



Mediterranean Association of International Schools
Professional Development & Community for Educators



Thrive On Purpose: Teaching Special Needs Kids the *Other* Essential Skills for Success

Website: www.debbiesilver.com
FB: www.facebook.com/drdebbiesilver
Twitter: @DrDebbieSilver

speaker • author • humorist

People-Smart And Self-Smart Skills (PASS Traits)

Self Smart

Self-regulation and impulsivity

Self-regulation (also called *executive function*) is a key component to the ability to control one's impulses. Pre-K and first grade teachers report that helping students develop this competency is a key goal in their classrooms. It is also a critical competency for older students in terms of helping them create intentional, mindful behaviors.

Self-efficacy

Educators play an important role in helping students define their self-efficacy both from an emotional and an intellectual perspective. Grounded in the research of Albert Bandura, this important trait helps students develop realistic assurances about their abilities and what they can control.

Perseverance

Learning to sustain their efforts in the face of setbacks is a trait that can be taught and reinforced by teachers. High performers, struggling learners, and everyone in between can benefit from developing the tenacity to stick with a goal.

Resilience and Optimism

The ability to "bounce back" from setbacks and failure is fundamental to a healthy sense of self. Dr. Carol Dweck's research on mindsets yields a plethora of data on how mindsets can affect resiliency. Dr. Martin Seligman's work on positive psychology parallels the correlation between resiliency and optimism. Both frames of mind can and should be taught to learners no matter what their status, their experiential background, or their situational environments.

Responsibility and Integrity

In a democracy, teaching students to become responsible citizens is one of the main goals of education. Truthfulness, selflessness, courage, accountability and stewardship are character traits schools desire to encourage in students. Integrity, of course, is when students manifest responsibility even when no one else is looking.

Mindfulness and Reflection

Though not new the concept of mindfulness has attracted recent attention mainly because it has been embraced by the science community as way to not only pause and control emotions, but also to affect the hardwiring of the brain in a positive way. Teachers can help students learn to pause, think, act, and reflect in a more purposeful way with training that will serve them for life.

People Smart

Collaboration and Cooperation

Businesses today tell schools they want students who know how to think and know how to get along with others. Collaboration and cooperation techniques vary from young learners to older learners. Classrooms that intentionally incorporate collaboration and cooperation among students show greater gains in both cognitive and affective learning.

Communication

Cognitively students must learn to be effective readers and writers, but communication is also essential to social and emotional learning. Students need to learn how to express themselves so that they can accurately convey their feelings and thoughts to others. They also need to know how to fully hear what another person is trying to tell them.

Empathy

Probably no other aspect of social learning is as important today as teaching students to empathize with each other and with those outside their circles. A vital component of anti-bullying strategies, this character trait is also the foundation for good cooperative, collaborative, and communication skills.

Gratitude

While gratitude can be aligned with the *self smart* skills, it also has the power to rejuvenate and strengthen relationships. Learning about and practicing gratitude has been proven to impact both the receiver and the recipient in a positive way. Studies show that the mere act of expressing sincere gratitude increases happiness for the giver.

Common Attributes



Once participants are arranged in groups, ask one member to be the recorder and write down each individual's name. A group leader should help the members discover 10 (hopefully unusual) common attributes. At the end of the ice breaker, one person from each group will introduce each group member and read their group's top 5 common attributes.

List each group members' name:

List your most unusual common attributes (they must be true and they must apply to ALL members of the group). When you are finished, put *stars* by your 5 favorite ones.

Eleven Proven Ways to Get Along Better With EVERYONE

1. Before you say anything to anyone, ask yourself 3 things:
 - a. Is it true?
 - b. Is it kind?
 - c. Is it necessary?
2. Make promises sparingly and keep them faithfully.
3. Never miss the opportunity to compliment or say something encouraging to someone.
4. Refuse to talk negatively about others; don't gossip and don't listen to gossip.
5. Have a forgiving view of people. Believe that most people are doing the best they can.
6. Keep an open mind; discuss, but don't argue (it is possible to disagree without being disagreeable.)
7. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing or saying anything that could make matters worse.
8. Let your virtues speak for themselves.
9. If someone criticizes you, see if there is any TRUTH to what is being said; if so, make changes. If there is no truth to the criticism, ignore it and live so that no one will believe the negative remark.
10. Cultivate your sense of humor; laughter is the shortest distance between two people.
11. Do not seek so much to be consoled, as to console; do not seek so much to be understood, as to understand; do not seek so much to be loved as to love.

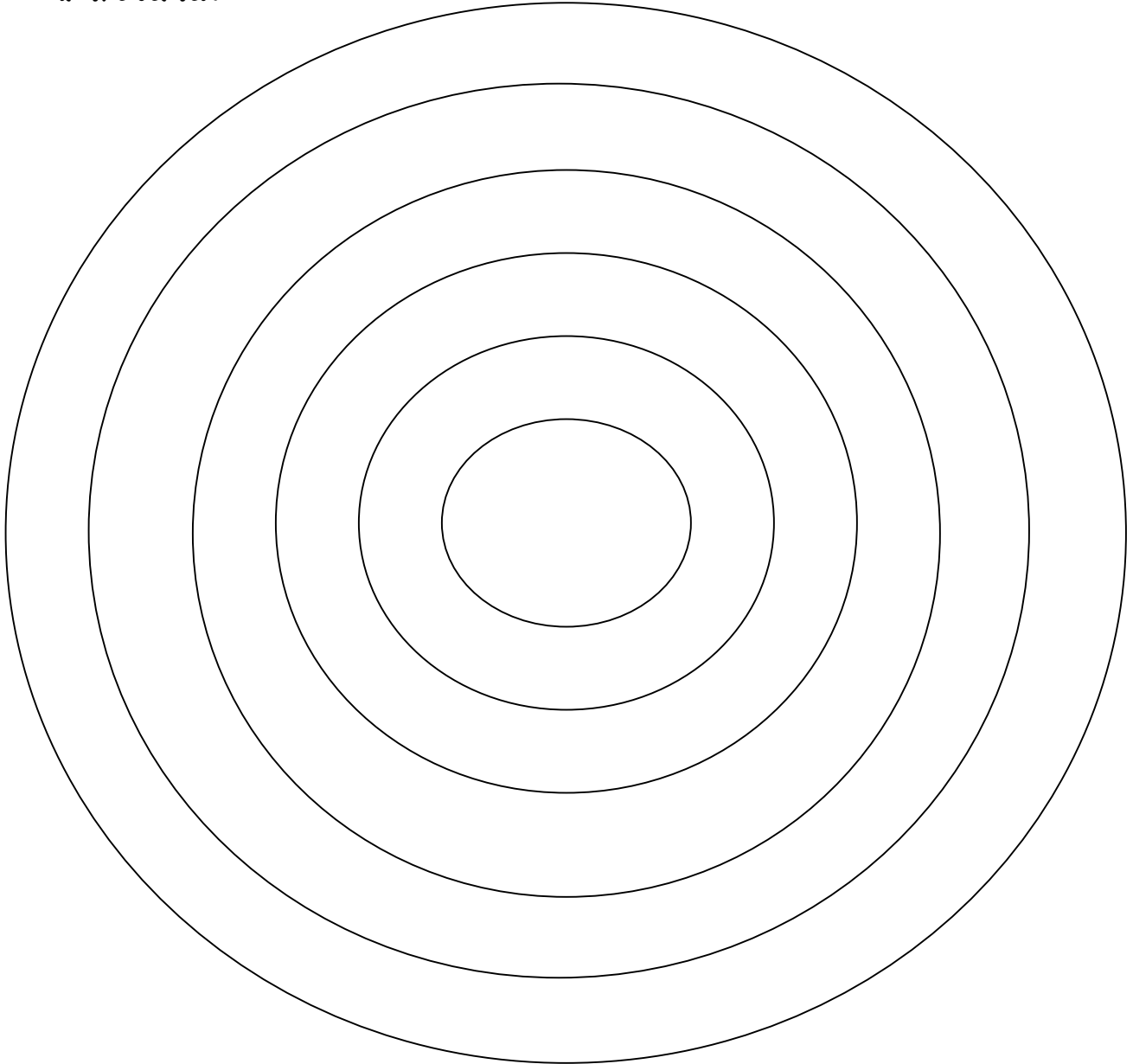
■ *author unknown*



This is an exercise in rethinking or reframing perceptions about a person. Select a person who needs affirmation or a person about whom you have ambivalent or negative feelings.

My Favorite Things About You

Put the identified person's name in the center circle. In each surrounding circle put words or phrases that describe your favorite things about that person. The most important factors should be placed closest to the name in the center.



STRENGTH WORD LIST

romantic
busy
kind
artistic
careful
convincing
friendly
gentle
loyal
distinctive
perfectionist
exact
tenacious
tenacious
ambitious
outgoing
steadfast
poised
strong
considerate
fulfilled
manager
open-minded
talented
witty
systematic
trustworthy
foresight
empathetic
cheerful
energetic
daring
coordinated

investing
strong-willed
motivated
understanding
disciplined
self-reliant
persistent
neat
caring
thinker
clever
self-determined
well-informed
creative
orderly
individualistic
searching
appreciative
fair-minded
respected
flexible
likes new ideas
forceful
predictable
intelligent
encouraging
imaginative
pursuing
compassionate
motivating
disciplined
risk taker
loyal

serene
organizer
tactful
committed
spontaneous
commanding
tolerant
goal-directed
progressive
sharp
capable
certain
looked up to
dedicated
courageous
consistent
honorable
productive
determined
planner
efficient
cooperative
dependable
comforting
sociable
serious
adaptable
forgiving
visionary
artistic
sharing
courageous
fun loving

prudent
confident
tireless
industrious
thoughtful
expressive
settled
persuasive
affectionate
graceful
reliable
leader
growing
eager
active
influential
giving
original
thrifty
unselfish
self-aware
self-directed
adjusted
inquiring
practical
unique
precise
listener
humorous
athletic
caring
patient
perceptive

SPIRITUAL STRENGTHS
MENTAL STRENGTHS

PHYSICAL STRENGTHS
EMOTIONAL STRENGTHS

The Essential Elements of Emotional Intelligence

- **Knowing one's emotions**
- **Managing emotions**
- **Motivating oneself**
- **Recognizing emotions in others**
- **Handling relationships**

If you view the Universe as a dangerous place, you will draw violence into your life. You will be AGAINST other people, and your life will be about survival.

If you view the Universe as a safe place, you will draw harmony into your life. You will be FOR other people, and your life will be about contributions.



From the Heart

Materials:

Stuffed animal or plush heart cushion

Set-up:

Participants should be seated in a circle. The leader should also be in the circle.

Purpose:

The purpose of this activity is to facilitate communication among students, staff, and others who need to work together. Participants communicate their own feelings and listen to the feelings of others. Cooperation is reinforced through the sharing of individual feelings and the practice of listening skills.

Procedure:

The leader sits with students in a circle (either on the floor or in chairs). One at a time participants share their feelings or ideas on a topic while holding the stuffed animal. When the student is finished, he passes the stuffed animal on to the next person. This continues until everyone has had the opportunity to share. The leader also shares but is careful not to dominate the activity.

Subjects:

Generally it is best to start students with "safe" subjects such as: . . .

- I like it when . . .
- My favorite thing to do is . . .
- My favorite quality in a person is . . .
- I am happy when . . .

Subjects of more depth can be explored once participants build trust among one another and become more comfortable with the activity.

Ground Rules:

1. Only the participant with the stuffed animal may talk. Everyone else actively listens and supports the person who is speaking.
2. A participant ALWAYS has the right to pass and give the animal to the next person.
3. Anything shared in this activity is PRIVATE!!! Participants should be aware that nothing communicated during "From The Heart" can be told outside the group. Everything must be held in confidence.
4. No one participant should monopolize the activity. Students should be that everyone gets a turn.
5. Participants should talk only about what they feel, not about how others in the group feel.
6. The stuffed animal should be handled and passed gently.
7. The leader should also share.

Additional Information:

"From the Heart" is a safe, simple way of sharing feelings. It is effective with ALL students whether shy or demanding of attention. Teachers who use "From the Heart" report that students exhibit:

- calmness and less anxiety
- more overall participation and productivity



"From the Heart" is an activity that can be used to help students through difficult situations, such as:

- death of a class pet
- accident or death of a student or staff member
- a fight
- a team loss
- an embarrassing moment
- a theft
- a disappointment



.....

9 Skill-Building Apps for Social-Emotional Learning in Special Education

by Jayne, Clare, Special Education Teacher, Educational App Curator.

Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/social-emotional-apps-special-ed-jayne-clare>

Several apps can be used in the classroom or at home to assist in reinforcing social and emotional learning while also helping kids cope with the pressures that we all face. These apps can help teachers and parents in addressing students with special needs, and many are also available in a web format.

- **Breathe, Think, Do** (Sesame Street) teaches children to keep calm and carry on by introducing three possible strategies for working through problems. It touches on familiar emotional challenges such as problem solving, self-control, planning, and time on task. Intended for very young children, this simple app gives players different scenarios in which the Blue Monster character needs to regulate his or her emotions using the breathe-think-do technique.
- **Touch and Learn -- Emotions** (Innovative Mobile Apps) is chock full of wonderful photographs representing four different feelings per page. The child is prompted to match the verbal cue with the appropriate photo. This app focuses on helping kids read body language and understand emotions by looking at pictures and figuring out which person is expressing a given emotion.
- **Avokiddo Emotions** provides opportunities for younger children to explore a wide range of feelings through several silly characters and a plethora of props. This app incorporates activities to help children understand the subtle cause and effect of facial expressions. The main idea is exposing young children to a variety of feelings and helping them grasp emotional connections with those feelings.

- **Emotionary** (Funny Feelings) is designed to give a wide age range of kids the tools and skills to express themselves well in our world of emoticons. The app has become a popular resource for the special needs population. This collection of emotions and funny feelings now allows users to draw their own emotionary "selfie" to match how they are feeling.
- **GoNoodle** is a wonderful web-based way to get younger kids out of their seats and moving. These short physical activities provide brain breaks that can help keep them focused throughout a long day. Studies have shown that physical activity increases blood flow, which increases concentration and attentiveness. This enhances students' ability to acquire and recall information. These activities make them cross the mid-line of the body, engaging both sides of the brain. GoNoodle provides teachers with fun, interactive ways to get kids moving and feeling good about themselves.
- **IF... The Emotional IQ Game** (If You Can) promotes teamwork and collaboration, accentuating how to be in touch with our own feelings and the feelings of those around us. With this app, kids (recommended ages 9-11) learn to listen, make friends, and deal with bullying in an adventure story/game format. IF's motto: "Play Learn Grow: Succeed at school with friends in life!" This pretty much says it all.
- The **Middle School Confidential** series is a powerhouse of SEL lessons by tween/teen expert Annie Fox. The book/app series for ages 8-14 is a graphic novel sequence focused on making stepping-stones out of stumbling blocks on the road to becoming a teenager. Readers follow the adventures of a group of seventh-grade friends trying to navigate the ever-changing drama of their friendships, families, and school. Excellent resource!
- **Stop, Breathe & Think** (Tools for Peace) promotes mindfulness, meditation, and compassion for middle and high school students and adults. Research has shown that people can develop kindness and compassion by focusing on them through mindfulness and meditation practices. You can cultivate your frame of mind in a very short timespan with simple meditation.
- I would be remiss if I didn't include the **The Social Express** in this collection of apps. Its quality content keeps students engaged and on the path to mastering healthy social and emotional skills. Research-based webisodes give kids the exposure necessary to develop meaningful relationships and become more socially competent in all realms of life. This program covers the gamut from preschool through high school with a robust SEL curriculum.

The Puzzle of Tech Use

Most students with or without disabilities can and do benefit from SEL-focused technology in the classroom. Incorporating these tech tools should increase student

incentive to learn through individualized lessons, especially when tailored to a student's specific needs. When done well, tech not only reinforces key SEL skills that children need to learn, but it can also drive student enthusiasm and promote self-assurance.

Looking at Mindfulness from a Beginner's Perspective

Debbie Silver, Ed.D.

"Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."

Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD. (founding Director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.)

As a middle school teacher one of my favorite activities was from the Project Learning Tree program, which employs the outdoors to enhance learning experiences. In a forested area behind our school I asked the students to find separate trees that appealed to them, sit quietly for 10 minutes, and just think about what it would be like to be that tree. They then sketched the tree and wrote a paragraph or poem to express their thoughts. During that exercise it was not unusual to find students with tears in their eyes or to be told by various participants, "I really need to talk to you later about something that has been bothering me." Their writings were deeper and more meaningful than any prior assignment, often giving me a glimpse into their inner thoughts and struggles. Generally their treatment of one another seemed markedly improved for at least a little while. I remember wondering if there were something magical about being outside and being with nature. As Richard Louv points out in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, there seems to be an ever-widening gap between modern kids and the natural world, so perhaps it was the novelty of being outdoors that brought on the profound results.

Today I believe it was more than just being outside. In light of the plethora of emerging research on executive brain functioning, self-regulation, and self-efficacy I reflect on that particular activity as one that offered my students an atypical chance to just be still and listen to their own thoughts. Whereas most of my classroom time was centered around group experiences, hands-on activities, and a rather frenzied pace to "get it all done" in their 47-minute class period, the tree observation activity allowed them time to disconnect from our fast-paced classroom with all its distractions and demands and literally "hear themselves think." Without consciously doing it I gave students an opportunity to be mindful.

I am intrigued by this past decade's close examination of how important it is for learners to be not only allocated quiet time to think deeply, but also to be taught the specific steps for becoming aware of one's thoughts and directing them in a purposeful way. The concept of *mindfulness* is gaining recognition not only in the fields of neuroscience and psychology, but also with educators and parents as a way to help learners grow and control their brains in a particular way. Mindfulness is way of learning to be fully present in the moment without being distracted by past anxiety or future uncertainties. It is a way to calm the emotional center of the brain through non-judgmental and non-reactive awareness.

Mindfulness is not new. Generally it is acknowledged as being based on age-old practices from the time of the Buddha, but some scholars also believe that similar practices were advocated as well in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim teachings. It is based on religious practices, however most of today's researchers and practitioners are focused on the more secular applications of its short-term effect on self-regulation and its long-term impact on the neuroplasticity of the brain. Yoga, Tai Chi, and Csikszentmihalyi's theory of *flow* are based on

some of the same tenets of focused attention. Mindfulness as taught in schools usually focuses on concentrating, breathing, and making conscious choices. There has been some pushback from religious organizations and parents who object to mindfulness being taught in their schools. Their apprehension generally comes from a misunderstanding of its purpose and a lack of knowledge about the overwhelming positive results mindfulness programs are bringing about.

Studies demonstrate that the benefits of mindfulness include better focus and concentration, increased self-awareness, stronger impulse control and feelings of calm, reduced aggression and violent behavior, stress, and loneliness, and increased empathy and understanding of others. Retrieved from: <http://www.roomtobreathefilm.com/about-mindfulness/index.html>
A survey of recent journal articles reveals that studies on the benefits of mindfulness are rapidly increasing in the several fields including psychology, medicine, and education.

While trying to learn more about mindfulness I watched the movie *Room to Breathe* about troubled students at Marina Middle School in San Francisco, CA (PBS World Channel, 2013). The film presents a true story of the surprising transformation of struggling seventh graders in a school that has a high rate of disciplinary suspensions, overcrowded classrooms, and a markedly negative learning environment. One classroom of students is introduced to the practice of mindfulness meditation in an effort to provide them with social, emotional, and attentional skills they need to succeed. A teacher from the Mindful School organization persists in introducing them to mindfulness in spite of their initial resistance and markedly unenthusiastic response. She meets with the students for thirty minutes a week over a six-week period. Her first goal is to get students to become still and quiet when they hear a chime. Even that simple task seems to be at first unachievable for some. By the end of the program she has the students applying the breathing techniques they learn in class to situations both inside and outside the school. At the end of the training these same students report they are better able to control their anger, more focused on schoolwork, more tolerant of each other, and feel more in control of their futures.

Similar results are being reported from mindfulness programs all over the world. Dr. Ronald D. Siegel, psychologist and Harvard professor, wrote a book for the Great Courses series entitled *The Science of Mindfulness: A Research-Based Path to Well-Being*. In this curriculum he cites study after study of hard science that supports the benefits to individuals (including children) who are being taught the practice of learning to pause and reflect before acting. He and other researchers have found that mindfulness practice over time actually changes the way the brain is formed. His catch line is, "Neurons that fire together, wire together." In other words, people can actually help their prefrontal cortex to function more effectively over time with intentional practice of mindfulness.

While listening to the audio presentation of Dr. Siegel's course I thought about how few instances I practiced mindfulness as a classroom teacher. The fact that the tree observation stands out so clearly in memory is evidence of how unique that was in my general practice. As a result of my recent research, I immediately began trying to get mindful in my present life, but I found it is not that easy. Mindfulness takes much practice and a commitment to slow down. The irony of trying to write about mindfulness is that one probably needs to be functional in it to be effective in expressing its merits. I will confess that I am a neophyte, and I have many hours of practice ahead of me before I feel comfortable in teaching it to anyone else.

As my middle school students sat quietly focused on a tree they were able to become still enough to experience feelings they had been holding just beneath the surface. They needed a trusted adult to hear their concerns. And although I felt comfortable helping them work through their new insights, I did not recognize the opportunity I had to extend this purposeful, meaningful kind of experience to a regular occurrence. Students are often hyper-stimulated and hyper-connected for most of their waking hours. The simple act of pausing to connect with one's thoughts in a focused, nonjudgmental setting can yield remarkable feelings of awareness and control. Simply being able to label feelings and realize one has a conscious choice about whether or not to act on those feelings is empowering.

Even though I am a novice to mindfulness, I am persuaded by the abundance of hard evidence from the scientific community about the benefits of learning to stop, breathe, and be aware of the world around me. The anecdotal evidence from student interviews, teacher reports, films, and the like is also convincing. I have always believed in being fully present when I am with students, and mindfulness seems to be a way I can get better at that. Hopefully schools will also embrace this relatively cost-free means of helping teachers and students develop positive, life-changing ways to think, to relate to each other, and to act in ways that help them thrive.

List of References

Thrive On Purpose: Teaching Special Needs Kids the Other Essential Skills for Success Dr. Debbie Silver

Kabat-Zinn, J.(1994). *Wherever you go, there you are*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books.

Louv, R.(2008). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.

Mindful Schools. [http://www.mindfulschools.org/about/our-story/Room to Breathe](http://www.mindfulschools.org/about/our-story/Room%20to%20Breathe).(2013). Documentary Drama. ZAP Zoetrope Aubry Productions.

Siegel, R.D.(2014). *The science of mindfulness: A research-based path to well-being*. Chantilly, VA: The Great Courses.

Silver, D. (2005). *Drumming to the Beat of Different Marchers*. Nashville: Incentive Publications.

Silver, D.; Berckemeyer, J.; Baenen, J. (2014). *Deliberate Optimism: Reclaiming the Joy in Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.