

It's Not Always About Me

Objective: Acts of generosity and kindness toward others re-balance the mind and cultivate a positive, powerful sense of well-being. We'll revisit "neuroplasticity"- the ability to rewire our brains through choices of attention - "What fires together, wires together."

Preparation

- Pass out index cards, post-its or pieces of paper to students. They will use these later to write notes of encouragement.
- Students will pair with someone they don't know very well, set up chairs accordingly.
- Have some definitions handy for the words: "Altruism," "Martyr," and "Sacrifice."
- Have a timer, watch or stopwatch ready.

Facts

- What we pay attention to become habit.
- Withholding love/help creates shame and increases levels of the stress hormone cortisol.
- People who are altruistic are happier.
- A review of 40 studies showed being of service to others improves overall life satisfaction and increases longevity.

Discussion (10 minutes)

1. *Introduce the lesson topic, Facts section and objectives.*
2. *To students:* Think about a specific time when you gave a gift or helped somebody, not because you were asked to, but just because you wanted to. How did you feel afterward? Did you smile? Were you excited to do it? Did you want to do something like that again? What happened to your thoughts about yourself when you were focused on helping somebody else?
3. How was this experience different from when you did something out of a sense of obligation, or because an adult commanded you do it?
4. Have you noticed that when we're feeling down, most of our thoughts are about ourselves? I know that I have! (*Adults share form their experience?*) Have you ever felt like your thoughts were in a rut? Like you'd like to "change the channel" but couldn't? This is really common for all of us! When we're down, most of our thinking is about us.
5. Take a moment to remember when you were in a rut with negative thinking all about yourself. Now imagine you see someone (could be a friend, someone you know or a stranger) struggling with carrying a bunch of packages, trying to get through a door. Imagine you go over and pick up a couple of the packages that have fallen to the ground, and you prop the door open for the person. They smile at you with real gratitude and say, "Thank you!" How do you feel now? Where are your thoughts?
6. Take time to discuss and allow students to share stories from their lives.

Exercise (10 minutes)

1. Pair off with another person in the room who you may not know very well, yet. Please don't pick a close friend for this exercise. *(An adult can pair with a student if there's an odd number)* **Important Note:** for this exercise there's no "cross-talk" or "fixing" allowed. This is just about listening and sharing, for now. The listener just listens silently.
2. You'll each spend two minutes sharing with the other person. Pick a topic about something you wish you had more help or support with. It could be about a current problem you wish to resolve, or something that happened in the recent past. When sharing, **please pick a topic that you are completely comfortable sharing** with the other person. *(Facilitator sets a timer and rings the bell at the beginning and end of each turn, with a short pause in between for the listener and talker to thank each other.)*
3. After both interviews are over, please stay in silence. Each of you will have an opportunity to write a short note of encouragement or thanks to your partner. It's ok to share something about how you felt about what they shared, but make sure to keep the focus on them, what they shared, and what you imagine it would be helpful for them to hear/read. Try to write from the heart. Take about two minutes to write. *(Facilitator sets a timer and rings the bell at the end.)*
4. OK, pens down. Now let's take one more mindful moment to sit back, take our mindful posture, and just reflect on this experience. How was it for you? What feelings did you have while sharing? While listening? While writing? How are you feeling now... What are your thoughts like? *(After about a minute the facilitator rings the bell to end.)*
5. *If both partners agree, their problems and notes can be shared with the group. Sharing personal information is **always optional**.*
6. Some questions to ask: Did focusing on your partner's issues take you away from your own problems? Did it get you out of your own head for a while? How might being able to focus on helping others "re-wire your brain? *Discuss and share feedback.*

Lesson Extensions (if time):

1. Write "random notes of kindness" on post-it notes for your loved ones, friends, teachers or even just for strangers! These notes could include positive sayings and compliments, or even little drawings. Secretly (anonymously) relived them or leave them on random lockers at school. Next time we meet, let's share how this went!
2. Find a way, as a group, to come together and help another group/person in need. Consider volunteering time or fundraising for a charitable cause.