or Caregiver,

This letter is to inform you that your child is now starting **SEE Learning, Chapter 2, "Building Resilience"**. You may remember that SEE Learning is a K-12 educational program created by Emory University to enrich young people's social, emotional, and ethical development.

In Chapter 2, your child will learn a variety of methods for regulating their nervous system to enhance resilience to stress and adversity. This involves developing greater skill in noticing sensations in the body that signal well-being or distress (called "tracking") and learning simple strategies that can calm the body down. These techniques come from a significant body of research on the role that the autonomic nervous system plays in stress physiology. Your child, however, will be encouraged to use and practice only those skills that work effectively for him or her.

### Home Practice

Many of the skills your child will learn in this chapter are skills you can explore yourself, and are just as applicable to adults as they are to children. You are encouraged to talk to your child about how you notice stress in your body and what signs your body gives you when you are experiencing stress as opposed to well-being. It may also be useful to discuss what kinds of healthy strategies you use to keep yourself resilient and which strategies are most appropriate for different situations or settings. Feel free to ask your child to share the techniques they are learning or to demonstrate them for you.

### Early Chapters Included

Chapter 1 explored the concepts of kindness and compassion and how they relate to happiness and well-being.

### Further Reading and Resources

*Building Emotional Intelligence: Practices to Cultivate Inner Resilience in Children* by Linda Lantieri. Introduction by Daniel Goleman.

SEE Learning resources are available on the web at: [www.compassion.emory.edu](http://www.compassion.emory.edu).

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher/Educator Signature

Teacher/Educator Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher/Educator Contact Info: \_\_\_\_\_



Center for  
Contemplative Science and  
Compassion-Based Ethics

EMORY UNIVERSITY

## Exploring Sensations

## PURPOSE

This first learning experience explores sensations and helps students build a vocabulary to describe them, since sensations tell us most directly about the state of our nervous system. Students will also learn Help Now! strategies, most of which involve sensing things around the room. Help Now! strategies

(developed by Elaine Miller-Karas and the Trauma Resource Institute) are immediate tools to help students return to a regulated body state if they are stuck in a dysregulated state, such as being overly agitated. They also are a great way to introduce the concept of sensations and practice attending to them.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Develop and list vocabulary of words that describe various sensations.
- Practice attending to external sensations while learning Help Now! strategies for regulating the body.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



**Attention &  
Self-Awareness**

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- A piece of chart paper or a board for creating a list of words that describe sensations
- Print outs of the Help Now! Strategies (optional)
- Markers

## LENGTH

30 minutes

## CHECK-IN | 4 minutes

- *“Welcome. As you think about this whole day until now - from when you first woke up to being in class right now, raise your hand if you can think of something kind or compassionate that you experienced or did for someone. Would anyone like to share?”*
- *Have any of you been practicing compassion by using the class agreements? Which ones? What did that feel like?*
- *Have you seen anyone else practice one of the agreements? Describe it. What did it feel like to see that?*
- *What do you think might happen if we keep practicing compassion with each other?”*

---

## PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 10 minutes

### What Are Sensations?

#### Overview

In this presentation you will help your students understand what a sensation is and then have them come up with a list of words that describe sensations, thereby building a shared vocabulary of sensation words.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Just as we can sense things on the outside with our five senses, we can pay attention to sensations inside our bodies also.
- Sensations can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- There are simple strategies we can use to help our bodies become calmer and feel safer.

## Materials Required

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers

## Instructions

- Review the five senses and talk about what we use them for. Discuss the nervous system and how senses are related to it. Discuss the concept of sensations.
- Make a list of sensation words with the students.
  - If they say things like “I feel good!” which is a feeling but not a specific sensation, then encourage them to put that into sensation words by asking, “And what does good feel like in the body?” or “Where in the body do you sense that?” It is all right if some of the words they come up with are not precisely sensation words, as the activities that follow will help them further develop their understanding of what a sensation is.

## Teaching Tips

- **A sensation** is a physical feeling that arises in the body, such as warm, cold, tingling, loosening, tightening, heaviness, lightness, openness, and so on. Physical sensation words are to be differentiated from general feeling words like good, bad, stressed, relieved, and so on, and they are also different from emotion words like happy, sad, afraid, excited, and so on. Helping your students come up with a list of sensation words will help them recognize sensations in the body, which in turn will help them monitor the state of their bodies.

- If you feel comfortable doing so, it is also recommended that you introduce your students to the role of the **nervous system**: the part of our body that allows us to feel sensations on the inside as well as sense things on the outside (through our five senses, for example) and that keeps us alive by regulating our breathing, our heart rate, blood flow, digestion and other important functions. This whole chapter involves coming to understand the nervous system (specifically the autonomic nervous system). You can teach the content and skills without naming the nervous system specifically and instead using the general term “the body,” but if you are able to bring in additional information about the autonomic nervous system gradually, this will likely enrich your students’ overall understanding.

### Sample Script

- *“We’ve been exploring compassion and happiness. Today we’re going to learn about how about how our senses can help us know what our bodies are feeling.*
- *Who can name one or more of the five senses?*
- *Those are for feeling things on the outside: we can see, hear, smell, touch and taste things.*
- *What are things we can sense on the outside through our five senses? Let’s think about one of our senses—hearing—let’s take a moment of silence and notice what sounds we can hear during a minute of silence. What did you hear? Can anyone share what you are sensing*

*right now using one of the other senses? What about seeing? Touch? Smell?*

- *There is a part of our bodies that help us sense these things on the outside of our bodies and also inside our bodies. We call it the nervous system.*
- *It is called the nervous system because our body is full of nerves that send information from different parts of our bodies to and from our brain. We’re going to be learning some interesting things about our nervous system that can help us be happier and healthier together.*
- *So, our senses help us feel things on the outside of our bodies like a sound or smell. Let’s notice if we can feel anything inside our bodies. Let’s put one hand on our heart and the other hand on our belly and let’s close our eyes for a moment and notice if we can feel anything inside our body.*
- *Sometimes we can feel something in our bodies like whether we are feeling hot or cold. We call things like that sensations. That’s because we sense them.*
- *Sensing something is feeling something with our body. Sensations are just things we can feel or sense with our body. Our body tells us what we are sensing.*
- *Let’s think of things we can sense on the outside. We will make a list of sensations together.*
- *When you touch your desk, is it hard? Is it soft? Is the temperature warm or cool?*

- *If you touch your clothing, is it soft? Scratchy? Smooth? Something else?*
- *Take out your pencil/crayon/pen, as you touch it, is it round? Flat? Warm? Cool? Sharp? Something else?*
- *Is there something else on your desk/near you that you want to describe with sensation words?*
- *Now let's think about what we sense on the inside. An example would be if we are standing in the sun, our senses may let us know it is too hot, and we take action to move into the shade to cool down. In the beginning, we sense the warmth or the heat on the inside and when we move to the shade, we sense a cooling down on the inside. Let's think together about other sensations we experience on the inside.*
- *Let's see how many we can come up with. If you say something but we're maybe not sure if it's a sensation, I'm going to write it separately over here."*
- *(Some children may need further prompting to understand sensations. Hence asking questions like the following may help:) "What do you feel on the inside when you're sleepy? What part of your body tells you that you are sleepy? How about when you're hungry? What do you feel like when you are having fun? What do you feel on the inside when you're happy? If you play a sport, what do you feel like on the inside? What do you feel on the inside when you're excited? Where*

*in your body do you feel that? (It may be helpful if you give a personal example, such as when I'm thinking about having fun, I sense warmth in my shoulders and cheeks.)"*

---

## **INSIGHT ACTIVITY** | 12 minutes

### **Sensing on the Outside and Inside\***

#### **Overview**

- This activity is to help students continue to recognize that we can sense things on the outside (using our five senses) and on the inside (turning our awareness inside, noticing and naming what sensations we find inside the body).
- The Community Resiliency Model, designed by the Trauma Resource Institute, provides several activities called "Help Now!" strategies. These all involve doing an easy cognitive task or directing our attention to sensations. It has been found that when the nervous system is agitated, directing attention to sensations by doing activities like these can have an immediate calming effect on the body. This insight activity works through the individual Help Now! strategies and also lays the foundation for cultivating attention as a skill (which is further developed later in SEE Learning), since all the Help Now! strategies involve paying attention.

#### **Content/Insights to be Explored**

- Just as we can sense things on the outside with our five senses, we can pay attention to sensations inside our bodies also.

- Sensations can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- There are simple strategies we can use to help our bodies become calmer and feel safer

### Materials Required

- Optional: copies of the stations handout if you are doing stations
- Help Now! strategies posters (both items are included at the end of this learning experience)

### Instructions

- Select a Help Now! strategy to lead your class through. Follow the script below in order to get comfortable asking questions about sensations. Show the poster of the Help Now! strategy to your class.
- Use this format to explore the various Help Now! strategies as you have time, and repeat this activity as necessary.
- Note: You can also have students explore the Help Now! strategies as stations around the room. Use the handouts provided in the following section or make your own and post them around the room. Have your students pair up and then walk around the room until they find a Help Now! station that they want to try. Then they can do the Help Now! skill together as a pair and share what they experience. After everyone has had a chance to try two or more stations, bring them back together as a class and ask them to share which stations they did and what they experienced.

### Teaching Tips

- As students explore the effects of these strategies on their bodies, it is important that they also learn to notice whether the sensations they experience are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. As this vocabulary (pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral) and the ability to connect these terms to sensations in the body will be important for all learning experiences in this chapter, it is worth checking in occasionally with your students to deepen their understanding of noticing sensations in this three-fold way. Note that sensations are not inherently pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral for everyone or at all times: warmth, for example, can be experienced as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral at different times.
- Note that not every Help Now! strategy will work for every student. Some may prefer to push against a wall, some may prefer to lean against a wall. Some may like touching pieces of furniture around them, some may not. **An important part of the process here is for each student to learn what works for himself or herself, while you as the teacher also learn what works for each individual student. This is the building of body literacy—a knowledge of one’s own body and how it experiences well-being and distress. Even something that works one time may not be effective another time, so learning a variety of strategies is best.**
- Once your students have had some familiarity practicing Help Now! strategies, you can also

have them illustrate their own Help Now! stations and place them around the room.

Please see the complete list of the Help Now! Strategies listed on the handout on the next page. Below is a sample script of how you can lead the activity to explore a few of them at a time.

### Sample script

- *“Remember we said we want to feel happy and we want to experience kindness.*
- *Our bodies can feel happy or unhappy too. If we pay attention to that, we can do things that feel kind to our bodies.*
- *We’re going to try a few sensing activities and see if we notice anything happening to our bodies.*
- *We’ll start with sensing things on the outside.*
- *Let’s all listen and see if we can hear three things inside this room. Listen and then raise your hand when you have three things that you heard inside this room. (Wait until all or most of the students have raised their hand.)*
- *Let’s share now. What three things did you notice? (Call on individual students to share).*
- *Now let’s see if we can hear three things outside of this room. Raise your hand when you’ve got three things that you heard outside this room.” (Note: This exercise can also be accomplished with music. You can play music and ask the students what happens on the inside as they listen to music.)*
- *(When most or all students have raised their hands, allow them to share.)*
- *“What happened to our bodies when we all listened for sounds inside and outside the room? What did you notice?” (Allow for sharing. You may notice that when you are all listening for sounds, you become quieter and more still.)*
- *“Now we’re going to notice what happens inside our bodies when we do this.*
- *Our sensations can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. There are no right or wrong sensations. Sensations exist to give us information like I am too hot in the sun, I need to walk to that shade to cool down. Neutral means in-between. It means that the sensation isn’t pleasant, but it isn’t unpleasant either.*
- *Let’s listen for things inside or outside this classroom that we didn’t notice before. [Pause.]*
- *When we’re doing this, what do you notice on the inside of your body as you’re listening? Do you notice any sensations inside your body right now? Raise your hand if you notice a sensation inside your body.*
- *What do you notice? Where is it? Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? [Allow other students to share.]*
- *Now let’s see if we can find things of a certain color in the room. Let’s start with red.*
- *Look around the room and see if you can find three red things in this room.*

- *Notice what you're feeling on the inside as you find the color red. Does anyone notice any sensations in their bodies? Raise your hand if you noticed one.*
- *What is it? Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?"*

Use this format to explore the various Help Now! strategies as you have time, and repeat this activity as necessary.

---

#### **DEBRIEF** | 4 minutes

- *"What are some things you learned today about sensations?"*
- *What are some words that describe sensations?"*
- *How can knowing a little more about the idea of sensations help us be happier and kinder? When do you think it might be useful to use one of these Help Now! activities?"*
- *Let's remember what we've learned and see if we can use it together next time."*

Strategy	What Sensations Do You Notice in Your Body?	Are the Sensations Pleasant, Unpleasant, or Neutral?
Name six colors you notice in the room.		
Count backwards from 10.		
Notice different 3 sounds in the room and 3 outside of the room.		
Slowly drink a glass of water. Feel it in your mouth and throat.		
Spend a minute walking around the room. Notice the feeling of your feet on the ground.		
Press your palms together firmly or rub your palms together until they get warm.		
Touch a piece of furniture or a surface near you. Notice its temperature and texture.		
Slowly push against a wall with your hands or your back and notice any feelings in your muscles.		
Look around the room and notice what catches your attention.		

Help Now! Strategy

# Station 1



Slowly drink a glass of water.  
Feel it in your mouth and throat.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 2



Name six colors you see.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 3



---

Look around the room and notice what catches your attention.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 4



Count backwards from 10 as you walk around the room.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 5



---

Touch a piece of furniture or a surface near you. Notice its temperature and texture.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 6



Press your palms together firmly or rub your palms together until they get warm.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 7



Notice the 3 sounds within the room  
and 3 sounds outside.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 8



Walk around the room.  
Notice the feeling of your feet on the  
ground.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

Help Now! Strategy

## Station 9



Slowly push your hands or back against a wall or door.

What do you notice on the inside?  
Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

## Resourcing

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this learning experience is to help students explore the use of a personal resource (in this case, the kindness drawings created in Chapter 1) to bring about greater well-being in the body. Personal resources are internal, external, or imagined things that serve to bring about sensations of greater well-being in the body. They are unique to each person. Thinking about a personal resource tends to bring sensations of well-being to the body.

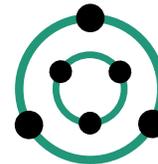
When we notice these sensations (tracking) and then focus upon pleasant or neutral sensations, the body tends to relax and return to its resilient zone (which students will learn about later). Both resourcing and tracking are skills that develop over time and lead to what can be called *body literacy*, since we are learning about our own bodies and how they respond to stress and well-being.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Discover how to use a personal resource to relax and calm the body.
- Develop greater skill in identifying and tracking sensations in the body.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



**Self-Regulation**

## LENGTH

30 minutes

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

The drawings of kindness that students created in Chapter 1. If you do not have those drawings, you can have them create new ones, but this will take additional time.

### CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

- *“Let’s practice some of the Help Now! activities that we learned. (You may wish to have pictures of the Help Now! activities up to allow students to pick one of them.)*
- *Let’s listen and see if we can hear three things inside this room.*
- *Now let’s listen and see if we can hear three things outside this room.*
- *What do we notice on the inside as we do that? Do you notice a pleasant or neutral sensation? Remember, neutral means in-between.*
- *Look around the room, and see what catches your attention that is pleasant or neutral, it could be an object, a color, a favorite friend, or something else.*
- *Now let’s check-in with our bodies. What do you notice on the inside? Can you find a pleasant or neutral sensation in your body?*
- *Is there anyone that can’t find a pleasant or neutral sensation? If so, raise your hand. (If some students raise their hands, help them shift to a place in their body that feels better.)*
- *Once you’ve found a pleasant or neutral sensation, let’s just pay attention to that place quietly for a moment. See if the sensation changes or if it stays the same.”*

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 20 minutes

#### Using the Compassion Drawing as a Personal Resource

#### Overview

In this activity, students share their drawing and then notice sensations in their body, paying particular attention to pleasant and neutral sensations.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored:

- Sensations can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral; the same sensation (such as warmth) could be any of these three
- When we focus on pleasant or neutral sensations, our bodies tend to relax.
- We can use resources and attention to sensations to relax our bodies.

#### Materials Required

The drawings of compassion that students created in Chapter 1.

#### Instructions

Follow the script below to facilitate resourcing for the first time.

#### Teaching Tips:

- Bringing to mind something that evokes greater well-being, safety, or security is called “resourcing.” The object that one brings to mind is called a personal resource. Noticing the sensations that arise is called “tracking” the sensations or “reading” them (you can use whichever term you prefer). When a pleasant or neutral sensation is found through

tracking, we can keep our attention on that sensation for several moments and observe the sensation, seeing if it stays the same or changes. This tends to deepen the sensation and lead to greater relaxation in the body.

- Although we all have nervous systems, there can be great variety in terms of what functions as a personal resource for us and what sensations arise in us related to well-being or stress. If tracking leads us to noticing unpleasant sensations, we can try to find a place in the body that feels better, and focus on that instead. This is called “shift and stay.” When we do find a pleasant or neutral sensation in the body through tracking, we can keep our attention on it for a few moments. As noted, this silent attention tends to deepen the experience and signals to the body that we are safe, and the body typically responds with relaxation.
- It’s possible that during resourcing, the students will share sensations that are coming from things other than the kindness drawing. For example, the student may feel nervous speaking up and may describe sensations related to that. If that happens, you can redirect the student back to the compassion drawing and see if that evokes any pleasant or neutral sensations. If the student does report a pleasant sensation, then ask them to pause for a moment and just notice that sensation. It is this pausing and staying aware of the pleasant or neutral sensation that allows the body to relax and deepen into an experience of safety. If the student reports unpleasant sensations,

ask if there is somewhere else in the body that feels better, then allow them to pause and notice that place that feels better.

- Note: A single sensation (like warmth, for example) can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Coolness similarly can be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. So it is helpful to ask the students specifically whether the sensation is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral so that they begin to learn the skill of tracking in this way. Also note that the nervous system responds to stimuli very quickly. So if you wait too long when the student is sharing their kindness drawing, their attention will have moved on to something else, and they will no longer be experiencing sensations related to recalling a moment of compassion. The timing of this will become more apparent to you with practice

### **Sample script**

- *“Remember how we said we all like compassion?”*
- *We’re going to explore how looking at or thinking about something we like can lead to sensations in the body.*
- *Does anyone remember what we call the part of our body that senses things and sends information to our brain? That’s right—the nervous system. We’re going to learn more about that now.*
- *Sensations can be pleasant, unpleasant, or they can be neither. If they are not pleasant and not unpleasant, we say they are “neutral” or “in between.”*

- *What sensations do you think could be pleasant or unpleasant or in-between?*
- *How about warmth? What's it like when it's pleasant? Unpleasant? In-between?*
- *Or coolness?*
- *Or having lots of energy and movement inside our bodies? What's it like when we have that and it's pleasant? Have you ever felt that but it was unpleasant? Could it be in-between and neutral?*
- *Now let's take out our compassion drawing that we made.*
- *Take a moment to look at your compassion drawing. Remember what it was about.*
- *If you like, see what catches your eye on your drawing, and touch the part that catches your eye.*
- *Are the sensations pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral? Is there a difference between looking and touching your kindness drawing?*
- *Who would like to share their compassion drawing with the rest of us?*
- *It's important that when one of us shares, everyone else is going to listen and watch quietly."*

Allow one child at a time to share. After the child has shared, ask them immediately (waiting too long will allow the sensations to pass):

- *"What do you notice on the inside right now as you remember that moment of compassion?*
- *Are there any sensations you notice in your body?*
- *Is that sensation you just told me about pleasant, unpleasant, or in between?*
- *What other sensations do you notice in your body as you remember the moment of kindness?*
- *Would anyone like to share?"*

As an option, you can allow them to share other things that make them feel happy, safe, or good, besides their compassion drawing.

- *"If you'd rather choose something else to think of instead of your compassion drawing, you can think of a person, place, an animal, a thing, or memory that makes you feel good and share that."*

Allow a few students to share and go through the same process with each one. It's possible that as one student shares and experiences pleasant sensations, there may be noticeable changes in their body associated with relaxation. Other students may notice this. If they do, allow them to share what physical changes they noticed.

Once you have modeled this process two or more times, you can have the children form pairs and share with each other.

## **DEBRIEF** | 5 minutes

- *“What did we discover about personal resources and sensations?”*
  - *What kinds of sensations came when we looked at our personal resources?*
  - *Where in our bodies did we feel those sensations?*
  - *Do you think we could come up with more personal resources in the future?*
  - *If you ever feel unpleasant, do you think you could use one of your personal resources to help your body feel better?”*
- 

## **EXTENSION ACTIVITIES**

### Writing

- Write about a time when you resourced using a positive/kind memory or when you used a Help Now! strategy and what the positive or neutral sensations felt like in your body.

## Creating a Resource Kit

### PURPOSE

This learning experience builds on the last activity by helping students create a “resource kit” (or tool kit or treasure chest, as elementary students may call it) of personal resources. Personal resources are internal, external, or imagined things that serve to bring about sensations of greater well-being in the body. They are unique to each person. Thinking about a personal resource tends to bring

sensations of well-being to the body. It is good to have more than one resource, because a particular resource might not work all the time. For example, some resources might serve to energize us when we are feeling down, while others might calm us when we’re feeling hyperactive. It is important to practice resourcing along with tracking, since it is the tracking skill that builds body literacy.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Create a resource kit of personal resources that they can use to calm themselves when stressed.
- Discover how to use their personal resources to relax and calm the body.
- Develop greater skill in identifying and tracking sensations in the body.

### LENGTH

30 minutes (40 with optional activity)

### PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



#### Self-Regulation

### MATERIALS REQUIRED

- The compassion drawings from Chapter 1
- Colored or white blank 4”x 6” cards (or paper cut to a similar size) and colored pens or markers for each student
- Small box, pouch, or a large colored envelope to serve as the “resource kit” for each student to store their drawings of personal resources in
- A box of small colored rocks, stones, crystals, or other similar objects (optional)
- Art supplies for decorating the resource kit (optional)

### CHECK-IN | 4 minutes

Distribute the compassion drawings from the previous learning experience to each student.

- *“Let’s take a moment to get comfortable as we take out the compassion drawings we did a few days ago.*
- *Look around the room, and see what catches your attention that is pleasant or neutral, it could be an object, a color, a favorite friend, or something else.*
- *Bring your attention to a place on the inside that feels pleasant or neutral.*
- *Now let’s think of our moment of compassion or the drawing of a resource. (Pause.) Take a look at your drawing and see if you can remember what the act of compassion or resource was that you drew, where you were, or who you were with.*
- *When you think about this moment of kindness or resource, what do you notice happening the inside your body? (If students share pleasant or neutral sensations, allow them to sit with their attention on those sensations. If they share unpleasant sensations, encourage them to shift and stay, or to choose one of the Help Now! activities.*
- *As we do this, we’re learning about our bodies and how to calm them and make them feel okay.”*

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 16 minutes

#### Creating a Resource Kit of Personal Resources\*

##### Overview

In this activity students will come to understand what a personal resource is: something specific to them that makes them feel good or better when they think of it. They create a set of personal resources for themselves, drawing each one on a piece of paper and then labeling it. The pieces of paper can be small so that they can be folded and placed in a box (or colored envelope) which will serve as a resource kit of the student’s personal resources. If you or your students prefer, you can call the resource kit something else, like a “pouch of resources,” “tool box” or “tool kit.” (Similarly, you can provide pouches instead of boxes.) As the year goes on, they can add to their resource kit of personal resources and they can pull resources from it when they need to.

##### Content/Insights to be Explored

- We can develop and use a variety of resources to help the body feel calmer and safer.
- Our nervous systems respond when we think of things we like and enjoy or things that make us feel safer.
- Some resources may work better at certain times than others.
- Resourcing can become easier with practice.

##### Materials Required

- Colored or white blank 4”x 6” cards (or paper cut to a similar size) and colored pens or markers for each student; small box, pouch,

or a large colored envelope to serve as the “resource kit” for each student to store their drawings of personal resources in; a box of small colored rocks, stones, crystals, or other similar objects (optional); art supplies for decorating the treasure chest (optional)

### Instructions

- Tell students you are going to make a resource kit and explain to students what resources are.
- Ask questions to get students to share some of their resources.
- Provide ample time for students to draw their resources and then share them. Sharing can be done in pairs or as a whole group or both.

### Teaching Tips

- What’s important in this learning experience is students identifying what serves as a personal resource for them, that is, recognizing the value of something in their life as a resource that makes them feel good or better. Although we all have things in our lives (people, places, activities, memories, hopes, etc) that make us feel better, we sometimes take them for granted or don’t recognize them as having this special value.
- You may wish to repeat this activity to create more resources. Also, you can set aside time for your students to decorate and personalize their resource kit, thereby making it individualized. In this way, their resource kit itself may come to serve as a resource for them. You can also use the following

supplemental insight activity (“resource stone”) to add to the resource kit.

- *Note:* Personal resources can be quite simple; they do not have to be something incredibly wonderful. Personal resources are also unique to the individual; what works for one person will often not work for someone else. To keep the range as broad as possible at first, use a variety of words to describe what a personal resource can be rather than a single word like “happiness,” “safety,” “joy,” etc. That will make it easier for your students to find something that works for them.

### Sample Script

- *“Today we’re going to create a resource kit. It’s like a tool kit.*
- *What’s a tool kit for? What kind of things do you find in a tool kit?*
- *In this kit we’re going to put reminders of things that make us feel good, things that make us feel safe, or things we like.*
- *We call these things personal resources. A resource means something that is useful. It’s personal because our resource is something special to us. It doesn’t have to be special to other people.*
- *Personal resources are things that make us feel good or happy or safe.*
- *They can be things we like to do. They can be things we find relaxing or fun. They can be people we like. They can even be things about ourselves - things we’re proud of or happy about.*

- *Is there someone you like who makes you feel safer and happier when you think of them?*
- *Is there a place you like that makes you feel better when you go there or think about it?*
- *Is there something you really like to do that is fun?*
- *These are all personal resources. It can be anything that makes you feel good or makes you feel better when you're not feeling good.*
- *It can even be something that you imagine that makes you feel good or happy when you think of it.*
- *Let's take a moment to think of a personal resource for ourselves, it might be two or three.*
- *Now let's take a moment to draw our resource or resources.*
- *Let's write down the name of our resource on the drawing so we can remember what we drew later.*
- [Allow students ample time to draw.]
- *Now we've created a few personal resources. Each one is like a treasure. It's valuable. Like treasure, we can save it for later and we can use it when we want to.*
- *We can keep our resources in our resource kits. Let's write our names on our treasure chests.*
- *Let's share what we made with each other. Who would like to share one of your resources and why it is a resource for you?"*

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 7 minutes

### Practicing Resourcing and Tracking\*

#### Overview

In this reflective practice, students will choose one of their personal resources and sit with it for a moment, seeing if they can notice sensations in the body and identify them as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral (in-between).

#### Teaching Tips

- Note that if students share unpleasant sensations, remind them that they can shift to a place in their body that feels better or even just neutral. This skill is called "shift and stay." Also, remember that you are helping them to learn what a sensation is, so if they say things like "It feels good" or "It feels bad," ask them things like, "What does good feel like? Can you describe the sensation?" You can use the sensation word list that you created with them in the previous learning experience.
- Resourcing is a skill that will take time to develop. It is suggested that you repeat this activity a few times until students gain some direct experience with pleasant sensations in the body while thinking of their personal resource. After such critical insight is born, further practice will then lead to an embodied understanding of the way their own nervous system experiences and expresses stress and well-being.

#### Sample script

- *"Now we're going to notice sensations in our bodies. (Review what a sensation is with examples if necessary).*

- *Let's take a moment and choose one of your favorite resources.*
- *Make yourself comfortable and place the drawing of your resource in front of you.*
- *If you feel that you are distracted, move to a place where you are less distracted.*
- *Let's take a moment and be still and just look at our resource and think about it.*
- *What does it feel like on the inside when we look at and think about our resource?*
- *Do you notice any pleasant sensations? If you don't, that's okay.*
- *If you notice unpleasant sensations, then just shift and find another part of your body that feels better. Stay with the place that feels better.*
- *Once we've found a pleasant sensation, or just an in-between sensation, then we can stay there and just feel that sensation. [Pause.]*
- *It's like we're reading our body and its sensations. We call this tracking. Tracking means to follow something closely. When we notice the sensations in the body and pay attention to them, we are tracking.*
- *Would anyone like to share a sensation that they notice in their body?*
- *What does it feel like when you just pay attention to that sensation?"*

### **DEBRIEF** | 3 minutes

- *"These resource kits are for you to use to help you whenever you need to feel more safe, calm, and peaceful.*
- *Whenever you feel you need some help feeling calmer, you can take a few moments and touch your stone quietly, and remember something you're thankful for. Or look at your pictures of your resources.*
- *What kinds of sensations came when we looked at our personal resources?*
- *Do you think we could come up with more personal resources in the future?*
- *When might you want to use your resource kit?"*

---

### **OPTIONAL INSIGHT ACTIVITY** | 10 minutes Resource Stone

#### **Overview**

This is an optional supplemental insight activity that can go along with the resource kit activity. You may not have time to do both activities in one lesson, so you can always do this later. In this activity, you invite the students to form a circle and choose a small stone, crystal, or other object from a bag or box. They then think of something they are thankful for, and the stone or object comes to represent that thing. They then add the object to their resource kit.

## Materials Required

- A small stone, crystal, or other small item for each student
- Students' treasure chests

## Instructions

- Invite the students to join you in a circle.
- Give each student a small crystal, stone, or other small item or invite them to choose one they like from a box or bag. They should choose.
- Lead them through the resourcing practice, scripted below.

## Sample script

- *"This is a special treasure for your resource kit.*
- *It is a stone (or crystal) that can help remind you how to feel calm, safe, and peaceful. We'll call it a resource stone, since we will use it to remind us of a resource.*
- *But, before it can do that, we have to practice something new.*
- *Take a moment and think of something that you are thankful for.*
- *It can be one of your personal resources or something new.*
- *We can feel thankful for little things, like a someone giving you a smile, or big things like special people in our lives.*

- *Let's all take a moment and think about something we feel thankful for: a place, a person, an object, or something else.*
- *It could be an adult in your life, a pet, a favorite park. Whatever it is, take a moment to picture it in your mind.*
- *As you think about this special thing, give your stone a gentle squeeze. You can rub it with your fingers too.*
- *Notice what sensations you feel on the inside as you hold your stone and think of what you're thankful for.*
- *Now, we'll go around the circle and share what we're thankful for.*
- *I'll start: "I'm thankful for... (the trees that I see outside, my walk home, my good friends, my cat)."*

Go around the circle until everyone has shared. It's ok to pass.

- *"Notice how you feel on the inside now that we've all expressed thanks for something special to us.*
- *Does anyone notice any sensations on the inside? What do you notice?*
- *Now you can return to your desks (tables) and place your special stone inside your resource kit.*
- *We can write a note and put it in our resource kit also, so that we remember what it is we were thankful for."*

## Grounding

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this learning experience is to explore the skill of grounding as a way of returning to and staying within the resilient zone/OK zone. Grounding refers to attending to the physical contact of one's body with an object. Grounding is always practiced with tracking (attending to sensations in the body),

as these two together build body literacy. As there are many ways to do grounding, and each student will likely find methods that work best for him or her, it is recommended that you repeat some of the activities in this learning experience a few times.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Increase awareness of how our bodies feel when we move them in certain ways.
- Gain proficiency in the practice of grounding through various postures.
- Gain proficiency in the practice of grounding through holding an object.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



## Self-Regulation

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Students' resource kits
- A grab bag of objects for students to hold such as stuffed animals/soft toys, articles of clothing, pendants, watches, toys. (If you prefer, or if it is difficult to arrange these items, you can ask students beforehand to bring something that they feel they might enjoy using for this activity.)

## LENGTH

30 minutes

### CHECK-IN | 4 minutes

- *“Let’s take out our resource kits and see if there’s something in there we’d like to use.*
- *Pick one of your personal resources and hold it in your hands or place it in front of you.*
- *Let your eyes rest on it, or close your eyes and feel it carefully with your hands.*
- *Let’s take a few moments to really give our attention to our objects. [Pause.] As you do that, try to notice the sensations inside your body. You might feel warmer or cooler, lighter or heavier, perhaps tingling, maybe you notice your breathing, just be curious. If you don’t notice any sensations, that’s okay and just notice that you’re not feeling any sensations at the moment. You can still just sit and enjoy your object.”*

---

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 12 minutes

#### Grounding with One’s Stance\*

##### Overview

In this activity students will practice the skill of grounding by trying out different stances and seeing which ones bring about the greatest sense of well-being in their bodies.

##### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Our nervous system responds to the physical contact of our bodies with objects and surfaces.
- Attention to pleasant or neutral sensations in the body when grounding can lead to relaxation.

- We each have specific grounding techniques that will work best for us.
- Practicing grounding can make it easier and more effective over time.

##### Materials Required

None

##### Instructions

- You may need to prepare the space first to allow for students to push down on a desk as well as push and lean against a wall.
- Use the script below to guide your students through grounding with one’s stance and tracking for the first time.
- Explain that you will be learning a skill called “grounding” which is to help the body feel better, safer, more secure, and more stable. (In that sense it is quite like resourcing, but instead of thinking of a resource, it involves moving your body until it is most comfortable.)
- Lead your students through different postures (standing, sitting, pushing down on their desk, leaning against the wall, pushing against the wall), pausing briefly during each posture to allow them to track their sensations, and then allowing them to share what sensations (if any) they notice.
- Conclude by allowing them to practice the stance or posture that they like best, and note that they can use stances and postures like this when they need to calm down or help their bodies feel better.

## Teaching Tips

- Because our nervous systems constantly monitor the posture of our bodies and the contact of our bodies with objects (including what is supporting us, such as the floor, beds, or chairs), simply changing our stance can help the nervous system regulate itself better. Tracking sensations allows a deepening of the experience and the building of body literacy.
- If you like you can add other postures as well, even including lying down or sitting with one's back against the wall. Arm positions can also be used, such as folding one's arms. Remember to encourage them to use tracking to notice the sensations in their bodies, as this will help them see which postures are most helpful.

## Sample script

- *"We can use the sense of touch to practice a skill called "grounding."*
- *We are going to try a little experiment and see if we feel differently depending on what our body is doing. Remember, our nervous systems are all different, so something that feels pleasant for you might feel unpleasant for others. Since we're all sitting now, let's notice the sensations in our bodies that come from sitting. Feel free to change your way of sitting to one that is most comfortable for you. Now let's track our sensations by paying attention to them. [Pause.]*
- *Now let's all stand. Stand in the way that is most comfortable for you.*
- *Let's track what sensations we notice in our body now that we're standing. Let's see what we're feeling on the inside. [Pause.]*
- *Who would like to share? [Allow for student comments on what they are sensing.]*
- *Raise your hand if you feel better standing. Raise your hand if you felt better sitting.*
- *That's interesting, isn't it? Tracking helps us know which feels better for us. It is different for each of us.*
- *What we're doing is called "grounding."*
- *We use grounding to help our bodies feel more safe, strong, secure, or happy.*
- *That's because our nervous system always pays attention to the position of our bodies and what we're touching. It senses what position we are in and it responds to that. It can feel better or not so good depending on how we're standing or what we're touching.*
- *Now that we are paying attention to sensations, we can see if the way we hold our body changes those sensations.*
- *Sometimes by changing the way we are standing or sitting can help us feel better.*
- *Let's try something different. Let's push down on the table with our hands. It doesn't have to be too hard. And let's track what sensations we feel on the inside. [Pause.] (If students are sitting in a circle away from tables, they can place their hands on the bench or floor and push hard to lift themselves up off their seat,*

feeling the contact and also the pressure in their arms.)

- *What sensations do you notice on the inside?* [Allow students to share.]
- *Let's try a different thing. Let's push against the wall with our hands. While we're doing that, let's do tracking. Let's notice what sensations are in our body when we push like this and where in our body we feel those sensations.* [Pause.]
- *What sensations are you noticing?* [Allow students to share.] *Are they pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?*
- *Let's try leaning against the walls with our backs. And let's track while we do this, paying attention to our sensations on the inside.* [Pause.]
- *What sensations are you noticing now?* [Allow students to share.] *Are they pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?*
- *Raise your hand if you felt better pushing against the wall. Raise your hand if you feel better leaning against the wall. Raise your hand if you felt better pushing down on the table or seat.*
- *Now let's each do what we prefer. If you want to sit, do that. Or you can stand, you can push down on the table, you can lean against the wall, or you can push against the wall. Let's all do the one we like best.*
- *Now let's pay attention to the sensations inside our body by tracking. You might*

*like to close your eyes to help you feel the sensations.*

- *What do you notice? Do we all like the same things?*
- *Did you find one that made you feel better?*
- *When we do this, we learn what feels best for us. We can use this practice of grounding to help our body be calmer if it isn't feeling calm."*

---

### **INSIGHT ACTIVITY** | 10 minutes *Grounding with an Object\**

#### **Overview**

In this activity you will allow your students to choose an object they like from a selection that you provide (or ask them to bring objects of their own) and they will practice holding a few of the objects and noticing what sensations arise in their bodies when they do this.

#### **Content/Insights to be Explored**

- Our nervous system responds to the physical contact of our bodies with objects and surfaces.
- Attention to pleasant or neutral sensations in the body when grounding can lead to relaxation.
- We each have specific grounding techniques that will work best for us.
- Practicing grounding can make it easier and more effective over time.

## Materials Required

A grab bag of objects for students to hold such as stuffed animals/soft toys, articles of clothing, pendants, watches, toys. (If you prefer, or if it is difficult to arrange these items, you can ask students beforehand to bring something that they feel they might enjoy using for this activity).

## Instructions

Use the provided script to guide students through grounding with an object and tracking for the first time.

## Teaching Tips

- Grounding is the physical contact of our body with an object. This can include the ground, a chair, or the wall, as in the previous activity. But it can also involve holding an object. When we enjoy the sensations that arise from holding an object, attention to those sensations can also help us relax.
- You may wish to have a variety of soft objects or objects with nice textures as well as some hard objects like wooden objects or stones. Students can also use their resource stone from the previous Learning Experience. If you will not have enough objects for them, you can ask them to bring in something from home prior to doing this activity.

## Sample script

- *"We can do grounding by holding or touching things also.*

- *Here are some things we can use to practice grounding. You can each choose something you think you might enjoy holding.*
- *Let's sit and hold our object. You can feel it with your hands or place it on your lap.*
- *Notice how it feels.*
- *Can anyone describe their object using sensation words? What does it feel like?*
- *Now let's do tracking. We're going to pay attention to the sensations in our body as we hold our object.*
- *Let's be silent for a moment and notice any sensations in our body as we hold our object. [Pause.]*
- *What did you notice? Where did you notice it in the body?*
- *Let's be silent again and do some more tracking. [Pause.]*
- *What did you notice this time?*
- *Would anyone like to change their object? [Repeat once allowing students to pick a different object if they didn't particularly like their first one.]*
- *This is also grounding."*

After you do this a few times, you may find that some students like particular objects especially and can use them for grounding. If this is the case, you may wish to leave some of these objects in the classroom to allow students to use them for grounding when they feel the need to as it suits your classroom.

## OPTIONAL INSIGHT ACTIVITY

10 minutes

### Grounding with a Part of the Body\*

#### Overview

This activity is an extension of further ways students can use grounding, in this case by becoming aware of their feet and hands while lightly pressing down on a table, leaning against the wall, sitting, or standing. As in other grounding activities, what is important is to combine grounding with tracking (awareness of sensations in the body).

#### Sample Script

- *"We can do grounding by becoming aware of a part of our body in relationship to a surface.*
- *Let's try placing our hand(s) against a table, a wall or the floor.*
- *Let's try paying attention to our feet and how they are positioned on the ground.*
- *Now let's do tracking. We are going to pay attention to the sensations in our body.*
- *Let's be silent for a moment and notice any sensations in our body. [Pause.]*
- *What did you notice? Where do you notice it in the body?*
- *Let's be silent again and do some more tracking. [Pause.]*
- *What did you notice this time?*
- *Did you like paying attention to your hands, your feet, or both?*
- *This is also grounding."*

## DEBRIEF | 4 minutes

- *"We have spent some time together trying out different ways of grounding ourselves and noticing sensations within our bodies. Which has been the best one for you (i.e. which has given you pleasant or neutral sensations)? Which one did not work for you?"*
- *Does anyone remember a sensation that they felt or heard someone else share?*
- *When do you think you could use grounding?"*

## The Resilient Zone

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this learning experience is to introduce students to the concept of the resilient zone, which you can also call the “OK zone” or “zone of well-being,” by using a puppet and charts to facilitate understanding. The resilient zone refers to when our mind and body are in a state of well-being. When we are in our resilient zone we can handle the stresses that happen during the day and react with the best part of ourselves. Stress can bump us out of our resilient zone into our high or low zone.

When we are stuck in the high zone we may feel anxious, agitated, nervous, angry, stressed out, and so on. Our body is dysregulated, making it hard for us to concentrate, learn new information, or make good decisions. When we are stuck in the low zone, we may feel tired, lacking in energy, unexcited about things we normally like, unmotivated, and deflated and it’s just as difficult for us to learn new things, solve problems, or make our best choices.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Understand our three zones.
- Develop the skill of recognizing which zone they are in at any given moment through tracking.
- Develop the skill of returning to the resilient zone using resourcing and grounding.

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



## Self-Regulation

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- A board or chart paper for drawing the three zones
- Enough copies of the provided stories to distribute to pairs or trios if you wish to do the insight activity in small groups
- For optional insight activity: another story to diagram

## LENGTH

30 minutes

## CHECK-IN | 4 minutes

- *“Take a moment to give your attention to the sensations inside your body. You might want to check how much energy you have, whether you are feeling heavier or lighter, warmer or cooler, relaxed and soft, or tight and jumpy. I invite you to notice what’s going on.*
- *Last time we talked about grounding - using our body and senses to help us calm down and feel better. Can you remember something you tried that felt pleasant or neutral to you? (Take enough responses to feel that most strategies have been represented.) Is anyone having trouble remembering these? (If so, you might want to make a list to post in the classroom.)*
- *Is there one form of grounding you would like to try right now? (Allow some time for individual choice and exploration, or you may want to choose one experience for the whole group to try.)*
- *How do you feel now? Can you tell whether that exercise was helpful to you? Do you notice any differences in your body?”*

---

## PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 10 minutes

### The Resilient Zone

#### Overview

In this presentation, you will discuss the concept of the resilient zone, the high zone, and the low zone, using a story and charts to facilitate understanding and set up for the next activity, which goes through the day of a child

(“Nelson”) and how that child experiences the day in his body and nervous system.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Stressors can knock us out of our resilient zone. All people experience being stuck in the high zone or stuck in the low zone.
- When we are stuck in one of those two zones, we tend not to make the best decisions and we don’t feel good.
- There are specific practices we can do to return to the resilient zone.
- Once in the resilient zone, we experience more well-being, our bodies are healthier, we are kinder to ourselves and others, and we make better decisions.

#### Materials Required

- A board or chart paper for drawing the three zones

#### Instructions

- Explain that you are going to read a story together about a character named Nelson and that you are going to talk about Nelson’s day and ask them to think about what Nelson might be feeling as he goes about his day. In order to do this, explain that you will be using a chart that shows different zones or different ways Nelson could be feeling in his body.
- Show a chart of the resilient zone or draw one on the board or a piece of chart paper. Your drawing should have two horizontal lines and a wavy line between them inside it going up and down.

- Explain that this drawing shows how our bodies, and specifically our nervous systems, go throughout the day: sometimes getting more excited or even upset, sometimes feeling more tired or low in energy.
- Explain that the middle zone is the “resilient zone” (or “OK zone” or “zone of well-being” or another name your class can come up with.) This is where we’ll put Nelson when he’s feeling OK. He could be experiencing a range of emotions and feelings in this zone, but his body is still healthy and he can make good decisions. He can be OK sad or OK mad and still be in his resilient zone/OK zone.
- You can explain that “resilient” means the ability to deal with and handle difficulties; the ability to bounce back; inner strength, fortitude or toughness.
- Draw the lightning bolt symbol (or some other symbol) to represent the stressor or trigger. Explain that sometimes things happen that upset Nelson or make him feel less safe. If we come across something like this in the story, we can use a lightning bolt to indicate that something might be stressing Nelson. This might even knock Nelson out of his resilient zone. If that happens, he could get stuck in the high or low zone.
- Now add two pictures that represent a child being stuck in the high zone or low zone, such as the ones provided in the graphic. (You may print out the accompanying graphic and use that instead.)
- Ask your students what they think the boy in the high zone is feeling – really angry, upset nervous, anxious? If Nelson gets stuck in the high zone, what might he sense on the inside?
  - You may need to provide examples first. Write down the words they give you, using a different color (such as red) for sensation words. Then repeat this with the low zone. What do they think the girl in the low zone is feeling-sad, tired, alone? If Nelson were to get stuck in the low zone, what might he sense on the inside? Write down the words they give you, using a different color for sensation words.
- Then tell the story of Nelson included in the sample script below, pausing to check (a) what the students think Nelson might be sensing in his body; (b) where he might be on the resilient zone chart; (c) what he could do to get back to the resilient zone or stay there.
- Conclude the discussion by reminding the students that we have already learned a lot of skills that we can use to return to our resilient zone.
- Invite them to resource and/or ground as you end the discussion.

### Teaching Tips

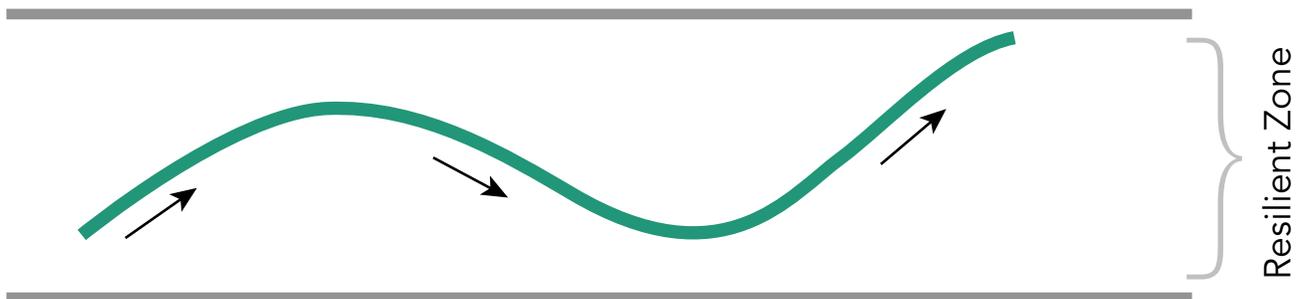
- Don’t be concerned if your students do not reach these critical insights right away, as they are reinforced in the following two learning experiences also.
- **A note on safety: When teaching about the three zones, it is safest to use a proxy at**

**first (such as a story, a puppet, pictures, or emojis) to represent being stuck in the high or low zones and to ask students about what they think that proxy is feeling or sensing.** This is a way of teaching the three zones indirectly at first. It is *not* recommended to ask students direct questions such as, “What do you feel like when you’re stuck in your high zone?” or “What is it like for us to be stuck in the high zone?” or “Do you remember a time when you were stuck in your high zone?” Doing so could inadvertently

cause a student to experience a traumatic flashback or to describe the worst thing that ever happened to them. Similarly, it is best to avoid creating scenarios to teach this material that involve students directly simulating being stuck in their high zone or low zone, rather than through a proxy or a role play.

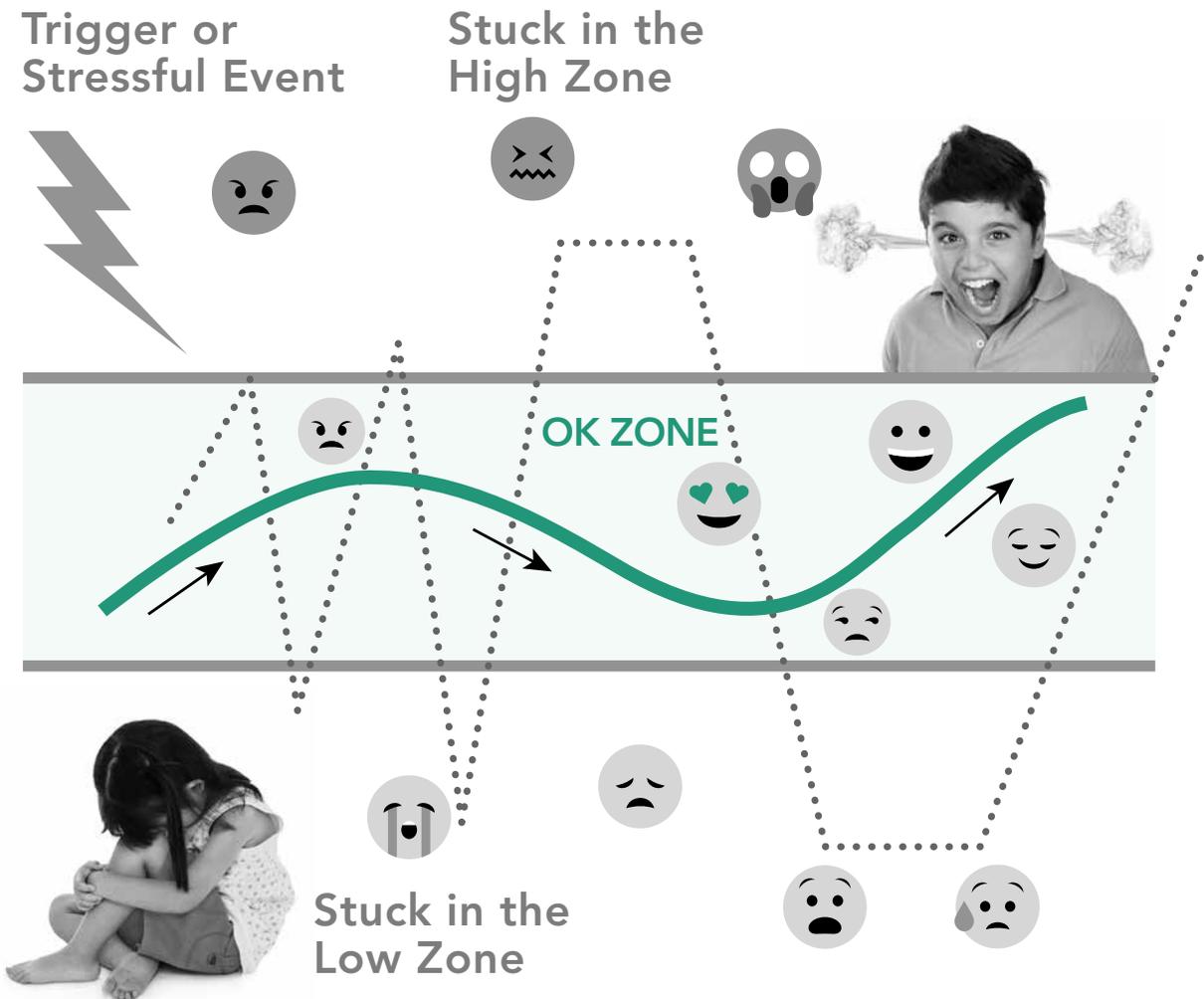
- You may find the script below particularly helpful as you try this learning experience for the first time.

## THE RESILIENT ZONE



(c) Trauma Resource Institute

Graphic adapted from an original graphic of Peter Levine/Heller, original slide design by Genie Everett



**Sample script**

- *"We've been learning about our bodies and in particular our nervous system.*
- *What have we learned that our nervous system does?*
- *We've been paying attention to our sensations. And we've learned how to calm ourselves using resourcing, grounding, and Help Now! strategies.*
- *We're going to read a story together about a character named Nelson.*

- *Nelson is the same age as most of you. He also goes to a school like you, and we're going to work to understand the nervous system better by thinking about what Nelson goes through in a day.*
- *To do that we're going to use a picture that is helpful for understanding our nervous system. This picture shows us what Nelson's nervous system is doing as he goes about his day.*
- *This middle part is called our resilient zone [or OK zone or zone of well-being.] That's*

because in the middle here, Nelson's body is feeling resilient.

- Has anyone heard the word "resilient"? Who can take a guess at what the meaning is? [Allow students to share.]
- Resilient means we are strong on the inside, we are in control, and we can handle any difficulties. Even if difficult things happen, since we are resilient, we can bounce back and be in control again.
- When we're in our resilient zone, we might have some difficulties, but we can deal with them because we have inner strength. We are not super stressed-out or super troubled because we have learned how to get our bodies and minds into a better place that helps us feel better.
- How do you think Nelson feels in his body when he's here in this zone?
- Through the day we might go up and down [draw a wavy line in the resilient zone]. The line going up means we might get excited and have lots of energy, or the line going down means we might get sleepy or be a bit low in energy. But we can still do that in our resilient zone.
- But then something scary happens or something we don't like [draw or point to the lightning bolt]. And it knocks us out of our resilient zone. And we might get stuck in our high zone.

- How do you think this boy [on the graphic] feels when he gets stuck in his high zone? [Allow responses.]

- Yes, many of you noted what it feels like to be stuck in the high zone - he doesn't like it. He feels anxious and scared. He also might feel angry and upset! He feels out of control, like he doesn't know what he's going to do. He feels a lot of stress in the high zone. And sometimes feeling a lot of stress can make him go to the low zone as well.

- How do you think that girl who is stuck in the low zone is feeling? [Allow responses.]

- Yes, many of you noted what it feels like in the low zone - she might feel low in energy and sad. She just doesn't feel like doing things. She doesn't feel like playing the games she usually likes; she's just not interested. She may just want to be alone. She may feel lonely, even if other people are around. She thinks it feels bad to be stuck in the low zone and she feels better when she can get back to the resilient zone."

---

### INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 12 minutes

#### Nelson's Day

##### Overview

In this insight activity, students go through Nelson's day, which is a typical day in the life of a child roughly the same age your students. As you tell the story of Nelson's day, you will let the students guide the process by asking them where Nelson is on the resilient zone chart.

### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Stressors can knock us out of our resilient zone. All people experience being stuck in the high zone or stuck in the low zone.
- When we are stuck in one of those two zones, we tend not to make the best decisions and we don't feel good.
- There are specific practices we can do to return to the resilient zone
- Once in the resilient zone, we experience more well-being, our bodies are healthier, we are kinder to ourselves and others, and we make better decisions.

### Materials Required

- The sample story (below)
- Marker
- Whiteboard or chart paper

### Instructions

- An asterisk is placed at each point in the story where you can pause and ask your students to guide you as to what Nelson might be feeling and where he is on the resilient zone chart. Ask, "What sensations do you think Nelson is feeling right now in his body?" After they've shared that, ask, "Where is Nelson in his three zones?" Ask them to be specific—if he's in the resilient zone, is he in the middle or the upper part of it or the lower part of it? Or has he been bumped out of his resilient zone? If so, he is stuck on high, and if so how high? As they give you the answers, you will be drawing a wavy line from left to right that chronicles

Nelson's day and where he is on the chart based on what they say.

- At some points the students may feel something stressful has happened that knocks Nelson out of his resilient zone. At those times you can ask, "Should we put a lightning bolt here? Should it be a big lightning bolt or a small one?" If your students think these bump Nelson out of his resilient zone, you will draw the line accordingly to show that.
- Also when you see an asterisk in the story and pause, you can ask your students to recommend things Nelson could do to calm himself or make himself feel better. As Nelson does those things, they may decide that he returns to his resilient zone. Note that you do not need to adhere rigidly to every time an asterisk appears in the story. These are just suggested moments when you can pause and check-in. Most likely, your interaction with the students will be more fluid than this and you may wish to pause more or less frequently depending on how they are participating in the activity.
- At the end, you will ask them to look at the whole picture and share what they notice. Lastly, explore the idea that if Nelson thinks about his day, and knows when stressful things tend to happen, might he be able to prepare in advance for those things so that they have less of a chance of bumping him out of his resilient zone?
- End with an opportunity for them to practice resourcing and grounding themselves.

## Teaching Tips

- A sample story is provided for you, but before doing this activity you should feel free to change it to fit the typical experiences your own students might have so that they can best relate to what Nelson is going through. (Note that once you go through this exercise once with your students, they should be able to do a similar exercise with any story that you read to them or tell them: that is, they will be able to tell you what the character(s) is feeling in his or her body and where they might be in their resilient zone (or out of it).)
- As an alternative, you can demark the resilient zone on the floor with rope or tape and have students move from zone to zone as they hear Nelson's story and you land on an asterisk.

## Nelson's Story

*"Nelson wakes up. It's so early! He doesn't have to leave for school until 8am, but for some reason he's very excited and he woke up earlier than usual. Why?\**

*Nelson's mother comes into his bedroom. "Nelson! You're up early. Why don't you brush your teeth and get dressed." She begins to open his closet and say, "Would you like me to get your clothes out for you?"*

*"No! I can do it myself!" Nelson says.\**

*"Okay, that's great," Nelson's mother says.*

*Nelson searches his closet and the clothes hamper for his favorite jeans and t-shirt until*

*he finds them. The jeans are soft in all the right places, and he likes the way he looks in the shirt. Then he looks for his favorite sneakers, and he finds them in the bathroom where he puts them on. He looks at himself in the long mirror and thinks, "I look good."\**

*Nelson brushes his teeth and goes downstairs. His mother is preparing breakfast for him. It's eggs and roast potatoes, his favorite. "Yay!" he says as he settles down to eat.\**

*"Nelson, you're going to be late," says his mother. "Hurry up and finish your food. Do you have your book bag?"*

*"No, it's upstairs," Nelson says as he's eating.*

*"Go and get it," says his mother. "And don't forget to put your homework assignment in it."*

*"But I'm still eating!" says Nelson. He is enjoying his food so much.*

*"You have to go and get it now or you'll be late," says his mother. "Go now."\**

*Nelson has to take a bus to school. He almost misses the bus! But he gets out just in time to catch it. When he finally gets on the bus and sits down next to his friend Arya, he says, "Phew! I just made it!"\**

*Nelson arrives at school and goes to his classroom. The teacher comes in and has all the students sit in a circle.*

*"Now it's time for us to show our assignments," the teacher says. "Remember I gave you some homework to do?"*

*Nelson suddenly remembers that the teacher gave them some homework to do, but he didn't do it.*

*"Oh no," he thinks. "How did I forget about that again?"*

*"Let's go in a circle," the teacher says. One by one, each student shows their homework. Nelson knows it's going to be his turn soon.*

*"Now it's your turn, Nelson," says the teacher and points at him.\**

*"I didn't do it," said Nelson. "I'm sorry."*

*"Don't worry," says the teacher and smiles at him kindly. "You can bring it tomorrow."\**

*Nelson sees that a few other students also didn't do their homework, and the teacher tells them that they too can bring theirs tomorrow.\**

*At lunchtime, Nelson is so happy because it's his favorite food: pizza!\**

*Nelson goes outside to play for recess after lunch, when they always have a little time to play before coming back to class. He sees some other kids playing kickball. "I love kickball!" Nelson thinks.*

*But when he goes over to play with them, they don't let him play. "You can't play with us!" they shout. "You're no good!"*

*Nelson is surprised and sad. He goes off by himself and stands at the edge of the playground. Suddenly he doesn't feel like playing with anyone any more. His whole body suddenly feels very heavy.\**

*Then Nelson's friend Theresa comes over to him.*

*"Hey, Nelson," she says, "we're playing kickball too. Won't you come and play with us? We'd love to have you on our team!"*

*"Really?" says Nelson. "Okay!"\**

*He runs over and plays kickball with Theresa and the other students until recess is over.*

*At the end of the school day Nelson goes home. He does his homework, has dinner with his family, and then crawls into bed. He's so tired and his legs hurt a bit from playing so much kickball, but the soft pillows feel so good under his head.\**

*The End"*

### DEBRIEF | 4 minutes

- *“Who would like to explain a part of what the drawing of the resilient zone means?”*
  - *How do you think we’d know if someone else was in their high zone?*
  - *What about their low zone?*
  - *What do you think are other words we could use to explain to someone what resilient means?*
  - *Do you think most people have been stuck in the high zone some time? What about the low zone?*
  - *What did you learn today that you want to remember because you feel it might be helpful sometime?”*
- *Together, your group will create a chart like the one we made together in a large group.*
  - *When you are finished, we will share out as a whole group.”*

---

### OPTIONAL INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 15 minutes

#### Practicing Naming Sensations and Zones with Stories\*

#### Overview

This activity offers a way for small groups of students to practice noticing and naming sensations and zones through the use of stories. Select a story for your class to read - it can be almost any story or you could write it yourself. It could just be part of a story, enough to give them something to diagram.

#### Sample Script

- *“In pairs or trios, your group is going to read a story together and chart a character’s experiences with the three zones.*

## Exploring the Resilient Zone through Scenarios

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this learning experience is to build off of Learning Experience 5, “The Resilient Zone,” by allowing students to move on a map of the three zones on the ground according to how they feel the characters in specific scenarios might be feeling. This helps them to further embody their understanding

of resiliency and the nervous system, while still maintaining an indirect approach, in that you are not asking them what it is like when they themselves are stuck in their high or low zones, but rather you are exploring this through characters in a scenario.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Understand our three zones.
- Develop the skill of recognizing which zone they are in at any given moment through tracking.
- Develop the skill of returning to the resilient zone using resourcing and grounding.

## LENGTH

30 minutes

## PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



## Self-Regulation

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- The charts of the resilient zone and nervous system to put up for students to see
- Sample scenarios (provided)
- Colored tape to place on the floor to create the three zones

## CHECK-IN | 5 minutes

- *“Take a moment to give your attention to the sensations inside your body. You might want to check how much energy you have, whether you are feeling heavier or lighter, warmer or cooler, relaxed and soft, or tight and jumpy. I invite you to notice what’s going on.*
- *Last time we talked about grounding - using our body and senses to help us calm down and feel better. Can you remember something you tried that felt pleasant or neutral to you? (Take enough responses to feel that most strategies have been represented.) Is anyone having trouble remembering these? (If so, you might want to make a list to post in the classroom.)*
- *Is there one form of grounding you would like to try right now? (Allow some time for individual choice and exploration, or you may want to choose one experience for the whole group to try.)*
- *How do you feel now? Can you tell whether that exercise was helpful to you? Do you notice any differences in your body?*

---

## INSIGHT ACTIVITY

20 minutes

### Exploring the Three Zones through Scenarios\*

#### Overview

In this activity, you will provide different scenarios and the students will stand along a line or diagram on the ground that shows the three zones, indicating where they think the

character would be in their bodies based on that scenario. They will share what it’s like to be in those zones. Then they will suggest to each other what the character could do to return to their resilient zone. Those stuck in a high or low zone will then do the practices suggested, and can move if they find themselves returning to the resilient zone. This is an activity you may wish to repeat multiple times.

#### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Stressors can knock us out of our resilient zone. All people experience being stuck in the high zone or stuck in the low zone.
- When we are stuck in one of those two zones, we tend not to make the best decisions and we don’t feel good.
- There are specific practices we can do to return to the resilient zone.
- Once in the resilient zone, we experience more well-being, our bodies are healthier, we are kinder to ourselves and others, and we make better decisions.

#### Materials Required

- The chart(s) of the resilient zone and nervous system to put up for students to see
- Sample scenarios (provided)
- Colored tape to place on the floor to create the three zones.

#### Instructions

- Draw a visual representation on the ground of the three zones, which will be your “zone

map." An easy way to do this is to use colored tape and simply draw two parallel lines, thereby creating the three zones. The resilient zone will be the space between the two lines, the high zone will be above the top line, and the low zone will be below the bottom line. If you like you can also put signs on the ground that say "High," Resilient" (or "Well-Being"), and "Low."

- If you feel it would be helpful, because your students don't quite have a firm grasp on the word "resilient," you can also write the word "resilient" on the board or on chart paper and ask students to name other words that are like resilient, creating a word map.
- Next ask for 2-4 volunteers who will stand on the zone map based on a scenario you read. Explain that everyone else will be an observer. You will then read out a scenario from the samples below (or make up your own) and ask these volunteers to stand where they think the character(s) in the story would be. Tell them that the three zones are a continuum: for example, they can be in the resilient zone but towards the high end of it (for example, if they are energetic or excited, but not stressed out), just into the high zone (slightly stressed), or very far high in the high zone (highly stressed out).
- After they've found their positions, ask the volunteers to share why they are standing where they are standing (they do not all have to agree or stand in the same place), and ask them to share what they might be sensing in their bodies.
- Then ask the rest of the class (the observers) for suggestions as to what the character(s) could do to feel better. They should suggest some of the skills (Help Now! skills, resourcing or grounding, or other activities. Ask the volunteers (and observers if you like) if they would like to practice what has been suggested. Those who wish to can then do the skill. Then ask them how the character would now be feeling, and if they'd like to move to a place that better describes where the character would be now.
- Repeat with a new scenario and new volunteers.

### Teaching Tips

- Note that this activity is a soft way of exploring the zones and the practices due to the fact that you are using scenarios rather than asking students directly where they are in their bodies. Because our nervous systems are constantly reacting to circumstances, however, it is very likely that you will in fact have students who may be stuck in a high zone or low zone. Our nervous systems also react to thoughts and imagination as if they were real. Therefore, the practice combines imagination with reality, and it is good for you as the teacher to be aware of this and see that activation of the nervous system is going to happen, and that the practices the students use can help them regulate their bodies in the moment.
- Gradually, practicing these skills can expand your students' resilient zones, making it harder

for them to be bumped out into the high or low zones by stressors and making it easier for them to return to their resilient zone if they are bumped out.

- Once students understand the process, using scenarios that have actually happened in your class or between students can be very effective: this helps develop the important skills of empathy, perspective-taking, and conflict transformation that are more fully explored later in SEE Learning.

### Sample Scenarios

These scenarios are offered only as examples. Please feel free to change the names of the characters to be appropriate for your class or to choose situations more appropriate for your class. You may wish to choose names that are not names that your students have. While you can allow students to be wherever they feel they should be and explain why, some suggestions of typical responses are provided in brackets.

- Stanley is a student your age, and he has to perform in front of the whole school. [He might be stressed out, and stuck in the high zone or low zone if he is scared of public speaking. He may be excited but in the resilient zone because he likes public speaking.]
- Keiko is in bed at home. She can't sleep because tomorrow is her birthday and she knows she's going to be getting some wonderful presents. [She might be excited but not stressed, and therefore probably not stuck in the high zone.]
- Jasmine goes to sit with her friends at lunch, but none of them saved her a seat. Instead, they all spread out at the table so there isn't room for her. She's left holding her tray with nowhere to sit. [Probably stuck in the low zone, or in the lower part of the resilient zone. Alternatively, she could get angry and be stuck in the high zone or in the higher part of her resilient zone.]
- Cameron shows up for school and is asked by his teacher for his homework. But he didn't do any of it.
- Steven is at home one evening. He hears his older brother fighting with his mother and both of them are shouting.
- Claire is at home with her parents on the weekend. They say, "We're going out and you are going to watch your two brothers." This is the first time she will babysit at night with no adults in the house.
- Aliyah is out at the mall with her parents, but they've allowed her to shop on her own for an hour. When she shows up at their meeting place, her parents aren't there. Fifteen minutes pass, and they don't answer her texts. [You can also ask where her parents may be since they are running late.]
- Kiara comes to school to find that her class has thrown her a surprise birthday party!
- Tyler and Santiago are at a haunted house. "Let's go in! It will be fun!" says Tyler. "I don't want to go," says Santiago. "No, let's go!" says Tyler and he pulls Santiago inside.

[Have some students show where they think Tyler would be and some Santiago.]

You may wish to repeat this activity a few times. Use these examples to come up with your own scenarios, developing ones that will be closer to situations your students might encounter. Work with students to come up with scenarios, perhaps similar to those that have occurred in your class.

---

### DEBRIEF | 5 minutes

- *“Let’s take a moment to bring to mind one of our resources. You can take one out of your treasure chest if you like and touch it or hold it.*
- *Let’s pay attention to our resource for a moment and notice any sensations that arise in the body.*
- *If you notice a pleasant or neutral sensation, let’s stay with that for a few moments. If you notice an unpleasant sensation, let’s find a place that feels better in the body and then rest there.*
- *What do you notice?*
- *What did you learn today that you want to remember because you feel it might be helpful sometime?”*

## How Compassion and Safety Affect the Body

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this final learning experience in Chapter 2 is to return to the foundational concepts of kindness, happiness, and safety explored in Chapter 1 and tie in what has been learned in Chapter 2. Now that the students have a greater understanding of their bodies, how to calm them, and the resilient zone, they can connect this with what they learned about happiness, compassion, and the value of class agreements. Stress and a sense of threat can knock us out of our resilient zone, making us feel uncomfortable and actually releasing chemicals in our bodies and dysregulating

our nervous system in ways that are unhealthy and can even cause long-term damage. Since students now have first-person experience exploring how we can get bumped out of our resilient zones, and how uncomfortable that can feel, and also know that we can help each other return to our resilient zones/OK zones through compassion, they can understand the importance of compassion and their class agreements on a deeper level. They are helping each other to be happy and healthy, and are even helping each others' bodies to be happy and healthy.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Synthesize the class agreements with their understanding of how the body experiences kindness, safety, and happiness.
- Recognize the relationship between nervous system dysregulation and physical health.

### LENGTH

30 minutes

### PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



#### Interpersonal Awareness

### MATERIALS REQUIRED

- The chart of class agreements and the chart of helping actions that were created in Chapter 1
- The resilient zone chart
- Graphic of the autonomic nervous system (if possible - there is one in the chapter introduction for your use)

## CHECK-IN | 4 minutes

- *“Let’s take out our resource kits and see if there’s something in there we’d like to use. Or if you’d rather do grounding, you can find a comfortable way to sit, stand or lean.*
- *If you’re resourcing, then pick one of your personal resources and hold it in your hands or place it in front of you. Let your eyes rest on it, or close your eyes and feel it carefully with your hands.*
- *If you’re grounding, just bring your attention to your body.*
- *Let’s now take a few moments to do tracking and pay attention to the sensations inside our bodies. [Pause.]*
- *If you find a pleasant or neutral sensation just pay attention to that and watch it. See if it changes or stays the same.*
- *If you haven’t found a pleasant or neutral sensation, see if you can shift to another part of your body to find a place that feels better. [Pause.]*
- *What did you notice?”*

---

## PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 8+ minutes

### Overview

The point of this discussion is to help your students understand that what they have been experiencing in the body has implications for health and happiness overall.

### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Experiencing a lack of compassion can make us feel stressed and unsafe and knock us out of our resilient zone. Experiencing kindness can help us feel safe.
- Having less stress is healthy for our bodies.
- By being kind and respecting others, we can help others feel safer, happier, and more healthy.

### Materials Required

- Resilient zone chart
- Graphic of the autonomic nervous system (if possible - there is one in the chapter introduction for your use)

### Instructions

- Begin by reviewing sensations and the information we receive from them.
- Show students the resiliency zone chart again. Review what happens to our bodies when we are in or out of the resilient zone. Discuss how the body might feel when in the high zone and the low zone. Discuss ways of helping one’s body return to the resilient zone.
- Use the resource kits for resourcing after talking about the zones.
- If possible, show a picture of the human body showing the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and/or the organs inside the body.
- Explain the ANS and how it reacts to danger and stress.

- Discuss how we can affect others and their zones and how we can help others get back into the resilient zone.

### Teaching Tips

- Our nervous systems are designed to keep us alive, and as such respond to perceived threats or the need to mobilize with activation of the sympathetic nervous system. This stress response releases chemicals in our bodies and increases inflammation as the body prepares for potential danger. This is not a problem in the short term, but chronic inflammation and stress gradually weakens our bodies and makes us susceptible to a whole range of physical and mental illnesses.
- This means that when we feel safer, calmer, and/or happier, our bodies are physically healthier and can do things like learn, grow, develop, rest, digest, regenerate, and heal. When we are feeling unsafe and unhappy, our bodies shut down the systems that allow us to do those things, instead preparing us for danger. When we understand this, we can realize that how we treat each other matters deeply. Being mean to someone is likely to cause them to feel stress and a lack of safety, making their bodies less healthy and contributing to illness. Being kind to someone helps them feel safe, making their bodies more healthy. Since we want health and happiness for ourselves, we want others to treat us with kindness and we want to feel safe around them. It makes sense therefore to show to others what we want for ourselves: kindness and compassion.

### Sample script

- *“We’ve been exploring the sensations in our body. When we pay attention to them, we learn if we’re feeling good, happy and safe, or if we’re feeling a bit nervous, unsafe, or unhappy.*
- *We’ve also learned what we can do to make ourselves feel happier, calmer, and safer in our bodies. What are some of the things we’ve learned to do for that? [Allow for just enough sharing that students are connecting with the last lessons.]*
- *Show the resilient zone chart. When we are in the resilient zone/OK zone, can someone show me what that may feel like in your body? Why?*
- *What do you think happens inside our bodies when we are in our resilient zone/OK zone? Do you think it’s healthy for our bodies to be in our resilient zone/ok zone? Why or why not?*
- *What do you think happens inside our bodies when we get stuck in the high zone a lot? Do you think it’s healthy for our bodies to be stuck in the high zone? Why or why not?*
- *What about the low zone? Why?*
- *Let’s take a moment to look at something in our resource kit, think of a resource, or ground. Be aware of what happens inside.*
- *[If possible, show a picture of the human body showing the autonomic nervous system and/or the organs inside the body.] Scientists have discovered that when we are feeling unsafe or*

when we are stuck in our high or low zones for a long time, it is not healthy for our bodies.

- We get stressed, and our nervous systems release a lot of chemicals in our bodies that could make us sick if we're not careful.
- What are some things we need our nervous system to do? It's the part of the body inside that controls our inner organs, like our stomach, our heart, our lungs. It helps us digest things when we eat. It helps us sleep and rest. It even helps us grow our body to be bigger and stronger. It has to keep our heart beating and our lungs breathing and our blood flowing.
- It's the nervous system that does all these things. When we're in the resilient zone/OK zone, then it can do all these things just fine. It also protects us properly against germs, diseases, and illness.
- But when we're stuck in the high zone or low zone, our nervous system has a hard time doing these things. Instead, it gets ready for danger and it stops doing things we need to be doing to be healthy.
- That's okay if there's a real danger, and we need to run fast or do something quickly. But if there's no real danger, then it doesn't need to be ready like that.
- When we're stuck in the high or low zone, what do you think happens to our heart? To our breathing? To our ability to digest food? To our ability to rest?

- If we can't digest our food properly, or if we can't rest properly, or if we can't grow properly, then that's a problem, isn't it?
- If we are not in danger and our nervous system does not need to take action to keep us safer, in which zone would we want to be?
- Would we want to make someone else feel unsafe and bump somebody into their high zone or low zone? What might we do that could bump someone into the high zone or low zone? [Allow sharing.]
- What might we do that could help someone stay in the resilient zone/OK zone or get back into the resilient zone/OK zone if they were bumped out?" [Allow sharing.]

---

### REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 13+ minutes

#### Acting Out the Class Agreements with Tracking

##### Overview

In this practice, students will work together to create little skits. If you have the ability to do so, you can video record these skits and tell your class that you'll be making a short movie.

##### Content/Insights to be Explored

- Experiencing a lack of kindness can make us feel stressed and unsafe and knock us out of our resilient zone. Experiencing kindness can help us feel safe.
- Having less stress is healthy for our bodies.

- By being compassionate and respecting others, we can help others feel safer, happier and more healthy.

### Materials Required

- The chart of class agreements
- The chart of helping actions that were created in Chapter 1

### Instructions

- Using the class agreements and the helping actions they created in Chapter One, explain that they will create stories based on these agreements being followed or broken and then will act these stories out (and make a movie, if you have the ability to do so). When creating stories, be sure to use made-up names for characters that are not the actual names of students in your class. As before, it may work to have one student pretend to be in need and have one or two other students see that need and engage in helping actions.
- After a story has been created, ask for volunteers to act it out. Explain that when you say “Go!” they will start the story and everyone else will be quiet and watch. When you say “Slow!” they will slow down their actions and take a moment to notice sensations in their body (tracking). You might also first ask the observing students what they think the characters in the story might be sensing in their bodies, and which zone they might be in. When you say “Go!” again, the acting students will continue the story. When you say “The End!” they can stop acting out the story.

- After the scenario has been acted out, which may only take a minute, allow both those who volunteered, and then those who observed, to share what they saw and felt. Then ask the observers what helping actions they might have done had they been in the story.
- When this debrief is completed, have your students create another story if there is time

### Teaching Tips

You can repeat this reflective practice several times, each time emphasizing different class agreements or activities. You can also draw from actual scenarios that have happened in class, seeing how they relate to the class agreements and walking students through the scenario while having them pay attention to their sensations and prompting them to suggest what skills or actions could be helpful.

---

### DEBRIEF | 5 minutes

- *“What did you learn today about our class agreements?”*
- *How do our class agreements affect our bodies?*
- *Is happiness something we feel inside the body? How do we know that? What about compassion?*
- *Is there anything you think we should add to the class agreements after what we did today?*
- *Is there anything you learned or practiced about compassion that you might like to use again sometime?”*

## WRITING EXTENSION

We have learned that compassion can make us feel happy and safe. It is important that we receive compassion on an everyday basis and that we are being kind to others. When we are kind to others, it can help them feel safer. This makes it a bit easier for them to move into or stay in their resilient zones. Let's reflect in our journals about how we can help others feel safer. What actions can you try to do over the next week when you see a friend in need?

