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This month's blog is written by Geraldine Jozefiak, Examinations Officer at HMP Norwich who further considers Mindfulness...

Mindfulness techniques to help students prepare for exams...

Health and well-being is a hot topic right now with the Government making it a compulsory part of the curriculum from 2020. Education Secretary Damian Hinds said "it will help children learn how to look after themselves physically and mentally".

Those of us working in Education know how important this aspect of school life is, and acting and thinking Mindfully is a big step towards this goal.

Exam time is one of the most tense and unsettling times of a young person's life. Fear kicks in a big way – feeling inadequate, unprepared, overwhelmed – just a few of the commonly seen emotions at this time of year.

So how to prepare our young people for the pressures to come? They certainly need more than subject skills to equip them for the weeks ahead. Fear can unravel us all and the unknown can unhinge even the bravest souls.

One of your first preparations should be to tell each student that they have a Choice in how they react to exams.

The Panic Spiral

It's normal for us to resist that statement but first we have the thought (fear) then our automatic reaction (usual way of handling the fear) kicks in, and lastly we have the result of all that panic spiral – Emotion!

This can be our minds telling us we can't do it, or our bodies giving us the symptoms of fear, worry and panic we expect – sickness, changes in our breathing, stress etc. Expectation is a mighty thing and can overrule our hearts, minds and bodies!

Expect the worst and The Law of Attraction will bring you the very thing you expect. Thoughts have energy so thinking the best for ourselves definitely has positive outcomes. It's not easy to do, but continued improved thinking pays dividends.

Mind the Gap

At *The Exams Office* Summer 2018 [National Exams Officer Conference](#) I introduced the Mind the Gap technique for stopping this automatic reaction to worry and anxiety. I explain it as a traffic light system or using a remote control.

Most of us are on automatic as our default way of handling common experiences. The 'Fast Track' system usually works just fine for us as a shortcut to dealing with our day. But when we react negatively in ways that don't serve us, then we need to review our auto responses and re-programme them.

So, tell your students that they have a Choice. When they notice panic rising (changes in breath, upset tummy, extreme emotions) tell them to STOP. This is the moment to do that 360-degree turnaround to see things from all angles.

Stop – what thinking got them there? (because the thought comes first).

Rewind - What is it making them feel, think and react this way? (noticing and observing are crucial Mindful approaches).

Fast Forward – Ask them to play it forward to see how things will pan out if they continue on this track. What other routes could they take to react to their anxiety? What would work out **better for them?**

Play – Once they decide which way might work best for them, tell them to choose this path, knowing that reacting in this newly considered way will have the minimal fall out!

Simple Relaxing Exercise

I recommend you combine the Mind the Gap technique with a group breathing exercise. Settle the students and ask them to focus on any fear or anxiety they might be holding and notice how it feels. Ask them to bring in the light (or their favourite colour) and see it moving slowly down from the top of their head to their tippy toes, dissolving and shaking out any tension.

This exercise was a great success at the conference last year with lots of positive feedback. It will work for your learners too!

Guided Visualisation

Another helpful way to calm worry is to visualise the process.

One of the best ways I know is to use a Guided Visualisation or a Meditation. It can be done anytime, anywhere, to music or without, using your own words and imagery. The key is to make it as bold and big as possible, with heightened senses.

Encourage your learners to see everything bright, loud, and exaggerated, with themselves right in the ‘action’.

Here's the kind of script you might use with your students

Imagine yourself in the exam room and see yourself in your ‘place’ – if you know it.

See yourself preparing calmly for your exam, knowing you know enough, that you are enough, that you will do your best.

You are steady and ready for your exam and you can breathe away any worries by slowing your breath and relaxing your body.

You can show the best of yourself in this moment. You know what you need to do and your mind is focussed and your spirit willing.

As the exam begins, your mind gives up the information it needs. You write easily and confidently. You are ‘in flow’ and able to work through the questions with confidence.

Feel yourself enjoying the process of giving up your knowledge.

All is well.

I wish you well with your exams and hope to see some of you at *The Exams Office Summer 2019 National Exams Officer Conferences* where I shall be talking more about using Mindfulness in your everyday life.