

Summer Wellness Challenge



Gratitude Meditation

Activity for Elementary School Students

After months of remaining Safer at Home, making adjustments to our normal daily life and planning for the start of the school year, now is a great time to practice gratitude and reflect on the many things in our life we can be thankful for.

Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness and joy we feel in response to something we've been given, whether the gift is tangible (concrete/physical) or intangible (something you cannot touch), such as a smile of encouragement from a loved one or a beautiful view of the beach.

Spending time reflecting on gratitude has physiological effects on the brain and body – when we think about something or someone we truly appreciate our bodies calm themselves, because the feelings associated with gratitude trigger the calming branch (parasympathetic system) of the autonomic nervous which tells the body to “rest and digest” and counteracts the “fight, flight, or freeze” response in the sympathetic system¹.

STEP 1: Prepare yourself and your space for meditation.

- Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit (on the floor, a chair, the couch, a bed, etc.) in your own personal space.
- Get all the wiggles and squirms out and when you are settled, rest your hands in your lap or on your thighs. If you are sitting in a chair, please plant both feet firmly on the floor.
- During this meditation, if your mind wanders that is normal and OK, just return to your breathing and refocus your attention on your breath.

STEP 2: Read the meditation script² (read slowly and pause where it feels natural for you).

Let your eyes close and settle into your space. Feel your breath as your belly rises and falls. Take two deep inhales through your nose and gently release your breath. Sometimes we forget all the things in our lives that we can be grateful for. It's like the rock at the top of a pyramid that isn't aware of all the rocks below it is sitting on. For you to be here, the sun must keep rising every day to give life to the plants that we need to breathe and eat. There are so many people we don't even think of who clean the streets we walk on, drive the food to the store where we buy it, and build the building we live in. Feel your breath as your belly rises and falls. Take two more deep inhales through your nose and gently release your breath.

Once you feel calm, picture the person in your life who makes you feel the happiest. Picture that person in your head, and then imagine they are sitting right next to you. Silently ask yourself, how does it feel to have them so close? Now picture your favorite food and imagine it sitting right in front of you. Silently, picture the colors and the smells and pay attention to what your body feels like. Keep thinking of your favorite things and people in your life. Think of the things you are most grateful for. When you picture them, notice your body feels. Take a deep breath and let all the things you are grateful for go, and simply notice what your body feels like after practicing gratitude.

¹ The MindUP Curriculum. Brain-Focused Strategies for Learning-and Living. Scholastic, 2011. Pages: 126- 151.

² Rechtschaffen, Daniel. The Way of Mindful Education: Cultivating Well-Being in Teachers and Students. W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.

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Slowly refocus your attention back to the room by wiggling your toes and fingers. Slowly reach your arms above your head and take a stretch as you gently open your eyes.

STEP 3: Gratitude drawing.

Now that you have reflected on what you are grateful for, complete the [gratitude drawing](#).

- **Take time to draw something you are grateful for:** Take a deep breath and think about something you are grateful for by asking yourself – what makes me happy? Maybe this is a family member, a pet, an object, or a special day. Draw one of the things you are grateful for in the box labeled “I am grateful for...”.
- **Take time to draw something that makes you feel special:** Remind yourself, “You are enough! You are wonderful and gifted, equally important and you matter.” Silently think about what makes you feel special today. Maybe it is making someone laugh or smile, something nice someone else did for you or said about you, something you are good at, something fun/cool/unique you can do, or something you do for others. Now draw what makes you feel special in the box labeled, “I am enough...”
- **Take time to draw how you feel when someone makes you feel loved:** Think about someone in your life who loves you and how they make you feel. Draw a picture of someone who loves you in the box labeled “I am loved...”.
- **Identify Acts of Kindness:** Think about people who love you and list what you can do for the people in your life to make them feel loved.

STEP 4: Gratitude discussion as a family.

Meditation Questions:

- How do you feel after thinking about all your favorite things? What does your body feel like?
- Who did you picture as your favorite person? How did you feel when you were imagining they were sitting next to you?
- What was your favorite food? How did thinking about it make you feel?
- Did you think of a happy memory you want to share?

Drawing Questions:

- What did you draw in the boxes?
- How did it feel to think about what made you feel special and enough?
- How did it feel when you thought about those who love you?
- What did you identify as acts of kindness?

Want to continue practicing gratitude and mindfulness?

[MindUP](#) is an evidence-based program grounded in neuroscience, mindful awareness, positive psychology and social-emotional learning. You can access all school-based, booster lessons, videos and additional mindfulness resources visit bchd.org/mindup.