Mindfulness, Wellness, and Social-Emotional Learning during the Pandemic

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Figure 2.7: Ranking of Happiness 2016-2018 (Part 1)

1. Finland (7.769)
2. Denmark (7.600)
3. Norway (7.554)
4. Iceland (7.494)
5. Netherlands (7.488)
6. Switzerland (7.480)
7. Sweden (7.343)
8. New Zealand (7.307)
9. Canada (7.278)
10. Austria (7.246)
11. Australia (7.228)
12. Costa Rica (7.167)
13. Israel (7.139)
14. Luxembourg (7.090)
15. United Kingdom (7.054)
16. Ireland (7.021)
17. Germany (6.985)
18. Belgium (6.923)
19. United States (6.892)
20. Czech Republic (6.852)
What COVID-19 Is Doing to Our Mental Health

- Americans are reporting significant and sustained increases in symptoms of depression and anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to recent data from Healthline and YouGov’s COVID-19 tracker.
- Women, minorities, people with preexisting health conditions, and adults under 34 all reported higher rates of fear and anxiety.
- The number of people reporting these symptoms are well above historical norms.
- Experts caution that spotting symptoms of mental health issues could be especially challenging given the current environment of stay-at-home orders and physical distancing.
What do we know about distress?

Negative outcomes of distress

- Body (sleep issues or fatigue, muscle tension, headaches)
- Mood (irritability, anxiety, lack of motivation, depression)
- Behavior (social withdrawal, outbursts, substance abuse)

(Mayo Clinic, 2018)
Musicians’ Psychological Concerns

Anxiety

Overwhelm

Self-doubt

Poor concentration

Distracted

Diaz, Silveira, Strand (2020)
Mindfulness

- Attention to the present moment
- Emphasizes openness and curiosity
- Awareness of thoughts and feelings
- Intentional and non-judgmental
Mindfulness Outcomes

• Decreased anxiety
• Better management of stress
• Reduced reactivity
• Improved sleep
• Reductions in implicit bias
• Increases in prosocial feelings and behaviors
Focus
Distraction
Noticing distraction
Letting go
Shifting back
Breathe it Down

• Sit or lay down in a comfortable position. Make sure body is fluid and flexible to allow for deep, unobstructed breathing.

• Take four to five measured breaths using the following pattern:
  • Exhale all the air out of your body
  • Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 counts
  • Hold your breath for 7 counts
  • Exhale for 8 counts
  • Repeat steps 2-4 three to four times

• After the exercise has been completed, spend 1-4 minutes attending to the sensations of your breath without interfering. If you get distracted, label your distraction and gently refocus on the sensations of your breath.
Mindful STOP

- **Stop** what you are doing.
- **Take** a few deep breaths.
- **Observe** your sensations, feelings, and thoughts with a sense of curiosity.
- **Proceed** with intention. Anchor your awareness in your body, assume a dignified presence, and bring to mind your goals and aspirations for the next moment.
Mindful Self-Compassion (Neff, 2003)

- Self-Kindness versus Self—Judgment
- Common Humanity versus Isolation
- Mindfulness versus Over-Identification
Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate as follows:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Almost Never</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-Occasionally</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-About half of the time</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-Fairly</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-Almost Always</td>
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Questions

1. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.

2. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don’t like.

3. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
Questions

4. When I’m feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.

5. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.

6. When I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
Questions

7. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.

8. When I fail at something that’s important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.

9. When I’m feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that’s wrong.
Questions

10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.

11. I’m disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies.

12. I’m intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don’t like.
Scoring Guide

Self-Kindness Items: 2, 6
Self-Judgment Items: 11, 12 (reverse score)
Common Humanity Items: 5, 10
Isolation Items: 4, 8 (Reverse Score)
Mindfulness Items: 3, 7
Over-identified Items: 1, 9

Final
1-2.5 indicates low self-compassion
2.5-3.5 indicates moderate
3.5-5.0 is an indication of high self-compassion
General Findings

- Increased self-compassion reduces fear of failure
- General reductions in depression and anxiety
- Some associations with pro-social behaviors
Pedagogical recommendations

USE SCALE OR OPEN DISCUSSION PROMPTS TO DISCUSSION FROM STUDENTS

USE A SHORTENED VERSION OF COMPASSION MEDITATION WITH STUDENTS, OR USE VISUAL PROMPTS IN CLASSROOM AS REMINDERS

MODEL SELF-COMPASSION WITH STUDENTS

IN LMS, ADD SELF-COMPASSION MEDITATIONS AND PROMPTS FOR QUESTIONS

CHECK OUT: HTTPS://SELF-COMPASSION.ORG/GUIDED-SELF-COMPASSION-MEDITATIONS-MP3-2/
Research (Emmons & McColough, 2003)

- More instances of exercise, less physical symptoms, better life experience, and more optimism among keepers of gratitude journals versus controls.
- Better goal attainment
- More pro-social behaviors
• Three writing groups: (a) gratitude letter with option of sharing, (b) journal about negative experiences, (c) nothing (control)

• Gratitude letters improved mental health for up to 12 weeks, but effects started showing up for most some weeks after

• Lack of “negative” words in measure correlated highest with mental health

• Gratitude letters predicted mental health even when not shared

• Increases of activity in the MPC (medial prefrontal cortex) for gratitude group when they actively generated “gratitude” situations. MPC associated with learning and decision making.
Pedagogical recommendations

• Gratitude wall in class or LMS
• Gratitude as part of class discussion or as class activity
• Gratitude letter to a friend in class
• Check out: https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/gratitude_letter
## Mindfulness and SEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASEL Competency</th>
<th>Mindfulness Support</th>
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<tr>
<td>Com 1: Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Noticing thoughts and stories</td>
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<td>Com 2: Self-Management</td>
<td>Body scan</td>
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<td>Com 3: Social Awareness</td>
<td>Body scan and mindful listening</td>
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<td>Com 4: Relationship skills</td>
<td>Mindful listening and intentional action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Com 5: Decision making</td>
<td>Perspective taking</td>
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There's no "should" or "should not" when it comes to having feelings. They're part of who we are and their origins are beyond our control. When we can believe that, we may find it easier to make constructive choices about what to do with those feelings.
- Fred Rogers "The World According to Mr. Rogers"