

GRATITUDE AND  
MINDFULNESS  
ACTIVITIES FOR THE  
CLASSROOM (SAMPLE)  
BY FITRAH DESIGNS



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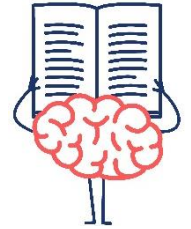
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# AIMS



- **PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS:** Gratitude techniques provide students with skills to increase calmness and solutions to practice in response to challenging situations.
- **ATTITUDE AND RESPONSE:** Gratitude helps to allow a positive response and a deeper awareness of student's emotions in positive and negative situations.
- **GRATITUDE:** Gratitude helps students to focus on the positive (and be aware of the negative) and help students to focus on positive approaches resulting in positive actions and behaviours.
- **SELF-AWARENESS:** Students' self-awareness deepens when enhanced by the mindfulness practices as it allows students to be in control on how they respond to their thoughts and feelings.
- **DECISION-MAKING:** Mindfulness increases cognitive flexibility and creativity, which gives students a wider range of responses to challenging situations, improving mental health and well-being.
- **SOCIAL AWARENESS:** Mindfulness increases students' empathy by helping them to regulate their emotions rather than get emotionally overwhelmed when faced with difficult situations.
- **SELF-MANAGEMENT:** Mindfulness increases students' emotional regulation skills, which enhances their ability to resolve conflict more creatively.
- **MINDFULNESS:** Mindfulness can help students become aware of the present moment (being non-judgmental), helping them to recognise and cope with signs of stress, anxiety and depression.

# INTRODUCTION



## THE BRAIN AND THE BODY

The human brain contains nerve cells (neurons) that receive electro-chemical impulses from everywhere in the body. They interpret these impulses and send responsive signals back to various glands and muscles. The brain functions continuously as a switchboard for the human communication systems as well as regulating emotions, mood memory, thought and personality.

There are four main areas in the brain:

- The cerebrum which controls memory, personality and conscious thought
- The cerebellum which controls balance and co-ordination of movement
- The medulla which controls heart rate and breathing rate
- The hypothalamus which is the regulating centre for temperature and water balance

This extends to other systems from the spinal cord to the skin, muscles and other organs in the body. CBT (Cognitive Based Therapy) works on the basis that the way we think and interpret life's events affects how we feel and, ultimately, how we behave. The theory is that problems arise from the meanings we give to events and unhelpful thoughts can make it difficult for us to function confidently in different situations.

One such system is the autonomic nervous system (ANS), it governs the actions of the muscles, glands and covers vital functions such as heart beat, salivation, digestion and breathing. The autonomic nervous system is divided into two parts (they help balance each other), the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system.

## SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM:

This has an excitatory effect on the body and like all animals, human beings have evolved ways to help us protect ourselves from danger. When we feel under threat our bodies react by releasing certain hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones (known as the fight, flight or freeze response):

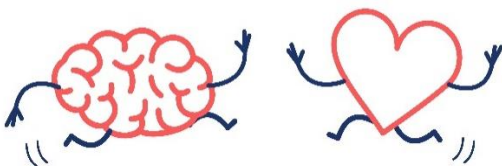
- Make us feel more alert, so we can act faster
- Pupils are dilated
- Activity of muscles of the intestinal wall is reduced
- Where it widens the airways to the lungs
- Make our hearts beat faster, quickly sending blood to where it's needed most.

## PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM:

This has an opposing effect to the sympathetic nervous system as it has a calming effect on the body and its systems. It depends on the neurotransmitters acetylcholine to transmit signals from one cell to the other which (known as the ease response):

- Make us feel more calm, so we can slow our thoughts, actions and response
- Pupils are constricted
- Activity of muscles of the intestinal wall is increased
- Where it narrows and constricts the airways to the lungs
- Make our hearts beat slower, reducing sending blood to other parts of the body (muscles).

A diagram of the body and the two systems has been provided in '[Session 5 - Positive affirmations and Alternative thinking](#)' of the lesson plans.





# GRATITUDE

Gratitude is a feeling of appreciation and being thankful for the good things that happen in your life. Research suggests that centralising experiences through writing and transcribing your thoughts (in a gratitude journal) is spiritually therapeutic, reduces stress, increases happiness and improves self-esteem. Recording our thoughts gives us an intimate insight into ourselves and allows us to translate appreciation from our thoughts into reality.

As we introduce this technique to our students we can start to familiarise this practice and cultivate positive mental well-being. This program involves each student having a gratitude journal so they can write and keep track of their thoughts and progress. Over time the practice will allow them to reflect and have a positive mind-set when dealing with intense moments in their life.

The journal is designed to help students savour what they appreciate as it will prompt them to write what makes them happy. It's an activity book created specially to cultivate mindfulness and appreciation in the student's life. In the journal they will find a mixture of inspirational quotes with writing prompts and mood emoji's to help enhance their positive mental wellbeing.

Below are some general statements that can help the students in their journal entries:

- Something beautiful I saw...
- The best part about today...
- Something I can be proud of...
- A fun experience I had...
- A valuable lesson I have learnt...
- An unexpected good thing that happened...
- An act of kindness I witnessed or received...

The journal can be used weekly at lesson time and over time it will allow the students to record and reflect on their progression and their own personal mental wellbeing.

# GRATITUDE LESSON PLANS



The lesson plans are designed to be tweaked if needed and are intended to last 45-60 minutes under the digression of the teacher.

## Session 1 | GRATITUDE MEDIATION (MINDFULNESS)

Mindfulness meditation encourages the students to observe wandering thoughts as they drift through the mind. The intention is not to get involved with the thoughts or to judge them, but simply to be aware of each mental note as it arises. Students can practice the Gratitude Meditation while sitting at their desks or while sitting cross-legged on a cushion on the floor.

### GOALS OF THE SESSION:

1. To establish an understanding of the term gratitude.
2. To establish group rules and rapport with students.
3. To get the students to relax and practice breathing techniques to help with gratitude

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Define gratitude.
2. Have students identify a personal experience with feeling grateful.

### MATERIALS:

1. White board.
2. Gratitude journals and pencils/ pens for students.

### ACTIVITY 1: (5-10 MINUTES) – GENERAL EXERCISE

1. Sit down comfortably
2. Close your eyes

3. Make no effort to control the breath; simply breathe naturally
4. Focus your attention on the breath and on how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. Notice the movement of your body as you breathe. Observe (feel) your chest, shoulders and stomach. Simply focus your attention on your breath without controlling its pace or intensity. If your mind wanders, return your focus back to your breath.
5. Maintaining this mindfulness awareness, take a moment to reflect on Gratitude. What are you truly thankful for?

Teacher's statements to help them attain and maintain the breathing mindful technique:

The teacher could be guiding the students by speaking to them and ensuring that they are doing the technique properly. Guidance statements include:

- "Notice what it feels like as your breath enters through your nose, goes down your throat, filling your lungs, and back out through your nose"
- "Notice your stomach and chest rise and fall with each inhale and exhale, and allow your breathing to be natural and relaxed"
- "Whenever you become distracted and your mind wanders, return your focus back to your breath".

## ACTIVITY 2: (10–15 MINUTES) – EXERCISE DISCUSSION

At this moment the teacher can discuss the previous activity (the topics raised are):

- What are you grateful for?
- How was the exercise for you?
- What did you find easy/ difficult?
- Were you able to focus on thoughts of gratitude?

## ACTIVITY 3: (10–15 MINUTES) – GRATITUDE JOURNALING

Have students write down 1-3 things they are grateful for in a journal.

The teacher will next hand out journals to the students. Students will be instructed that these will be their gratitude journals



Teacher: "I am handing out your own personal gratitude journals. I would like for you to please write your names on the journal and hold on to the journals until the next time that we meet. Please turn to the first page of your gratitude journals. On this page I would like for you to focus on the things in life or you thought about during the meditation that you are most thankful for. Think about it for a few minutes. Next I want you to jot down 1-3 that you are most thankful for."

Teacher prompts to help the students get started:

- Something beautiful I saw – A previous holiday perhaps.
- The best part about today - Think about things in your past, even your recent past, that you are grateful for.
- Something I can be proud of – Think of achievements and targets you have met.
- A fun experience I had - You can also think about your unique skills and talents, like your ability to sing, dance, draw or play sports.
- A valuable lesson I have learnt – Think about positive conversations you have had.
- An act of kindness I witness or received - Remember the teachers who have encouraged and taught you or who have inspired you to learn...
- Think about your relationships - Choose one person or multiple people in your life, and describe why you are grateful for them and how they make you feel.
- Think about the opportunities that are available to you. How might it feel if any of those things were taken away?

Teacher can end by stating:

"Now, it may be that you are not feeling so grateful right now, at this very moment. And that's OK. Just notice where you are, and continue to practice the techniques used to help you feel grateful".

This can be followed by a questions and answer session (5-10 minutes) under the discretion of the teacher.

10 minutes allowed (making an hour session) for setting up and extra time in case the activities run for longer than planned.

**END OF ACTIVITIES (MAX SESSION TIME IS 50-60 MINUTES).**

# OUTRO

THIS IS THE END OF THE PACKAGE.

ALL REFERENCES TO DEFINITIONS, ANATOMY,  
EXERCISES AND MEDICAL TERMS ARE AVAILABLE ON  
REQUEST AS INFORMATION IS CHECKED AND UPDATED  
ACCORDINGLY.

Disclaimer: Mindfulness can also be the cause of anxiety attacks and stress. As you try to meditate, your mind may start to concentrate on unconformable past experiences that can make you feel more anxious. Please refer to the school's health and safety procedures or first aid guide.

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