



Child Mind
Institute

Mental Health Fitness

Educator Resources

Middle School



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Middle School

Implementation Options

Option 1

Whole School or Grade-Level Assembly

This video series can be shown to large groups of students in one session. This option has the benefit of reaching many students at once with less of a time commitment. With this option, follow-up is essential since it is unlikely that students will fully absorb all skills in a single session, and the opportunity to process and practice skills one at a time is something that can hopefully be integrated in brief doses over the ensuing days/weeks. Here are a few suggestions for how to make this delivery option most effective:

A. Show all five videos in sequence over a period of approximately 45 minutes. Afterward, in individual classrooms, such as advisory or another designated time, educators can provide students with an opportunity to engage in reflective discussion.

- Possible Discussion Questions

“What resonated with you during the videos?”

“What do you already know about mental health?”

“Which skills do you think would be most helpful?”

“How can we practice them together?”

Additionally, to help facilitate discussion, educators can utilize the five skills sheets included at the conclusion of this Implementation Guide to help reinforce skills shown and provide an opportunity for reflection and practice of skills. For example:

Understanding Feelings skills sheet helps students monitor and track their emotions by labeling the feeling, rating the intensity, and describing physical sensations attached to the feeling.

Relaxation skills sheet helps students practice paced belly breathing and plan for when to use it.

Understanding Thoughts skills sheet helps students to be mindful of their thinking, recognize when it’s unhelpful, and practice alternative ways of thinking that can improve how they are feeling and what they will do.

Managing Intense Emotions skills sheet helps students utilize their five senses and create a self-soothe kit to help them tolerate intense emotions.

Mindfulness skills sheet provides students with different activities for practicing three core areas of mindfulness.

B. When showing the video series, educators can pause after each video to ask students to practice a skill or reflect on what they have just learned. For example:

- After watching **Understanding Feelings**, educators can ask students to label all the emotions they feel in that very moment and direct their awareness to where they are feeling these emotions in their body.
- After watching **Relaxation Skills**, educators can request that students take 30 seconds to practice paced belly breathing.
- After watching **Understanding Thoughts**, educators can lead students in identifying an unhelpful thought they may have had that day and what could have been an alternative thought or way of interpreting the situation.
- After watching **Managing Intense Emotions**, educators can help students reflect on how they already use their senses to self-soothe and what they might add to their self-soothe kit.
- After watching **Mindfulness**, educators can facilitate a 30-second mindfulness activity. For example, have students name five things they see, four things they hear, three things they feel, two things they smell, and one thing they taste.

Option 2

Delivery of the Curriculum in Smaller Groups Over Time

This video series can easily be viewed in individual advisories or classrooms, such as health classes. This option has the benefit of ensuring that students engage with the material and provides space for further discussion and practice. Here are a few suggestions for how to make this delivery option most effective:

A. Utilize one advisory section or class each day of a week to show one content area of the video series.

- With this option, students would be able to view and discuss the full video series in one week. After each video, educators would have the ability to facilitate discussion and utilize the skills sheet or suggestions for that video as a way of practicing skills learned.

B. Utilize one advisory or class to show one content area of the video series each week.

- With this option, students would be able to view and discuss the full video series in five weeks. After each video, educators would have the ability to facilitate discussion and utilize the skills sheet or suggestions for that video as a way of practicing skills learned. Educators would also be able to utilize the week in between new content videos to reinforce skill practice.

C. Utilize one advisory section or class to show one content area of the video series each month.

- With this option, students would be able to view and discuss the full video series over a period of five months. After each video, educators would have the ability to facilitate discussion and utilize the skills sheet or suggestions for that video as a way of practicing skills learned. This provides educators and students with the opportunity to deeply reflect on how to integrate the skill learned into daily or weekly practices over the full month. Schools can also create themes around the topic and fully integrate skills throughout the school day.

Option 3

Student-Guided Viewing With In-School Discussion

This video series can be assigned to students as an activity to complete outside of school, framed as a self-guided opportunity to interact and engage with the materials at students' own pace. The benefit of this option is that it does not require as much time during school hours, and some students may feel more comfortable engaging with the material at home.

Because video content is watched outside of school, students can utilize advisory or another designated class to engage in skills sheet practice and reflective discussion of the video content. Students can be assigned one content area per day, per week, or per month, with educators continuing to reinforce skills discussion, integration, and practice at school.

Classroom Integration Tips

The student-teacher relationship and climate of the school are paramount to students' mental health and wellness. This is especially important in middle school, a time of transition and when students start to explore questions about the future, their identity, and their relationships. Students thrive when educators provide a space where students feel comfortable, accepted, and validated. By practicing the skills in this curriculum together, we can make our communities healthier and more vibrant.

This guide provides helpful tips for reinforcing the content and skills from each video in your classrooms along with suggestions for continued implementation.

Understanding Feelings

Key Points

- All emotions are normal and important — they provide information about ourselves and help us connect with others.
- Students learn to label emotions, notice physical sensations, and rate intensity on a 1–10 scale.

Tips for Reinforcing

- Emotional validation: Listen, reflect back the emotion, connect. *“I hear you had a frustrating experience. That sounds difficult.”*
- Bring emotions into academic work — ask what characters or historical figures might be feeling.
- Model sharing your own feelings to normalize emotions for students.
- Use specific positive feedback when students name their emotions.

Relaxation Skills

Key Points

- Stress and anxiety produce uncomfortable physical sensations due to the fight, flight, or freeze response
- Paced belly breathing calms the body by rebalancing oxygen and carbon dioxide.

Tips for Reinforcing

- Practice paced belly breathing as a class before starting work — even one minute sets a calmer tone.
- Encourage practice when calm, not only in stressful moments.
- Post the breathing steps from the activity sheet somewhere visible in the classroom.
- Use specific positive feedback when you notice a student using paced breathing.

Understanding Thoughts

Key Points

- How we think impacts how we feel and what we do.
- Thoughts are not facts — they are temporary and can be changed with practice.

Tips for Reinforcing

- Use academics to highlight unhelpful thinking — discuss when characters engaged in distorted thinking.
- Reinforce awareness: *“What thoughts are you having?”* and *“How is that thought making you feel?”*
- Help challenge thoughts: *“What are the facts here?”* and *“Is this thought kind to you?”*
- Use positive feedback when students pause to reconsider a thought.

Managing Intense Emotions

Key Points

- Everyone experiences intense emotions and the urges that come with them. The intensity does not last forever.
- Students can ride out intense feelings using their five senses and grounding activities.

Tips for Reinforcing

- Validate emotions before trying to solve the problem.
- Provide space to calm down. Allow healthy coping like journaling or drawing.
- Model healthy strategies for riding out intense emotions when opportunities arise.
- Use positive feedback when students use healthy strategies.

Mindfulness

Key Points

- Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention on purpose to the present moment, without judgment.
- Three core skills: **Observe** (notice without words), **Describe** (name what you notice), **Participate** (engage fully).

Tips for Reinforcing

- Start class with one minute of mindfulness practice — five-senses observation, paced breathing, or mindful coloring.
- Protecting that one minute communicates to students that the practice matters.
- Recommend apps for guided practice.
- When it comes to mindfulness, everything taught has to be lived — model your own practice.

Middle School

Skills Sheets

Practicing these skills helps you to increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to improve your mental health and wellness.

Feelings Intensity and Body Response

Use this activity to help practice labeling feelings, rating their intensity, and identifying which body sensations you may feel with these emotions. First circle the ratings below to indicate how much you've experienced each feeling within the past week, with 0 being not at all and 10 being the most intense.

joyful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
anxious	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
frustrated	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
fearful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
depressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
calm	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
disgusted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
content	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
hopeful	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Joy

Sadness

Fear

Anger

Disgust

faster heart rate	sweaty palms	clenched teeth	nausea
tension in neck and shoulders	slower heart rate	steady breath	more energy
stomachache	furrowed brows	clenched fists	shaky
tightness in chest	headache	pursed lips	urge to run
weakened or shaky legs	reddened or hot cheeks	shallow or quickened breathing	heaviness

Follow-Up

When you rate your feelings, you're gathering data about your experiences over the past week. If there are emotions that you're hoping to feel more or less, the skills reviewed in the additional videos and worksheets of this curriculum will help. You can use worksheets like this one each week to track your progress and figure out how the skills might be affecting your feelings.

Paced Belly Breathing

Breathing deeply into your belly helps to tell your body that you are safe and calm. Follow the instructions below and practice paced belly breathing when you are feeling calm and when you are feeling stressed or anxious.



- 1 Sit comfortably in your chair or on the floor either cross-legged or on your shins.



- 2 Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest.



- 3 Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds and feel your belly expand.



- 4 Slowly breathe out for 5 seconds through your mouth, letting the air gently leave your body.



- 5 Repeat 3-5 times, or for as long as you want.

Use the space below to think about times to practice paced belly breathing:

Before going to bed

Before taking a big test

Before sports practice

In the morning at school

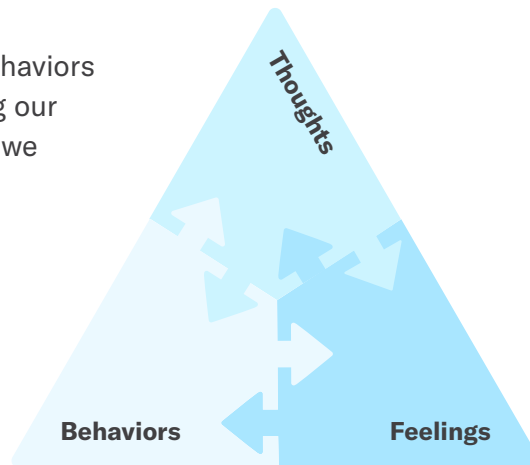
After getting into an argument with a friend

Outside, sitting down, and enjoying nature

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

Remember thoughts are not facts, and sometimes thoughts are unhelpful to us. One way of practicing understanding your thoughts is by keeping track of them when you notice uncomfortable feelings. Below is a thought log. Practice identifying what was happening at the time, what your thought was, how you felt, and what you did. If you notice that the thought was unhelpful, try to change it to a more realistic or helpful thought, and then see if that would change your feelings and behaviors.

Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are all connected. By changing our thoughts, we can change how we feel and how we behave.



Event	Unhelpful Thought	Feeling	Alternative/Helpful Thought

Here are some things you can ask yourself when trying to change your thoughts:

- What is the likelihood that this will happen?
- Is this realistic?
- What is the evidence that this is true?
- Is there another way I can think about this?

Follow-Up

When you notice how your thoughts are connected to how you feel, you're gathering data about yourself. If you notice that certain ways of thinking are not all that helpful or lead to uncomfortable feelings, remember that you have the power to slow down and consider when there might be other ways of thinking about the situation. The skills reviewed in the additional videos and worksheets of this curriculum can also help!

Self-Soothe Kit

You can use your five senses to self-soothe and help tolerate intense emotions. Use the guide below to create your own self-soothe kit.

You can carry this self-soothe kit with you so you always have what you need to tolerate intense feelings.

5 Senses	One thing that makes me calm and relaxed is:	Stumped on what to pick? Here are some suggestions:
See		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calming colors• A relaxing scene• Small picture of my favorite person, family member, athlete, or place to visit
Hear		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to rainstorm or ocean sounds• Recordings of funny jokes or comedians• Happy or soothing music
Smell		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good-smelling hand lotion• Small perfume bottle• A scented candle
Taste		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pieces of your favorite candy or other treat like gum or a mint
Touch		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Satin ribbon or soft fabric• A small pompom or pouf• A small feather• A stress ball• Slime

Mindfulness Skills & Activities

The more you practice mindfulness the more it will help your mental muscles to have better focus, attention, and awareness. Below are the skills of mindfulness to practice:

Observe

Describe

Participate Fully

You can choose from many activities below to practice the skills of mindfulness.

Counting
breaths

Paced belly
breathing

Listening to
music and paying
attention to one
instrument

Going for a walk
and naming what
you see

Mindfully
eating your
favorite food

Playing an
instrument

Journaling

Dancing