

Mindfulness: A Guide for Teachers

By Dr. Amy Saltzman

Practicing P.E.A.C.E. Participants begin by attending to the breath and the body, then move on to observing thoughts and emotions. This is a transformative process. When we are aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can choose our behavior, and choosing behavior is how we create our lives. For example, when a student is struggling with a math problem or confronted in the hallway s/he can pause, breathe and then respond to the situation. Below is guided practice to support older students in dealing with life's frequent challenges.

PEACE is an acronym for a practice that can be used in any difficult situation. Perhaps you can begin by practicing with small daily irritations. Those of you dealing with more extreme circumstances may need to repeat the practice many times a day, and you may also want to get additional help from a friend, a parent, a counselor, or a doctor. The practice goes like this.

P is for pause. When you become aware that things are difficult, pause.

E is for exhale. When you exhale you may want to let out a sigh, or a groan, or even weep. And after you exhale you want to...Inhale. Just keep breathing.

A is for acknowledge, accept, allow. As you continue to breathe, acknowledge the situation as it is. Your backpack with all your stuff is gone, your parents are getting divorced, your best friend is now dating the person who just became your ex... Acknowledging a situation doesn't mean you are happy about it. It just means that you recognize the situation is as it is, whether you like it or not.

C is for choose. When you are ready, and this may take a few moments, days, weeks or even months, choose how you will respond. At its best, responding involves some additional Cs.

- *Clarity: being clear about what you want, what your limits are, what you are responsible for.*
- *Courage: the courage to speak your truth, and to hear the truth of others.*
- *Compassion: compassion for yourself, for others, and for how incredibly difficult it sometimes is to be a human being, and*
- *Comedy: (Actually, I prefer the word humor, but it doesn't start with C.) It is amazing what a sense of humor and a willingness to not take ourselves too seriously can do.*

E is for engage. After you have paused, exhaled, allowed, and chosen your response, you are ready to engage with people, with the situation, with life.

Typically these practices are followed by a discussion or journaling:

What came up for you during the practice?

Are there situations in your life where this practice might be helpful?

Are you willing to practice PEACE when difficulties arise during this coming week