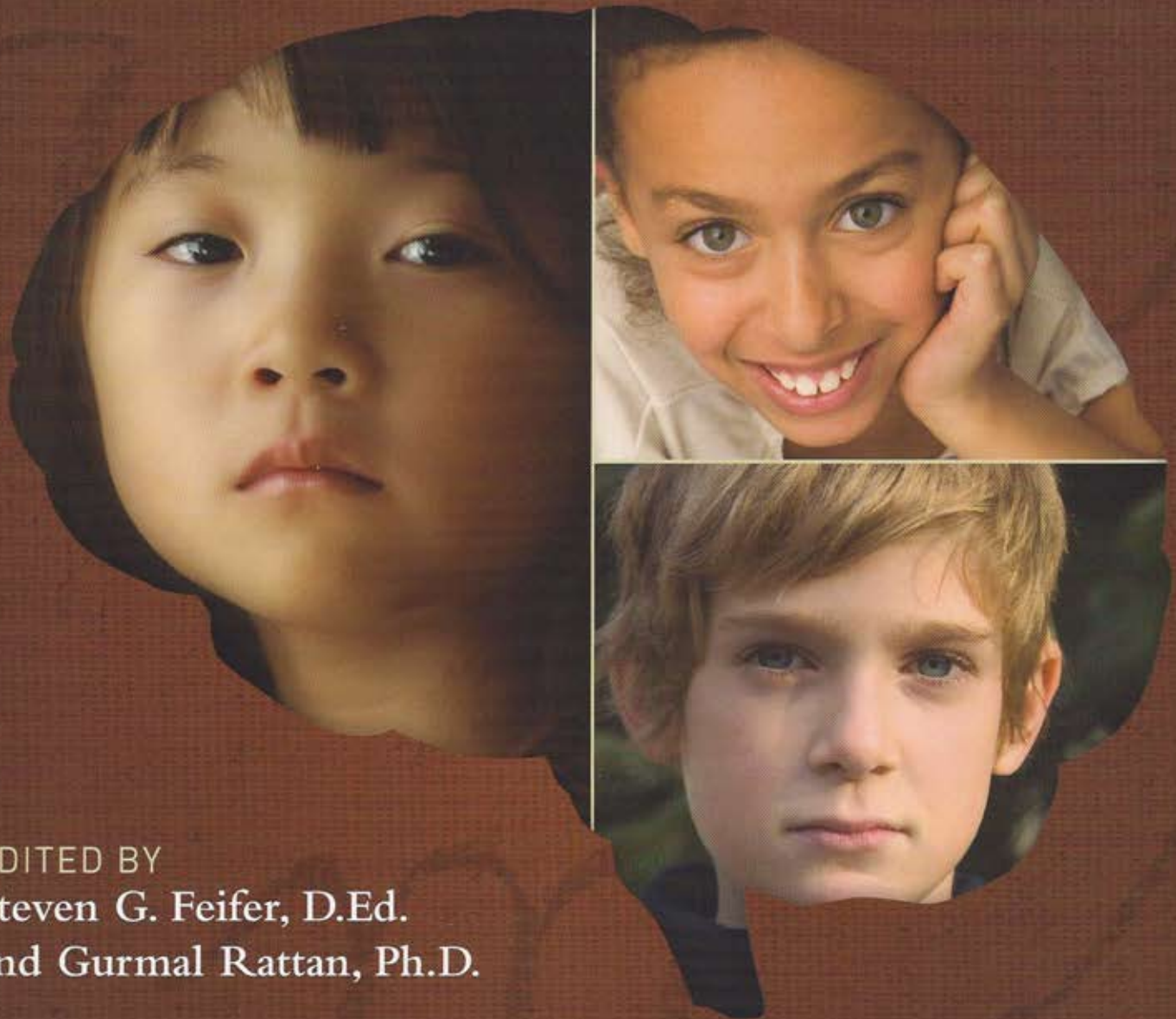


Emotional Disorders:

A Neuropsychological,
Psychopharmacological,
and Educational Perspective



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CHAPTER 11

MINDFUL DISCIPLINE FOR DISTRESSED LEARNERS

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“Teachers not only must coerce and cajole students to learn; they must also be mature enough to deal with the emotional messiness implicit in working so closely with young people.”

—David Labaree, Professor of Education, Stanford University

Steven, a ninth grader pushes into the classroom and slams his books on the desktop where the previous occupant has left a pen. Suddenly, the pen explodes and goopy ink spreads everywhere. Steven immediately reacts with a verbal arsenal of expletives as his peers and classmates begin to laugh. Feeling embarrassed and socially threatened, Steven's *flight or fight* response takes over and he instinctively lashes out at his closest classmate in a physical manner. Acting swiftly and decisively, his teacher orders Steven to leave the room, and then spends the next few minutes feverishly writing a referral.

Sally, a third grader, dashes off the school bus and makes a run to be first in line. She's in full speed, intently concentrating with her eye trained on her desired goal. Suddenly, another child bursts to the head of the line at the moment Sally arrives. Sally responds by shoving the girl out of her way. The line monitor orders Sally to the office, where the principal decides to suspend her for the rest of the day. Once the weight of the consequences looms over Sally, she reflects upon her actions and realizes she should never put her hands on another student. However, in the heat of the moment, Sally has such difficulty controlling her emotions when her desired goal is so close to fruition.

Tommy, a middle-school student, has adopted a new persona to carve out his rightful place among his peers. He is determined to become a malcontent, disobey rules, and essentially become bad to

the bone, only Tommy is unable to play this role fully. His half-hearted attempts to become unruly and wield a false sense of bravado are easily exposed by his peers, who see through his phony demeanor and simply laugh at him. However, to his teachers, Tommy's disruptive behavior is becoming more and more problematic in the classroom. Beneath the surface, Tommy presents as an angry, confused, and somewhat emotionally challenged student whose edginess has impacted both his academic and social skill development.

What Do These 3 Students Have in Common?

Most school psychologists have frequently encountered a Steven, Sally, or Tommy as these types of behaviors are often quickly referred to school support teams for further assessment. Each student may be diagnosed with a host of neurological issues such as disruptive, behavioral or mood disorders like ADHD, ODD, OCD, Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety, Depression, or PTSD. Regardless of the label, these students share an underlying issue. They are distressed learners. As such, they are naturally prone to being emotionally distraught, difficult to manage in a class setting, and quickly driven to reaction. These students misbehave, miss social cues, and draw wrong conclusions. Fearful, anxious and defensive, they often react with emotional volatility, anger, and unusual displays of aggression. In the face of such behavior, it may be hard to read their emotional sub-story. Clearly, each of these students requires a teacher or building administrator who can respond to their behavioral outburst with "grace under pressure". Unfortunately, emotionally messy students have a way of pushing the inner switches and emotional boundaries of the very persons who want to assist them most. Therefore, when the situation calls for a cool, calm, collected, response, teachers may find that they, too, have been driven to an emotional reaction that subsequently fuels the situation even more.

Many classroom management interventions often focus on the by-products of the emotional messiness—the obvious behavior disruptions that occur in the school or home setting. This chapter is about *managing* distress—the precursor to emotional messiness or disturbance. It focuses on prevention and intervention techniques that calm and quiet distress—theirs, yours, and that of other learners. Simply put, parents and educators need to understand why certain techniques are needed to diffuse certain types of behavioral situations for distressed learner. These techniques are essential, and once there is an understanding of how they work, hopefully most educators will use them to complement solid classroom management and practice. Hence, this chapter will focus upon a 3-step holistic approach known as "*Mindful Discipline*." This approach draws upon research in the fields of social psychology, neuroscience, behavior, and mindfulness to foster stress reduction.

Mindfulness Defined as a Classroom Management Practice

Mindfulness is the practice of becoming intentionally aware of our own internal thoughts and actions, and not necessarily the thoughts and actions of others. Only by developing and enhancing our own self-awareness can human beings illuminate what beliefs or experiences might be shaping our thoughts, feelings, and ultimately our behavioral responses. This intentional awareness relies upon the power of observation. The purpose of observation is bidirectional, as it allows us to look for causes of our own internal responses, as well as the external behaviors from others that trigger these self-same responses. Therefore, rather than focusing on the behavior and its emotional ramifications, the focus takes a more objective and rational turn toward analysis and understanding. Soon, our understanding replaces judgment with evaluation. Evaluation leads to seeing more facets of a problem and generating thoughtful, responsive possibility. (Langer, 1989)

Through mindfulness, teachers are able to disengage from the emotional messiness being played

out before their eyes. This cognitive disengagement allows teachers to observe the behavior from a different perspective, and thus attend to the student's messiness using a reasoned, problem-solving approach. In other words, there is an opportunity that presents itself each time a student misbehaves. This opportunity allows teachers a window of insight to "see" behavior in an objective fashion, without pre-judging or superimposing stereotypical names such as "*bad kid, trouble maker, wise guy, etc.*" Table 11-1 is a simple three-part technique that should assist teachers in curbing self-serving judgments about students. After all, the goal of all educators is not to label students, but rather educate them academically as well as socially on their emotional journey through school.

TABLE 11-1
Three-Step Technique to Curb Emotional Judgments

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1. **Observe:** What about the situation or the context is contributing to the maladaptive behavior?
 2. **Empathize:** How would you or others act in similar situation given the emotional sub-story.
 3. **Search:** Look for "*hidden*" clues or unseen factors that explain what's driving the behavior. Always seek to answer this question: "**What is the student working for?**"
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Learned Reactive Patterns and Self-Defeating Behaviors

The techniques of "*observe, empathize, and search*" have the added benefit of not fueling an emotional fire, and therefore allow to teachers to sidestep the drama of learned reactive patterns such as those demonstrated by distressed students such as Tommy. Most disruptive students often mask their true feelings with many behavioral disguises, which often erupt from the stress and strains of previous interpersonal experiences. These students develop a repertoire of behaviors that psychiatrist Robert Brooks (2007) categorizes as *self-defeating*. According to Brooks (2007), common self-defeating behaviors include quitting, avoiding, clowning, controlling, bullying, and denying. Brooks (2007) labeled these behaviors as self-defeating because they represent feeble attempts on the part of the student to protect and defend against a perceived threat, real or imagined, in the hopes of achieving a goal such as gaining attention, power, or control (Center for Collaborative Practice, 2001). For some educators, volitional behavior aimed at disrupting the learning environment simply represents a lack of moral character. Consequently, the notion of self-defeating behavior being nothing more than an attempt to mask more painful emotions may be hard to accept. Nevertheless, the class clown may be laughing on the outside yet crying on the inside because their antics are not producing the desired goal, namely, approval and a sense of belonging. When teachers begin to understand the emotional sub-story driving inappropriate behavior, they are more likely to act mindfully instead of mindlessly. Table 11-2 depicts the differences between mindful and mindless behavior.

TABLE 11-2
Mindful Versus Mindless Behavior Patterns

Mindful—to be aware and attentive	Mindless—to sense and react
Mindful—to observe and respond	Mindless—to judge and condemn
Mindful—to act with intention	Mindless—to act out of desperation
Mindful—to solve problems	Mindless—to stir or create problems

The Biology of Stress, Threat, and Distress

Our brains are a system of networks, systems, and subsystems. Though we sometimes refer to our “emotional” selves and our “thinking” selves, in actuality the neural systems that govern emotion and thought are highly interactive. Still, at the present time in human evolution, connections from the emotional system to the cognitive system are much stronger for children than those connections traveling from the cognitive centers in our brain back toward the emotional centers. Despite our advanced cognitions, human behaviors remain first and foremost a survival species. For instance, part of human consciousness is always on alert, and always appraising incoming stimuli for any harmful potential. Often times, there is a natural tendency to react with lightning speed in a flight or fight manner when our survival appears threatened (Sapolsky, 1998). In addition, human beings also react to psychosocial, emotional, and mental stressors in the same neurobiological manner as physical threats, by making a quick appraisal of the stimuli with respect to its detrimental effects on our emotional psyche (LeDoux, 1996)

According to the preeminent neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux (1996), an emotional stimulus presents itself through one or more sensory pathways; visual, auditory, olfactory, or somatic as the incoming stimuli travels toward the thalamus. The thalamus receives all incoming stimuli from the outside world, with the exception of smell, and then relays the information for further processing to the prefrontal cortex. Housed in the anterior regions of the brain, the prefrontal cortex is associated with both cognitive and emotional executive functioning skills including thinking, planning, problem solving, reflecting, and evaluating. The prefrontal cortex allows us to “think” about what we are sensing, and ascribe some emotional value to the stimuli. The thalamus also serves to relay information from the prefrontal cortex to the amygdala, which is the brain’s early warning threat detector, via an emotional pathway referred to as the “high road” (LeDoux, 1996). The *high road* allows us to respond in a more rational and cerebral fashion by intellectualizing a perceived threat, as opposed to allowing unbridled passion and aggression to subvert our behavioral responses in a reflexive fashion.

The signal the thalamus sends to the amygdala that is independent of the prefrontal cortex, travels along what LeDoux (1996) referred to as a quick and dirty processing pathway or “the low road.” The amygdala, which lies deep within the limbic structures of our brain in the temporal lobes, is our brain’s rapid fire, emotional appraisal threat detector. It signals the body to order up an array of neurochemical ingredients in case it senses a perceived threat or danger requiring us to fight, flee, or freeze. This “low road” pathway allows us to react instantaneously if need be, and is not dependent upon the prefrontal cortex to take action. The key word here is react. Reaction is driven by the brain’s limbic system and has important evolutionary significance, especially when hesitation might result in a disaster (LeDoux, 1996)

Whether to respond in a cerebral manner or react in a reflexive manner has much to do with how the brain perceives the stimuli. For example, a 10-year-old boy is swimming in a Florida river, and there is something floating nearby. Immediately, there is an elevation in respiration and breathing patterns, and the boy's body activates adrenaline in response to a perceived threat. There is no more enjoyment, but rather just intense focus and concentration to determine the closest exit from the water. This bodily response and change in psychological thought patterns occurs because of the confusion surrounding a particular visual stimulus within a contextual situation; namely, is this a log or an alligator floating in the water? If circumstances allow some time to pause, then chances are the executive network in the prefrontal cortex will make a reasoned assessment of the situation. If the object in question is determined to be just a log floating nearby, the boy becomes engaged in an internal and private monologue: *"Hold up. That's not an alligator, silly! No need to scream for help! Go ahead. Enjoy yourself. Finish your exercise. Keep swimming."*

The overarching design of the brain is indeed very useful. Of course, there are times when it can become extremely difficult to recognize the difference between a log and an alligator. Similarly, in a classroom learning environment, it can also be extremely difficult to interpret a perceived threat when there is none. That's where the emotional messiness comes in. The more emotionally taxed a child becomes, the more likely the child will react emotionally, instead of responding in a rational manner. If a child is over-stressed, tired, not feeling well, or has an underlying neurological condition, the chances of a reaction tend to increase (LeDoux, 2008). Clearly, our day to day experiences also color our judgment. For instance, suppose the 10-year-old boy had previously come dangerously close to an alligator while swimming. It stands to reason that each time the child swims in a river, the emotional memories of the previous danger will no doubt flood into the child's psyche to cloud further judgments and perceptions.

For emotionally distressed learners, certain school environments, tasks, or social encounters can cast shadows from earlier traumatic experiences to the present day. Most teachers will be unaware of these earlier experiences that trigger the behavioral reactions for each learner. To further compound the process, the limbic system is geared to identify patterns of stimuli, and does not necessarily distinguish between past or present tense. (VanDerKolk, 2006) Consequently, many students often find themselves in reaction, as opposed to reflection, with little clue as to what led them there.

The Neural Short Circuit—the Angry, the Aggressive, the Anxious

As previously stated, reaction has an evolutionary advantage to immediately ward off an impending threat. These behaviors are highly adaptive and appropriate depending upon the context. Nevertheless, unless there is clear and present danger, it is crucial for children to activate cortical regions that override emotionally driven reactions in order to facilitate emotional control and order emotionally appropriate behavioral responses. In other words, children need to think before they act.

Herein lies the problem for distressed or emotionally messy students. The behavioral trend is for these students to be *low road* processors, and subsequently become vulnerable to emotional triggers. Unfortunately, these students often react in a maladaptive manner during situations that call for a more tempered response. Thus, their behavior is often inappropriate for the context, and their reactions tend to be volatile. In the face of a frothing student, it may be especially hard for teachers to read the fear and anxiety that is fueling an aggressive or anger-driven reaction. Clearly, such

thoughtful response would be better. Thus, not only are certain students low road processors, but there are also many educators who respond to these behaviors in a similar (low road) fashion as well. Many ineffective classroom management practices such as yelling, threatening, or even ridiculing tend to occur when teachers are operating from a position of reacting, and not reflecting. Reactive behaviors can happen to all educators, in part, because they “discharge” behaviors, meaning these behaviors help release unpleasant physical and emotional sensations (Scaer, 2007)

In the vignette with Steven, the ninth grader described at the beginning of this chapter, anger had carried over from a previous situation. Consequently, Steven had slammed his books causing his pen to explode, which resulted in a discharge behavior of inappropriate language. The ideal response would have required his teacher to ignore the behavior until Steven was calm, and then discuss the situation in a rational manner to encourage Steven to make better choices. However, before his teacher could speak, another student had reacted with laughter, also a *discharge behavior*, to relieve tension. After all, loud noises startle and elevate the fight, flight, or freeze chemical cascade in the brains of others as well. In response to the laughter, Steven then reacted by verbally threatening the other student, yet another discharge behavior. Consequently, his teacher reacted in a rather emotional manner, thereby prompting Steven to storm out of the room.

To some, Steven’s behavior pattern is typical of an emotionally disturbed student, and he may certainly have a history of ADHD, ODD, or another emotional condition. Being a ninth grader, he may be headed toward an alternative educational placement setting, and also have an increased risk of dropping out of school. It is important to understand that *emotional disturbance* is nothing more than a diagnostic category reflecting the lack of success a child has in modulating the neurobiology of distress and reactivity. The teacher who understands that anger and aggression are basically fear-driven reactions will be less likely to respond in a reactive manner, and in turn, more apt to respond in a rational and effective manner. Clearly, Steven’s behavior merited a disciplinary response. In the case of a highly distressed learner, timing and a sense of calmness means everything. Unfortunately, all too often schools require an emotionally distressed student to exhibit the use of self-control skills before actually being taught the specific interventions or strategies needed to modulate behavior.

The Felt Sense of Distress—Reaction Junkies

Throughout the course of a school day, all children experience a rise and fall in the levels of stress chemicals in their bodies. Stress chemicals, such as adrenalin, cortisol, and norepinephrine are in a constant state of flux in response to specific environmental demands. Children or adults who are constantly under stress, or who suffer a traumatic brain injury, often develop an elevated level of baseline stress chemicals in their bodies. Consequently, their bodies become accustomed to these heightened levels of stress chemicals. When the cascade of fight, flight, or freeze chemicals subside in their bodies, there is a tendency to feel as if something is terribly wrong (Sapolsky, 1998). In essence, there is a natural human tendency to adapt to feeling “high” on stress chemicals, and the body habituates to this stress response. Therefore, when there is a rise and fall in the levels of stress chemicals in their bodies, the baseline has been sufficiently raised to not return to pre-trauma norms, at least not without deliberate use of stress reduction techniques (McEwen, 2000).

Similarly, children with behavioral or emotional disorders are predisposed to limbic-driven, stress reactive behavior. This reactive behavior makes it more likely these children will have an elevated stress chemical baseline. Consequently, children with emotional disorders often find themselves in

more frequent negative social exchanges, thus under more stress and trauma, and locked in a self-defeating cycle (Goleman, 1995).

Among the harmful effects of chronic elevated stress chemicals are coronary heart disease, immunosuppression, and also cognitive inefficiency. For instance, McEwen's (2000) research revealed that excess stress chemicals destroy neurons in the hippocampus, the brain structure associated with memory functions. Elevated levels of stress chemicals can also impair the optimal functioning of the brain's executive network in the prefrontal cortex. Thus, the ability to think, plan, problem solve, make reasoned decisions, and follow through with goals and objectives is affected as well (LeDoux, 1996).

This reactive cycle sheds a new light on the plight of Sally, the third grade student described in the second vignette. Sally has ADHD and though she's not necessarily oppositional defiant or emotionally disturbed in the way these labels are currently used, she is highly reactive. Sally's ADHD makes it difficult for her to modulate her behavior and exercise self-control when flooded with stress. Her anger was impulsive and reactive, almost like a lightning strike, without any reason or forethought. Nevertheless, her reaction may have also served to discharge elevated levels of stress chemicals pending from a desired goal (being first in line) being so suddenly thwarted (Sapolsky, 1998). In a different context, Sally's behavior could have been highly appropriate if her behavioral response was to shove her classmate away from an oncoming bus. Still, once this neural circuit becomes activated, the brain does not differentiate between situation and context; it simply summons a reaction (LeDoux, 2008).

Effective classroom management must help students deal with the source of their distress, as well as help them interpret the physical sensation of stress through a specialized technique called *Mindful Discipline*. Mindfulness, the act of being aware, of witnessing without judgment, of letting go of belief systems that trigger reactive behavior patterns, or of recognizing unquieted body sensation is an effective way to help students with emotional disorders better manage their emotional worlds (VanDerKolk, 2008). Simply put, *Mindful Discipline* is the electrical tape wrapped around a frayed, emotionally disturbed cord to keep it from short circuiting.

Mindful Discipline in Practice

"The more mindful we are, the more choices we have and the less reactive we become."

—Ellen Langer from *The Art of Mindful Creativity*

There are three types of general strategies that help students who have difficulty with reactive behavior patterns. The goal of these strategies is to rewire the internal behavioral tendencies in the brain by forging newer and more powerful circuits leading to a more adaptive emotional response to stress.

Step 1. Training Response-ability

Clearly, if an emotionally distressed learner were capable of stopping and thinking in the heat of an emotional moment, there would be no need to simply react. Cognitive therapeutic approaches encourage children to stop and think—to use the same mind that created the problem to solve the problem. Since the brain is already emotionally reactive and unlikely to think clearly in the heat of

AND BREATHE. When an emotionally reactive student is asked to stop and think, the child is actually being asked to shift cognitive gears rapidly by first shifting their own physiological state. Often times, distressed learners such as Steven and Sally are incapable of exhibiting self-control until there has been an actual physical discharge. The goal is to train “*Stop and Breathe*” so that it becomes the student’s first discharge reaction. There is evidence-based research emerging regarding the effectiveness of utilizing stress management techniques such as breathing, mindfulness, and similar practices in schools to dispel reactive behavior patterns (Bradley et.al., 2007, Zylowska, 2008).

How “*Stop and Breathe*” Works

Stop and Breathe engages the mind and discharges uncomfortable physical sensations. “*Stop*” diverts a child’s attention, while “*breathe*” refocuses the attention on a conscious deliberate action to physically discharge stress in a more appropriate manner. The act of breathing brings more oxygen into the system and thereby reduces the cascade of stress chemicals that have been flooding the body. According to Sapolsky (2004), cortisol is the primary stress hormone that leads to increased heart rates, higher blood pressure, and immune system dysfunction. Conversely, lower levels of cortisol are associated with positive moods and a more relaxed bodily state. From a neuropsychological perspective, there are three core executive functioning deficits that arise from a stressful brain: namely, deficits with behavioral inhibition, diminished working memory skills, and limited cognitive flexibility (Lupien et al., 2005). All three executive functioning skills allow children to respond to an emotional crisis in a more reflective and contemplative manner, as opposed to reacting in a reflexive and impulsive fashion. Once cortisol is released in the blood stream, it takes approximately 45 minutes for the body to return to baseline rates; however, controlled breathing can enhance this process. For most students, there are four types of learning experiences that often elevate stress levels (Lupien et al., 2005):

TABLE 11-3
Four Types of Stressful Learning Experiences

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1. **Novelty situations**—teachers can reduce stress in their students by developing a daily schedule and reviewing it periodically throughout the day
 2. **Unpredictable situations**—developing a structure and routine to the day is critical to reducing the chances of unpredictable events. However, assemblies, fire-drills, change of schedules, and substitute teachers are part of any school experience. Preparing children in advance for inevitable changes as well as discussing back-up contingencies for these events can be helpful.
 3. **Perceived threats to the ego**—teachers can control their verbal and nonverbal (body language) behavior so it is less threatening. Kneeling down to talk to a student, becoming cognizant of personal space, using a quiet voice, discussing misbehavior in private rather than in front of peers, avoiding empty threats, empathizing with emotions, using reflective listening techniques, diffusing anger with humor, and simply knowing each student well enough to avoid putting them in an uncomfortable situation (*i.e. calling on a learning disabled student to read out loud in front of the class*) can help defuse emotional outbursts.
 4. **Sense of control is lost**—allowing students choices rather than dictating a particular behavioral response or providing an in class time-out area to relax can help students feel more in control to make better decisions.
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In most classrooms, children have been conditioned to repress physical discharges, much to our biology's detriment. For instance, students who elicit a yawn, or perhaps an exasperated sigh or even a grunt, usually receive negative feedback from their teacher. As previously discussed, negative feedback actually elevates the stress reaction, especially for students with emotional disturbances. Once the biology is quieted, the student has a chance to demonstrate a more rational response, as opposed to an emotional reaction. Once again, a reactive biology has to calm before it can become response-enabled.

How Do You Teach Students to "Stop and Breathe"?

This technique is very easy to train and even easier when appropriately demonstrated. One of the keys is to observe whether or not students breathe from the top of their chest or their diaphragm. Often times, shallow-chested breathers tend to exhibit more stress and therefore need explicit training in this technique. Table 11-4 provides a framework for teaching the stop and breathe technique for distressed students. In addition, for teachers who are prone to reactive behaviors and engage in combative practices with students such as yelling, making empty threats, or other ineffective discipline practices, this technique provides an extra cushion of self-control.

A daily practice of stress management techniques such as breathing has proven effective in reducing anxiety and behavior problems, improving emotional regulation, and increasing academic performance and attendance (Bradley, 2007; Zylowska, 2006). Table 11-5 provides a training regimen for students to practice daily, and is an important component of social-emotional academic learning. Following this protocol will allow students to better manage their emotions and ultimately guide the development of social integration through trust, empathy, and attachment, while simultaneously learning to temper emotional aggression and reactivity.

TABLE 11-4
Teaching the Stop and Breathe Technique

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1. At this very moment take a deep breath and just observe the feel of the air going in and out of your lungs. Breathe in and out. Got it? Okay.
 2. Now, place your hand on your lower abdomen. When you breathe in, imagine your lower abdomen is a balloon filling with air. Breathe in and try to fill the balloon slowly. Breathe out and let the balloon slowly collapse.
 3. Do this deep belly breathing to the count of four for a full minute. Eventually, we will work our way up to five minutes.
 4. Now breathe in 1-2-3-4. Hold for a full second. Now breathe out 4-3-2-1. Breathe in. Hold. Breathe out.
 5. As you breathe, notice how you feel. Calm? Quiet? Perhaps even peaceful? Did you notice that you were not thinking about anything else, and focusing all your attention on breathing in and out? The simple act of breathing has not only calmed your nervous system; it has also disengaged you from any thoughts that might be spiraling through your head and leading to unpleasant feelings.
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Once students have been taught the proper techniques of breathing, the next step is to utilize a nonverbal cue to signal them when they need to calm their biology. A nonverbal gesture or signal is highly recommended since words can have a disquieting effect. For instance, teachers can hold up their hand instead of verbalizing stop, and then motion to *breathe* in with an index finger drawing a line from your nose to your belly as you model the breath. Whatever gesture is decided upon, it is important to practice this technique with the entire class. Keep practicing so this technique eventually sets the physical state for each learner. Ideally, each student will be trained to stop and breathe, and also be in a position not only to self-monitor their own emotional levels, but also be in a better position to monitor their peers as well. Through practice, students are learning an effective and lifelong self-control technique.

TABLE 11-5
Breathing and Relaxation Protocol

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1. Be relaxed and authentic. Discuss with students the nature of breathing and the control they can develop over their body and emotions by consciously altering the pace of drawing a breath.
 2. Prepare students.
 - a) Teach a brain lesson on the sympathetic nervous system, the parasympathetic nervous system and homeostasis.
 - b) Acknowledge uncomfortable feelings and try to diffuse tension through games and activities. For instance, encourage students to tighten one arm as hard as they can, hold it, and then release. Ask them to notice what the release feels like. Have them repeat the exercise holding even longer, and then discuss the results.
 - c) Next, ask students to pay attention to their breathing. Have them notice whether they are breathing from the chest or the belly. Explain that chest breathing is shallow and inefficient intake of oxygen, while belly breathing is calming and efficient intake.
 - d) Practice breathing as a group exercise.
 - e) Guide students in daily practice. Begin day 1 by practicing for 30 seconds, then add 30–60 seconds each day up to 3–5 minutes a day. The following techniques will also be helpful:
 - Use a calm, steady voice.
 - Provide an alternative for students who need to move (e.g. breathing and walking, or breathing and making figure 8's with their fingers on the desk.)
 - Provide an alternative, quiet activity for resistant students. These students usually need extra time to feel more comfortable.
 - Encourage home base breathing for 10–15 minutes. Consider making this a homework assignment and reward students for their commitment.
 - Consider creating a class-wide reinforcement contingency. For instance, if everyone completes their breathing homework for one week the class receives a special snack, or five minutes of down time, or even a no-homework night.
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Step 2. Make "IT" Safe

The "IT" to make safe is referring to the identification of whatever is going on that provokes student reaction. It could be a particular type of task, an unpredictable environment, content that is perceived too difficult, another classmate, personal history, family drama, or a number of other possibilities. Resilience research findings show that children exposed to multiple risks and adversities can overcome them with the right complement of protective influences (Masten, 2001). Interestingly, it is the ordinariness of influences that surprised researchers the most. For instance, important adults in their lives and turning point experiences were essential when helping children with neurologically based difficulties overcome their childhood adversities (Katz, 2006).

What can a teacher do? The answer lies in tending to three basic human needs cited by researchers Ryan and Deci (2000) in their work on intrinsic human motivation and self-determination. These needs are centered around the emotional constructs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence. When a student does not feel secure, albeit physically or emotionally, one of these three basic needs is most likely not being met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In fact, all issues of safety and security must be addressed or the student will be "mis-engaged" in behavior that takes them further away from meeting these essential needs. Table 11-6 highlights three ways to foster social emotional health and wellness in students.

Step 3. Act With Intention

The idea behind mindful discipline is to "ACT" and not "REACT". Although no method is foolproof, one way to increase the probability of success is to develop an intention to guide your teaching practice. Intentions are simple, straightforward guidelines for behavior. They are one sentence descriptions of your ideal state of being.

For instance, suppose there is a student who tends to promote a reactive behavior through their persistence noncompliance and oppositional behavior in class. In this case, your guiding intention may be "I am competent, kind, and concerned." If still ready to react, you simply repeat your intention silently and as many times as necessary so that you do not say or do something that you will regret, that is ineffective, or that violates this fundamental postulate.

TABLE 11-6
Three Ways to Nurture Student Health and Well-Being

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1. Foster relatedness through connection and belonging. Some characteristics of safe environments are:
 - Constant, predictable, and non-reactive. Students respond best to highly structured but not rigid environments, consistent routines, rules that are created collaboratively and are consistently reinforced with pre-set consequences. In other words, the students know what to expect and behavior is reinforced.
 - Spirit of community and collaboration. This includes team mentality, no put-downs, a sense of connection and belonging, differentiation in tasks and activities, and personal strengths celebrated. Social isolation is taboo.
 - Abundance of positive feedback. Develop a realistic appraisal of frequency by monitoring yourself for a week. Put a check mark down every time you give positive feedback. Is it abundant?
 - Have a sense of humor that is truly funny, though never at another's expense.
 - Challenges are opportunities. Teachers need to break down challenging tasks into stepping stones and provide encouragement and support along the way.

CHAPTER 11 Mindful Discipline for Distressed Learners

2. Cultivate autonomy and self-determination by allowing choices and decision making.
 - Provide choices of preferred activities and rewards whenever possible.
 - Allow alternate methods of response.
 - Treat behavior as a choice. Allow the student the opportunity to calm first and then decide wisely.
 - Train students to **SBTR**—stop, breathe, think, respond. During “*think*” the student makes a choice between appropriate or inappropriate behavior. During “*respond*”, the student follows through on the choice and evaluates the result. Use prompts to coach each step of this process. The “*think*” part works best once the student’s biology has quieted a bit. If the shift to cognitive activity reactivates the stress, go back to quieting.
 - Provide a setting where student is most comfortable and relaxed.
 3. Develop competence through authentic participation in meaningful activities and successful experiences.
 - Identify strengths and talents. Provide multiple opportunities to use them.
 - Provide differentiated or universal design for learning instruction.
 - Use portfolio assessments.
 - Provide positive feedback for increments of appropriate behavior and completed work.
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It is important for teachers to have flexible intentions, and perhaps to have different guiding intentions for different patterns of behavior. An intention should be relatively brief, usually between 3–5 words, and simple enough that it can be recalled during stressful situations. Silently reciting a guiding intention replaces the need to put forth conscious energy to refrain from saying something regrettable or unprofessional that will only serve to entice even more inflammatory behavior. In addition, intentions can help teachers interact in a way that builds safety, trust, consistency, and predictability. For many traumatized children, the school often represents a beacon of hope by providing a learning environment that fosters resilience and reinforces pro-social behavior to allow children to develop an effective skill set to best manage their emotional worlds.

“I will act as though what I do makes a difference”

—William James

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