

3 Activities to Practice Modeling SEL



About this Resource

Supporting students' social-emotional learning (SEL) starts with adults. The three activities in this resource kit are designed to help adults practice modeling the same SEL skills they seek to promote in students. These activities are easy to implement in any staff meeting and can help adults understand and develop critical SEL skills such as emotion regulation, social awareness, and self-management.

What's Inside

Activity #1: Practice the Hard Stuff	3
Activity #2: Mindfulness Practice	6
Activity #3: Rose, Bud, Thorn	9

Activity #1: Practice the Hard Stuff

Related SEL Skills: Sense of Belonging, Social Awareness, Self-Management

About this Activity:

“Practice the Hard Stuff” is a method that helps adult educators prepare to handle challenging moments in the classroom by practicing how they would respond in challenging scenarios, like those reflected on above.

Role-play is a common training method among military branches, emergency response groups, and companies where quick decision-making is highly valued.

Principal Thabiti Brown of Codman Academy in Dorchester, MA speaks about the strategy with his staff in [this video](#).



Connect:

Reflect on the current state for your school or district. What opportunities do adults currently have to practice their response to disrespect or behavioral escalations?

Reflect:

Think back to the start of your career as an educator. Now, bring to mind a difficult moment or interaction you had with a student that you later wished you could correct. Often, these memories are sticky in our memory because of how they challenge us emotionally.

What memory comes to mind?	How did you respond?	What would you do differently today?

Discuss:

What memory came to mind? What would you do differently today? Why?

How To Run This Activity:

1. As pre-work or a warm-up activity, have staff share an example of a challenging interaction or an escalation they have recently faced in their practice.
 2. Choose three scenarios that will serve as the content for the role-play exercise.
 3. Ask staff to count off and form small groups of three participants. Ask participants to take on the roles in the table below. You might use cards or a physical reminder for participants to understand each role.
 4. Ask participants to take turns acting out a scenario, with each participant playing each role at least once.
 5. Ask participants to debrief the exercise as a whole group, elevating successes and challenges they faced.
-

Roles:

Adult:

In this role, the participant will practice responding to the challenging behavior.

Student:

In this role, the participant will play the role of a student exhibiting the challenging behavior.

Observer:

In this role, the participant will record low-inference observations and prepare to present them to the group during the debrief.

Sample Scenario:

- *Students are engaged in a math lesson, and you are getting ready to model a strategy for solving a word problem with the whole group before students practice the strategy in pairs. You ask for student volunteers to read the word problem aloud to the class, and a student who rarely speaks in the front of the class volunteers himself to read.*
- *The student begins reading the word problem aloud, and mispronounces a word. Another student in the front of the room laughs at the mistake, mocking the mispronunciation and correcting the student aloud in front of the entire class. A few others students laugh along.*
- *The student who volunteered to read is visibly upset, and some students have begun chatting.*
- *How do you respond?*

Notes:

Observations	Wonderings / Takeaways

Discuss:

Pluses: What went well during the role play?

Deltas: What were the areas for improvement?

Meta: Would staff benefit from this exercise? Why or why not?

Meta: How might this exercise be used with students?

Activity #2: Mindfulness Practice

Related SEL Skills: Emotion Regulation, Self-Management

About this Activity:

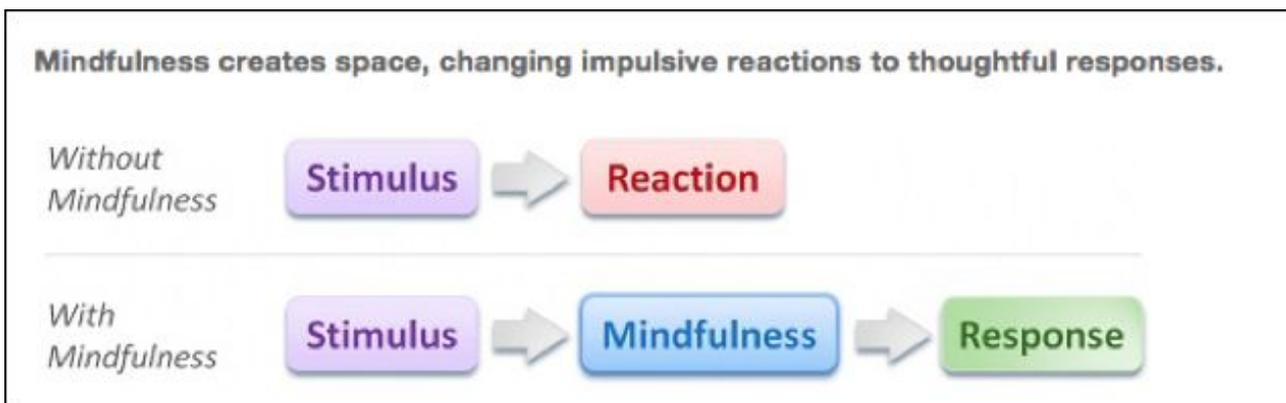
This facilitator-led activity introduces adults to the practice of mindfulness. It consists of three minutes of mindfulness, followed by a share-out in partners or as a whole group. This activity is a great way to kick off staff meetings.

What is mindfulness?

- **Attention:** Listening, watching, or considering what naturally exists (e.g., directing and sustaining attention on a selected object, such as the sound of a chime or the sensation of the one's breathing)
- **Intention:** Purposefully increasing awareness of experience
- **Presence:** Being in the moment, here and now
- **Openness:** Being curious, objective, and non-judgmental about experience (e.g., simply observing, without an explicit focus on particular objects; noticing thoughts, emotions, and physical states).

Did you know?

Different mindfulness practices can activate different mechanisms. For example, sustained attention may enhance executive function, while sensory experiences of breathing may reduce stress.



Discuss:

Many students, especially students approaching or in adolescence, may have learned responses to stimuli (reactions) that are deeply ingrained coping mechanisms. Have you encountered this in your practice, or leveraged mindfulness to rewire those responses in your work with students?

How To Run This Activity:

This short mindfulness exercise is designed to simulate a three-minute meditation. The facilitator will lead the group through the below script in a calm and relaxed manner. After the exercise, use the questions below to discuss the experience either in pairs or a whole group.

Facilitator Script:

“We’re going to try a brief, 3-minute practice that includes some basic elements of mindfulness, such as posture, body relaxation and awareness, and breathing. If you do not wish to participate, you are free to observe or simply relax for these few minutes. Also remember that there is really no such thing as being good or bad at mindfulness; the goal is just to be open to whatever experience you have. To begin, adjust your posture so that your back is straight if possible; not leaning forward and not putting too much weight on the back of the chair. See that your head is straight, facing directly forward; and have your feet squarely on the floor.

At this point, if you feel comfortable doing so, you can close your eyes; if not, just relax your gaze onto the floor in front of you. Relax your hands onto your lap, folding your right hand inside the left, or relax them onto your thighs; whichever you prefer; and relax your legs so that they aren’t straining.

See if you’re holding tension in your face: relax your forehead and brow; relax your jaw, and the inside of your mouth; see that you’re not clenching your teeth. Now, relax any tension in your shoulders; as if they were heavy. Now bring your attention to your entire abdomen, letting your belly relax. Check to see that your back is still straight.

*Now direct your attention to your chest; your breathing. Notice that when you breathe, your lungs expand... and contract. Don’t try to change anything; just observe your breathing. For the next five or six breath cycles, try to focus deeply just on your breath, just as it is... And if you get distracted by your thoughts: no problem; simply bring your attention back to your breath (*longer pause*).*

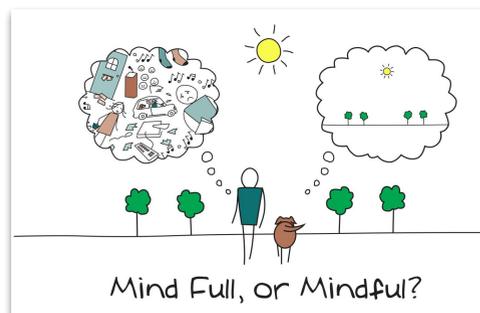
When you’re ready, gently open your eyes and come back to the room.”

Attribution: [Transforming Education](#)

Available in Panorama’s [Playbook](#)

Discuss:

- What was that like for you?
- What did you notice?
- Was it difficult? Easy?



Bonus Resources:

1. [Download](#) Transforming Education’s Mindfulness Toolkit.
2. Select a strategy to deep dive into, choosing from: Start With Yourself, The Practice of Presence, Establishing Mindful Posture, or A Mindful Break Area.
3. Plan to implement that strategy in your district or school using the planner below.

Planner:

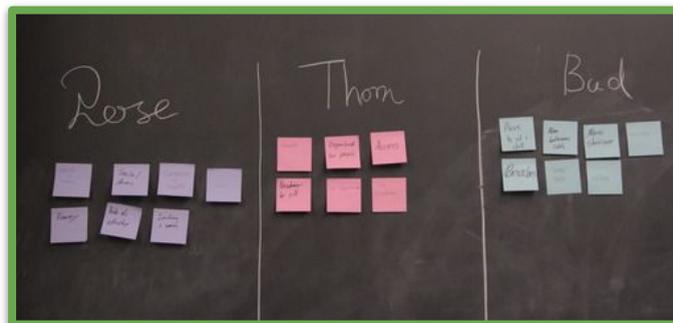
What is the name of the strategy you learned about today?	Relevant links or resources:
How will this strategy help you and your students make progress in the focus area you selected?	
Teacher-level outcomes:	Student-level outcomes:
What are the procedural steps you’ll need to take to implement this strategy?	
Steps:	Relevant resources or materials:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 	

Activity #3: Rose, Bud, Thorn

Related SEL Skills: Social Awareness, Grit, Sense of Belonging, Emotion Regulation

About this Activity:

“Rose, Bud, Thorn” is a protocol that prompts participants to describe their emotions, promoting empathy, social awareness, and gratitude. Participants share a “Rose” (something positive in their lives), a “Bud” (something they are looking forward to), and a “Thorn” (something they feel they need support or help with).



To promote grit, participants can also share their thinking around how to turn “Thorns” into “Buds.”

How to Run This Activity:

1. Prompt adults to reflect on a “Rose,” “Bud,” and “Thorn” for either the day so far, the last week, or the month.
2. Ask adults to jot down their reflections and prepare to share their answers with the group.
3. Have participants “turn and talk” in small groups, or share out to the whole group, in a whip-around style.
4. Optional Debrief: Discuss ideas for implementing this strategy in the classroom to promote students’ social-emotional learning.

Rose <i>Something positive, or worthy of celebration.</i>	Bud <i>Something you’re looking forward to.</i>	Thorn <i>Something you might need help with.</i>
<i>What would need to be true to turn your thorn into a rose?</i>		

Debrief:

First in small discussion groups, and then as a larger group, participants will debrief:

- In which classes or spaces within your school can you embed Rose, Bud, Thorn?
- How would you go about training teachers and other instructional staff on facilitating the strategy?
- How does this strategy relate to your district or school's social-emotional learning focus?

Ideas for Implementing This Strategy with Students:

“Rose, Bud, Thorn” can integrate seamlessly into academic instruction. Students might complete a “Rose, Bud, Thorn” as a bell ringer or exit ticket to foster metacognition about their own learning process.

This protocol is also a great conversation starter in 1-1 interactions with students. For example, while a middle schooler might respond “Good” to a standard “How are you?,” asking them to identify their highs, lows, and in-betweens might engender a more authentic reflection. Finally, through the lens of restorative practice, “Rose, Bud, Thorn” is an excellent prompt for classroom and community circles.

Your Notes:

- ___ Students reflect and share in pairs or groups of three
- ___ Student journals filled with blank Rose, Bud, Thorn templates
- ___ Whole-class reflection (potentially content related)
- ___ 1-on-1, teacher-to-student (replacing the standard “*How’s it going?*”)
- ___ _____
- ___ _____