

Exploring Attitude and Expectations

PURPOSE

This learning experience examines unrealistic expectations, the negative effects they can have on students' sense of self-worth, and how to adjust them to cultivate humility and self-confidence. Students will explore perfectionism and such questions as: Is it possible to be good at everything? What happens when we make mistakes or feel we

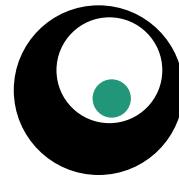
have "failed" at something? Is it realistic to expect we will achieve every goal right away or excel in every area? After students identify which attitudes and expectations are unhelpful in their own lives, they will design practices for themselves that can help cultivate positive self-regard through more realistic expectations of themselves.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Explore the myth of perfectionism and the ways in which it leads to unrealistic expectations.
- Explore "growth mindset," one's ability to grow and learn from mistakes and setbacks.
- Explore how difficult feelings, setbacks, and limitations are common features of everyone's life.
- Identify positive ways of responding to one's limitations and "failures."

PRIMARY CORE COMPONENTS



Self-Compassion

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- One sign that says "Yes" and one that says "No"
- Enough space for students to move around an imagined continuum line
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Paper
- Notecards
- Writing utensils
- Discussion handout included at the end of this learning experience

LENGTH

40 minutes

CHECK-IN | 3 minutes

- "Let's prepare for a short attention practice. How do we want our body to be?
- First we'll take a comfortable and upright posture. Then we'll keep our eyes on the ground or close them.
- Before we strengthen our attention, we'll do some resourcing or grounding to calm our bodies. Choose one of your resources from your resource kit, or you can choose a new one, or you can imagine one.
- Now let's just bring our resource to mind. And let's see if we can just pay attention to our resource with our mind for a few moments quietly. Or if you'd rather do grounding, you can do that too. Whichever you choose, we're going to rest quietly and pay attention for a few moments. [Pause.]
- What do you notice inside? If you feel pleasant or neutral, you can rest your mind on that.
- If you feel unpleasant, you can shift to a different resource, or you can ground. You can also change your posture but try not to disturb anyone else if you do that. Otherwise, just keep your attention resting with your resource. [Pause.]
- Now let's become aware of our breathing. Let's see if we can pay attention to the breath as it enters and leaves our body.
- If you find paying attention to the breath uncomfortable, then feel free to go back to your resource or grounding, or just take

a small break, making sure not to disturb anyone else. [Pause for 15-30 seconds.]

- If you ever get distracted, you can just return your attention to the breath. You can also count your breath. [Pause for a longer time, such as 30-60 seconds or longer.]
- You can strengthen your attention by focusing on sensations or by focusing on the breath. It's your choice - it's always up to you.
- What did you notice?" [Share aloud.]

INSIGHT ACTIVITY | 10 minutes

Stand by Your Opinion

Overview

Through participating in a continuum exercise, students explore and express their beliefs around the ideas of perfectionism, failure, and a growth mindset.

Content/Insights to be Explored

- Having unrealistic expectations can cause us to be hard on ourselves in ways that are unhelpful.
- Cultivating a growth mindset and patience can help one be more realistic when encountering setbacks.

Materials Required

- Enough space for students to move around an imagined continuum line;
- A sign that reads "Yes" and one that reads "No" that can be placed on either end of

a line (the line can be imaginary or can be created with colored tape on the floor)

Instructions

- Place the Yes/No signs at opposite ends of the continuum line.
- Explain to students that you will be reading statements and asking them to show their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by standing along an imaginary continuum, with the ends being marked by the signs.
- Demonstrate to students where a person would stand, depending on the degree to which they are in agreement or disagreement with the statement, so they are clear on how to express their opinion.
- Tell students there are absolutely no right or wrong responses to the statements and that they should stand based on their own opinion.
- Let students know that they will be sharing their thoughts with each other and refer to the group agreement that your class has in place, that addresses how they've agreed to do this type of work with each other, listening and sharing respectfully and agreeing to disagree without being disagreeable.
- Invite all students to stand up and get ready to listen to the first statement. Let them know there will be a brief period of think time before anyone moves to a position on the line.

- Read the first statement below. Give students 10 seconds to think about it and then ask everyone to move to show their opinion (agree/disagree). Tell them to stand anywhere on the continuum that fits with their experience, showing the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement.
- Once students are in place, ask them to turn and talk to one or two others who are near them and share why they chose to stand where they are standing. (If a student is standing alone, the teacher should be their partner.)
- Encourage everyone to maintain an open mind while listening to a few students along the continuum speak about their thinking that led to choosing that spot on the continuum.
- After listening to the volunteers, invite students to move if they have changed their mind. Invite those who move to share what changed for them.
- Continue the same process with the remaining prompts. End with the group discussion question.

Teaching Tips

- Make sure all voices have been heard by the whole group at least once if possible, and be careful of dominating voices.
- **The statements in bold are the most important for this activity.** If you have time and would like to include the others, please do.

- Remember, there are no right or wrong responses to these statements. They are designed to facilitate discussion and sharing. You want to be a neutral listener during the activity to allow for differences of opinion.
- This activity may lead to rich discussions that take time, and if you find you are having a rich discussion during the insight activity, consider extending the activity, eliminating the reflective practice, and ending the session with the debrief. Then come back to the activity the next time you meet, do the remaining prompts, and finish off the second time with the reflective practice.

Statements

- **You can get good at most things if you work hard and practice over a long period of time.**
- Being the best at something or finishing in first place doesn't necessarily make someone happy.
- **I like to be the best at whatever I do.**
- When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the care and compassion I need.
- It's okay and natural to not be good at something if you've just started at it.
- **When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.**
- It's sometimes good to be below average at something.

- When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
- **Failure can be a good way to learn.**
- When I fail at something important to me, I sometimes feel embarrassed and disappointed.
- I try to accept things about myself that I don't like.
- **It's possible to be perfect. [End the activity with this one, no matter how many statements you use.]**

Sample Script

- *"For this activity, we will be sharing personal experiences with each other. Which of our group agreements could we use to help guide our discussion today? [Allow time for review of agreements and for sharing.]*
- *I'm going to read you a statement and will be asking you to stand along a continuum to express your agreement or disagreement with what I've said. For example, if I said, 'all people should be kind' you would stand along the continuum to show your disagreement (demonstrate where they would stand) or agreement (demonstrate where they would stand.) You can stand anywhere along the continuum to show how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement. I'll give you a few seconds to think about each statement before asking you to move.*
- *[Read the first statement and wait a few seconds.]*

- Now move to stand along the continuum to show your level of agreement or disagreement with “[repeat statement].” [Pause while students locate themselves.]
- Turn and talk to a person or two who is close to you on the line. Why are you standing there? What experiences have you had that make you think or feel the way you do? [Allow for 2 minutes of sharing in small groups or pairs.]
- Now, let’s discuss together as a whole group —who will get us started? Let’s go from one end of the spectrum to the other, hearing from several people along the way. As you are listening to your peers share, think about how what they are saying impacts your own thinking. I will give you a chance to move later, if you would like to.
- [Call on student volunteers and ask them to explain their rationale for standing in their spot. Remain neutral about all responses, responding with “Thank you for sharing.” or a similarly unbiased comment.]
- For those who, after hearing these comments, would like to change your answer, please move now.
- How and why did your answer change? [Hear from volunteers if there are some who wish to share.]
- [Repeat the process above with each of the statements.]
- Thank you for sharing your ideas. Let’s sit down now.”

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION | 12 minutes

Attitudes & Expectations

Overview

Students will discuss their ideas around expectations, perfectionism, and growth mindset.

Content/Insights to be Explored

- Society provides many ideas about what will bring happiness, not all of which are realistic.
- Having unrealistic expectations about happiness can cause us to be hard on ourselves in ways that are unhelpful.

Materials Required

- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Paper
- Notecards
- Writing utensils
- Discussion handout included at the end of this learning experience

Instructions

- Divide your group into pairs or trios. Give each group one sheet of paper or use the provided handout.
- Ask groups to brainstorm some things that society, the media, and advertising tell us that we need to be happy. [Some examples may be new cars, fame, wealth, good looks, great job, a particular body type.]

- Invite groups to share out as you write their ideas on chart paper or the whiteboard under the heading “What Society Tells Us Will Make Us Happy.”
- Then, ask students to look over the list and ask them:
 - *“Will these things bring us lasting happiness? How do you know?*
 - *Is everybody who is [example: wealthy] happy?*
 - *Do you think if you had any or all of these things you would be happy? Why or why not?*
 - *Could any of these expectations people might have for themselves cause them problems?”*
- Let students guide this discussion.
- Ask students what may be meant by the term “expectation.” Write their ideas, along with a definition along the lines of “what someone predicts will happen” on the board.
- Next, give each student a notecard or post-it. Ask them to independently brainstorm what they want for themselves, that they think will bring them lasting happiness in the future.
- Invite students to share out as you record their ideas on chart paper or the whiteboard under the heading “What I Want that Will Help Me Be Happy.” (Or collect the post-its/notecards and display them on the chart.)
- Facilitate a group discussion using the following questions. You may want to display the questions in some way.
- Think of a time when you failed to meet your own expectations and you felt bad for yourself or treated yourself harshly. Imagine if a friend came to you and said the same thing about themselves. How would you help them take a different perspective on things?
- How does it feel when friends, family, and/or society have unrealistic or unhelpful expectations for you that you can’t or don’t want to live up to?
- How does it feel when friends, family, and/or society have realistic or helpful expectations for you that are in line with your own hopes and dreams for yourself?
- In your opinion, how are expectations and perfectionism (or wanting to be perfect) connected?
- In what ways does the way we feel about failure and making mistakes impact our behavior and growth?
- Tell them they are going to reflect on helpful and unhelpful expectations they have for themselves.
- *“Helpful expectations help us grow and encourage us; unhelpful expectations cause us to be hard on ourselves and can contribute to negative feelings about ourselves.”*

Sample script

- *"Today we're going to think together about expectations, perfectionism, and growth mindset.*
- *We'll be working in our small groups, so please get yourselves resettled now in your group. [If you do not have designated small work groups already, do so now.]*
- *Using this handout, you'll be brainstorming some things that society, the media and advertising tell us that we need to be happy. Who can share an example to start? [Allow time for 1-2 examples.] Wonderful. Go ahead and work with your groups, listing as many examples as possible. Remember that everyone will be working toward equity of voice, so take note of your own contributions and those of others. [Provide time to work.]*
- *Now, let's share your group ideas with the class. I'll write them here under "What Society Tells Us Will Make Us Happy." [Allow each group to share some or all of their ideas.]*
- *Thanks for contributing all of these terrific ideas. Now let's look over the whole list. [Pause. Facilitate a discussion using the questions below. Allow students to guide the discussion.]*
- *Will these things bring us lasting happiness? How do you know?*
- *Is everybody who is [example: wealthy] happy?*
- *Do you think if you had any or all of these things you would be happy? Why or why not?*

- *Could any of these expectations people might have for themselves cause them problems?*
- *What do you think is meant by the term "expectation"? [Write their ideas, along with a definition along the lines of "what someone predicts will happen" on the board.]*
- *Now I'm going to give you a notecard/post-it note. I invite you to brainstorm on your own what you want for yourself and what you think will bring you lasting happiness in the future. [Provide time for writing.]*
- *Who would like to share? [Record their thoughts on the poster or collect and display.]*
- *[Facilitate a group discussion using one or more of the following questions. You may want to display the questions in some way.]*
- *Think of a time when you failed to meet your own expectations and you felt bad for yourself or treated yourself harshly. [Pause.] Now, imagine if a friend came to you and said the same thing about themselves. How would you help them take a different perspective on things?*
- *How does it feel when friends, family, and/or society have unrealistic or unhelpful expectations for you that you can't or don't want to live up to?*
- *How does it feel when friends, family, and/or society have realistic or helpful expectations for you that are in line with your own hopes and dreams for yourself?*

- *In your opinion, how are expectations and perfectionism (or wanting to be perfect) connected?*
- *In what ways does the way we feel about failure and making mistakes impact our behavior and growth?*
- *Wonderful, thanks for a great discussion. Next we're going to do a reflective practice on expectations we have for ourselves. Helpful expectations help us grow and encourage us; unhelpful expectations cause us to be hard on ourselves and can contribute to negative feelings about ourselves.”*

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE | 10 minutes

What to Expect of Myself

Overview

In this reflective practice, students examine expectations they have for themselves and how they may be helpful or unhelpful.

Content/Insights to be Explored

Having unrealistic expectations can cause us to be hard on ourselves and create negative feelings that can be unhelpful.

Materials Required

- One copy of the reflective practice handout for each student
- Writing utensils

Instructions

- Ask students to move out of their groups and work quietly on their own during this reflective practice.
- Show students the back of second handout “My Expectations for Myself.” Model at least one helpful expectation and one unhelpful expectation for yourself. Tell students to work independently on this step, capturing their own ideas as they reflect on their personal expectations.
- Ask them to brainstorm their expectations for two minutes. Set a timer for this step.
- Invite students to select one helpful expectation and one unhelpful expectation from their brainstorm, and answer the questions on the worksheet in writing or drawing.
- Provide time to share for those who want to.

Sample script

- *“Please thank your group and move back to your personal work spot. [Pause as they relocate.] You will work on your own for the first part of this reflective practice and there will be time to share at the end.*
- *This is the reflective practice handout, “My Expectations for Myself.” What you’ll do here is think about some helpful and unhelpful expectations you have for yourself. This will be private writing, for your eyes only. You’ll be invited to use the ideas from this reflection during our sharing time, but the writing is just for you.*

- For example, for me, under the heading “helpful expectations,” I might write, “I will try to get at least 15 minutes of exercise every day.” In the column under “unhelpful expectation,” I might write, “I will try to make everybody in my family get along all the time.”
- Who has questions?
- Go ahead and begin. We’ll do individual brainstorming for two minutes. Capture whatever ideas pop up for you, writing them in the column without judging the idea or yourself. Don’t move to the next section yet—give yourself time to see what surfaces during this private silent writing time. [Allow time for reflection and writing.]
- Next, select one expectation from each column and answer the questions on the handout for both of them. Again, this writing is your own. [Allow time for reflection and writing.]
- Take a moment to finish just the thought you’re writing right now. [Pause.] And then look over your ideas. [Allow time for sharing.]

DEBRIEF | 5 minutes

Share in partners and/or volunteers for the whole group, as appropriate to your group.

- “What do you notice about your list of “helpful expectations”? Do you see any themes or generalities? Do they seem doable?

- What do you notice about your list of “unhelpful expectations”? What do the items on this list have in common, if anything? What impact might these “unhelpful expectations” be having on you?
- What do you notice about feelings or sensations that arise for you as you think carefully about these lists of expectations you’re holding for yourself today?”