



## Creating a Culture for Success

### Educator Series: 4.3 Mindfulness, Self-Reflection, and Gratitude

Hello. My name is Lindsey Jannaman, and I am the Director of SEL content here at QuaverEd. Today, we will be practicing exercises for mindfulness, self-reflection, and gratitude. Our objectives for today's session are to practice mindfulness and self-reflection as avenues of self-care and express gratitude toward ourselves and others. Part of our session today will include some mindfulness activities. Mindfulness is being aware of the present moment through bringing attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them.

Before we begin, let's create some community agreements for our time together. Community agreements invite us to consider how we'd like to learn during this time. You are invited to feel what is happening in your body in the present moment. And if that doesn't feel okay, you do not have to do it. When we learn to focus on what is happening right now, we become more self-aware and in-tune with our surroundings. I invite you to listen to what your body is telling you and make decisions that support your overall well-being. Make sure your body is positioned in a way that is comfortable to you during this time. Whether you are very familiar with mindfulness or not, I invite you to welcome new experiences in our time together.

Let's begin our session by doing a grounding exercise together. Grounding helps us become present in the here and now, pulling our focus away from our busy thoughts. This activity will help us draw our attention to our breaths, focusing on slow, steady inhales and exhales. This exercise is called star breathing and can be done using a graphic like this one [*presenter points at the star on the slide*] or simply using your hand.

To begin, get in a comfortable seated position. Extend one hand in front of you, palm outward and fingers spread apart, and imagine your hand is a star. Looking at your star hand, place the pointer finger of your opposite hand at the outside base of the thumb of your star hand. As you inhale through your nose, trace the outline of your thumb with the opposite pointer finger until you reach the tip of your thumb. Next, exhale through your mouth as if blowing through a straw as you trace from the tip of your thumb to the valley between your thumb and pointer finger. Repeat this as you trace each finger, inhaling to fingertips and exhaling to spaces between fingers. Trace all the way to your pinky and then all the way back to your thumb so that your opposite pointer finger ends in its original place. If closing your eyes feels comfortable at any point during this activity, I invite you to do so. Let's take some time to do this exercise at our own pace.

As you finish this exercise, I invite you to check in with yourself.

- **How does your body feel in this moment?**
- **What emotions are you experiencing?**
- **If busy thoughts entered your mind while doing this exercise, did you allow them to stay, or were you able to draw your focus back to your breath?**

This is a great mindfulness activity to do in any setting, and it's such a helpful way to focus on your breath and slow your body and mind.

Let's do one more mindfulness activity together. You can take a mini mental vacation in any setting. Start by getting in a comfortable seated position. I invite you to lengthen your spine and take a few deep breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Next, if it feels comfortable for you to do so, I invite you to close your eyes. Picture a place that feels safe, happy, or relaxing. This could be a real or fictional place.

As you notice your surroundings in your vacation place, consider the following if these senses are available to you:

- **What are five things you can see around you?**
- **What are four things you can hear?**
- **What are three things you can touch?**
- **What are two things you can smell?**
- **What is one thing you can taste?**

Now, think of one sentence that describes where you are in this moment. Take a deep breath in. Exhale and say that sentence to yourself.

Both star breathing and mini mental vacation are great mindfulness activities to do in any setting. You don't need any materials to do them except for your imagination. The next time you feel stressed or overwhelmed, take a moment to practice star breathing or take a mini mental vacation. These can be helpful exercises to try with your students as well.

Now that we've taken time to connect to the present moment, I invite you to explore weather-related words to describe what you are experiencing internally. This type of self-reflection is called our internal weather report. Perhaps you feel a mixture of different weather—partly sunny and partly cloudy—or maybe it's just one weather report. Can you explore what it's like to observe and accept whatever your weather is? Gently take a deep breath in through your nose and exhale through your mouth. This internal weather report can be used throughout your day to assess how you're feeling and what you need in the present moment.

Mindfulness and self-reflection can be valuable practices to alleviate stress personally and professionally. A growing body of evidence shows that regularly practicing gratitude can also improve educators' well-being. In a 2018 study, researchers concluded that regularly practicing gratitude not only improved educators' well-being, it also helped them remain calm during stressful situations.

I invite you to participate in a daily gratitude reflection. Please find some note-taking materials and write down "I am grateful for \_\_\_\_\_" three times. This reflection could include the following:

- **Personal strengths and skills**
- **Relationships**
- **Knowledge and**
- **Events and activities**

Spend a moment at the beginning or end of each day writing down—or quietly thinking about—three things for which you are grateful. This activity can lower stress and increase your gratitude for your own gifts as well as those of others.

In this session, we've explored activities to practice mindfulness, self-reflection, and gratitude. Each activity is designed to help boost your self-care practice on a regular basis. Think back over the activities we've practiced today. Which activity or activities might be the most beneficial to incorporate into your own daily habits?

Thank you so much for taking part in this session. We invite you to continue learning with us and hope you will find meaningful takeaways to inform your teaching and your self-care. Take care and stay well.