

Culture COUNTS

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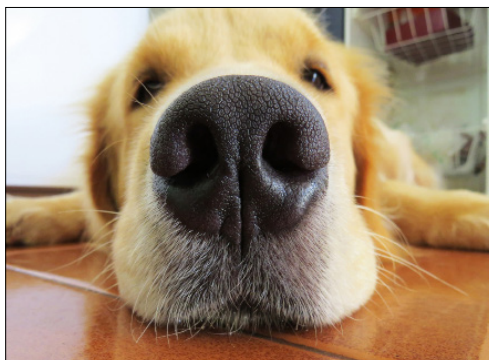
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December 2021

Mindfulness activities can ease holiday stress — but start small and practice self-awareness

Mindfulness exercises or meditation might feel intimidating if you've never tried it before. But it's actually really easy to get started with a mindfulness practice. Here are the best tips to get started:

- **Start small:** Choose one or two exercises, such as those described on the next page, to incorporate into your morning routine. Work your way towards doing more.
- **Build habits:** Make mindfulness a habit and be as consistent as you can to see the great benefits that mindfulness can have on your life.
- **Be forgiving:** You may find that it's hard to consistently add a mindfulness exercises to your morning every day. Forgive yourself if you miss a day here and there.
- **Be patient:** Mindfulness can have great benefits in your life, but with any health change, it takes time to see significant results. Be patient and don't get discouraged if you aren't feeling the full benefits right away.



How Mindfulness Eases Holiday Stress

Mindfulness is non-judgmental awareness of your present-moment experience. When we become aware of how we're feeling, and we're able to

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“GREAT TEACHERS
EMPATHIZE WITH
KIDS, RESPECT THEM,
AND BELIEVE THAT
EACH ONE HAS
SOMETHING SPECIAL
THAT CAN BE
BUILT UPON.”

- ANN LIBERMAN

GET SOCIAL



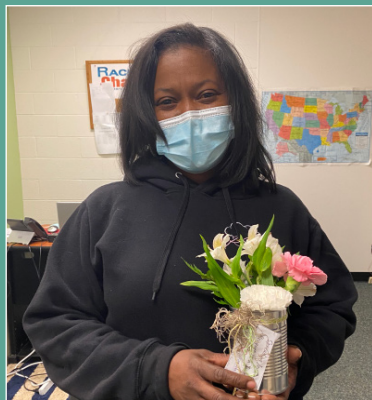
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Kindness in bloom

Students in the OCM BOCES Transition program at Onondaga Community College did it again — they reclaimed flowers from recent campus events, rearranged them, and put them in small vases. Later, they bestowed these flowers upon grateful recipients at our OCM BOCES Crown Road Campus. In the photo is **Shankevia Dean**, a social worker. Please turn to page 7 for more photos.

WELLNESS COUNTS

Mindfulness begins with acknowledging and accepting limits

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be equally present with joy and discomfort, our hearts open and our heads clear.

Acknowledge Your Stress

When we are stressed, we are often the last to realize it. It's not until family or friends give us the side-eye that we notice we're becoming a little too reactive. Sometimes, the body tells us we're stressed through fatigue, headache, stomach discomfort, or illness.

Mindfulness and the practice of self-awareness has the power to stop holiday stress before it starts. Mindfulness broadens our awareness and our ability to self-reflect. In the context of tackling holiday stress, it's important to understand what's stressing us out. Reflect upon these reasons, or just close your eyes and turn inward. Ask your body what it's feeling and be open to the response.

Understanding our triggers allows us to establish a mindful plan of action through which we might avoid stressful situations. If we remain aware, we'll notice when things are becoming too much, at which point we might mindfully choose to do less, take a break, or set boundaries for the situations we just can't side-step.

"The only way to live is by accepting each minute as an unrepeatable miracle."

- Tara Brach

Practice Acknowledging your Stress with this Exercise

Acceptance doesn't mean becoming a doormat and giving up your agency. Acceptance means being realistic. Acceptance is a form of mindfulness that helps us see things as they are, absent of the history we have or the stories we tell. Practicing acceptance also helps us avoid the stressful demands of perfection.

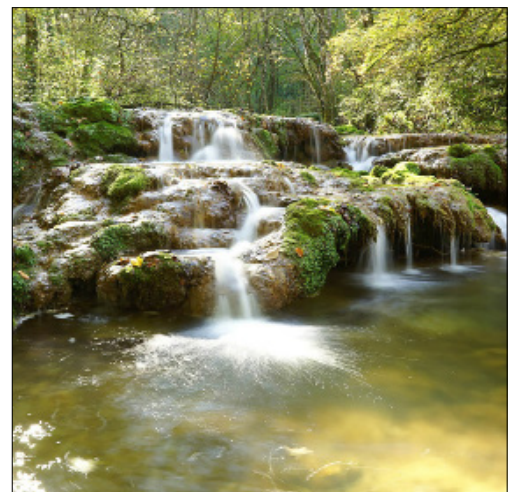
Notice if you find yourself saying things like, "I have to do XYZ," or "It has to be like XYZ." There are very few "have to's" in life. Most likely, in these moments you are holding yourself to an unreasonable standard.

Notice when you say things such as, "He always does XYZ" or "XYZ always happens to me." These are signs that you recognize certain patterns, yet haven't accepted them. Allow people and situations to reveal their truth.

Each time your reality conflicts with your expectations, you're setting yourself up for stress. When we accept reality, we're far more likely to do things like setting a budget, creating a schedule, establishing boundaries, and taking on only what we can joyfully accomplish.

"The spaciousness of pure awareness is compassion."

- Jon Kabat-Zinn



Another resource:

If you are interested in free apps to assist you with practicing meditation or mindfulness, check out this list from [mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org):

<https://www.mindful.org/free-mindfulness-apps-worthy-of-your-attention/>

WELLNESS COUNTS

Ease back into exercise post-holidays with these workouts

If your body begins to suffer from post-holiday burnout, the following light workouts can soothe sore muscles, flush out fatigue, and “scorch calories from the candy-coated sweets that are stubbornly sticking around your stomach,” according to the author of this Philadelphia Inquirer article, Ashley GreenBlatt, who is a certified personal trainer and wellness coach.

After the holidays, she says, “energy levels are depleted, your sleep schedule is off,” and your body could “pass for Santa’s body double.” Though you were on vacation mode, she adds, “your brain and body are feeling far from refreshed.”

As a result, it’s important to practice exercises that encourage recovery for the muscles and mind, as well as boost your desire to dive back into healthy habits. GreenBlatt also notes this important fact: A rundown body can cause a weakened immune system, making you more susceptible to colds and flu.

Greenblatt offers the following exercises to help you recover from the holidays. For best results, she encourages you to do these moves 30 minutes after waking up, when the muscles have had time to warm up. Complete this circuit three times, resting for 60 seconds between sets.

Lunge + lean

Stand tall with feet hip-width apart. Take a step back with your right foot, crossing it behind your left leg. Lower your body until your front knee forms a 90-degree angle. Don’t allow your front knee to extend past your toes.

Push through your left heel to elevate your body, and step your right foot back to the starting stance.

Exhale as you extend your left arm overhead, lifting your left heel off the floor as you point your toes. Feel a deep stretch in the muscles lining the side of your abdomen. Hold for two counts then repeat the entire sequence 10 times before switching sides.

Bend + breathe

Position your feet so they are slightly wider than hip-distance apart with toes turned out.

With your weight in your heels, exhale as you hinge back at your hips, lowering your body into a deep squat, and fold your hands in front of your chest. Your thighs should be parallel with the floor.

Inhale fully as you push through your heels to stand, simultaneously opening your arms up toward the ceiling in a circular motion. Practice 10 times.



Pose + plank

Using a mat or cushioned surface, start in a tabletop position with your shoulders stacked over your hands and hips above knees.

Exhale as you move into a child’s pose, tilting back at your hips until your glutes touch your heels. For a deeper stretch, separate your knees slightly wider. With your hands on the mat, extend your arms fully in front of your body. Feel the muscles in your arms, back, and chest elongate.

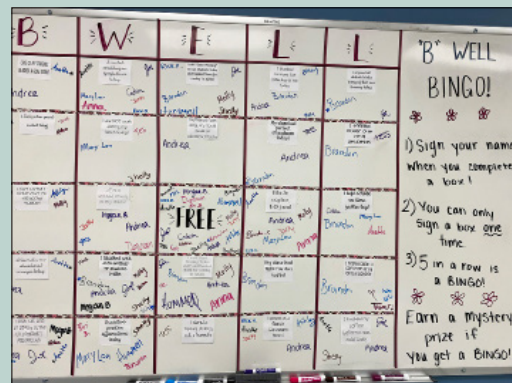
Hold this stretch for two counts then inhale, slowly rising back to the tabletop stance. Tuck your toes under and shift your weight into a plank pose by walking your hands out until they are stacked under your shoulders. Hold until balanced, then come back to the tabletop position, repeating the entire movement 10 times.

WELLNESS COUNTS

Committee Update: 'B' Well Bingo! is a big hit at Crown Road Campus

The Wellness Committee at Crown Road Campus came up with a clever idea recently to welcome back staff after Thanksgiving break. The "B" Well Bingo! game — a game drawn out on a large whiteboard — invited staff members to write their names on squares and win prizes if they got a "Bingo." Squares included feats such as "I laughed with a co-worker or student today," or "I did not work during my lunch today" or "One of my students reached a goal today." (The middle square was free, of course.)

In the end, any staff member who earned a "Bingo" received a small prize, and everyone who participated received a bag of snacks with the message, "You are all that and a bag of chips." Wellness Committee member **Brenda Cussen** said the activity produced a lot of positive feedback from staff.



Recipe: Healthy Blueberry-Lemon Ricotta Pound Cake

This healthy pound cake recipe isn't just delicious — it also only requires one bowl to make. For the best cake texture, be sure to beat the sugar and butter together long enough in Step 2 to look creamy — the time it takes to get there varies according to the type of electric mixer you have. Serve with brunch or alongside a cup of coffee in the afternoon.

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter at room temperature
- 3 large eggs at room temperature (see warming tip on next page)

- 3/4 cup part-skim ricotta cheese
- 2 tablespoons lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice plus one teaspoon, divided
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups white whole-wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups fresh blueberries
- 2 tablespoons packed confectioner's sugar

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Coat a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan with cooking spray and line the bottom with parchment paper.
2. Beat sugar and butter in a



large bowl with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until creamy. Beat in eggs, one at a time, until fully incorporated. Reduce the mixer speed to medium-low and beat in ricotta, lemon zest, 2 tablespoons lemon juice and vanilla until just combined. Sprinkle

Continued on next page

Blueberry-Lemon Ricotta Pound Cake Recipe - continued from Page 4

flour on top, then evenly sprinkle baking powder and salt over the flour. With the mixer on low speed, beat until almost combined. Add blueberries and gently fold into the batter. Transfer to the prepared pan.

3. Bake the cake until starting to brown around the edges and a tester inserted in the center comes out clean, about 1 hour. Let cool in the pan on a wire rack for 20 minutes. Run a knife around the edge to loosen the cake, then invert it onto the rack. Carefully turn it right-side up. Let cool completely.

4. Clean the bowl, add confectioners' sugar and whisk in the remaining 1 teaspoon lemon juice until smooth. Brush the glaze on the cake.

Tips

Make Ahead Tip: Wrap cooled cake airtight and store at room temperature for up to 1 day; glaze shortly before serving.

How to Wam Eggs: Room-temperature eggs make cakes fluffier. Here's a quick trick — place them (in the shell) in a bowl of lukewarm water for about 5 minutes.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size: 1-inch-thick slice

Per Serving: 303 calories; protein 8.4g; carbohydrates 44.9g; dietary fiber 3.3g; sugars 24.8g; fat 11g; saturated fat 6.3g; cholesterol 96mg; vitamin a iu 433.3IU; vitamin c 7.3mg; folate 15.4mcg; calcium 148.3mg; iron 3.7mg; magnesium 9mg; potassium 124mg; sodium 318.6mg; added sugar 21g.

Exchanges: 1 starch, 1 1/2 other carbohydrate, 1/2 fruit, 1/2 medium-fat meat, 1 1/2 fat

[Find the full recipe at EatingWell.com.](#)

CULTURE COUNTS

Restorative Practices can help students adjust to holiday breaks

By Randi Downs

This time of year, while hopeful and exciting for some, can be a challenge for many of our students. The holiday season brings schedule changes, family dynamics, and lack of structure, which can make students, and even staff, feel anxious. Because of this, our time with students should be framed with opportunities for students to feel supported and connected. It is also a good reminder to note that Restorative Practices should be mostly proactive, with a solid focus on relationship building.

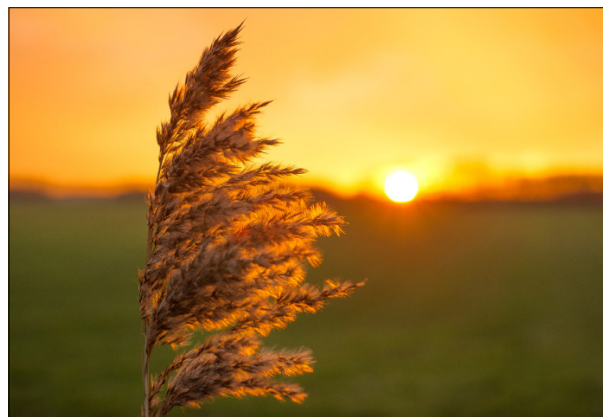
As you approach the holidays or any long break, try to make circles a part of every day. For those of you who are a bit out of practice, here's a quick refresher and circle idea from the International Institute for Restorative Practices:

Step 1: Introduce the Circle procedures/expectations:

- Remind students of the roles of the participants
- Introduce the talking piece and the guidelines that come with it

Next: Start with an icebreaker to engage all students

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CULTURE COUNTS

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Step 2: Ice-Breaker, "The Warm Wind Blows"

- First, remove one chair from the circle and go to the center of the circle to give instructions.
- For the game, the center person will give an announcement: "The warm wind blows for anyone who _____ — and then fill in the blank with a description of their choice (i.e., "likes ice cream, has a dog, is wearing red, has brown eyes," etc.).
- All students who resonate with that description are to get up and find a new chair to sit in. Students must choose a chair that is at least two chairs away (no hopping to the chair next door!), and must refrain from running or pushing
- Whichever student is remaining after the scramble and was unable to find a chair is now the new center person. This center student gives a new announcement of their choice (The warm wind blows ...) as the corresponding students scramble to find new chairs.
- Do 5-10 rounds of this. We find that our students love this game and it's a perfect way to get out some of that energy and excitement.

Step 3: "Rose and Thorn" Discussion About Holiday Break

- Use a talking piece. For this two-part prompt, students will each share both a "rose" and a "thorn." Ask the students to close their eyes and think about the following questions:
- **ROSE:** What is something positive for you about the holiday break? Share something you're most looking forward to that makes you happy.
- **THORN:** What is something that's difficult or negative for you about the holiday break? Share something you don't like about break.



*Note: "Rose and Thorn" is very effective in honoring the multitude of experiences students can have over break. For some, this time of year can be very joyful. But for others, it can be a challenging time of stress, disappointment, loneliness, etc. This versatile prompt allows our students to share whatever their unique experience is like while also keeping it open to a variety of holidays and cultural traditions.

If students choose to pass, it is ok. Just give them one more chance to share after their peers have gone.

After completing the "Roses and Thorns" circle, invite students to point out some common themes they noticed about everyone's roses and thorns. This is a helpful way to validate what has been said in the circle.

Step 4: Full Circle Check-out

With the talking piece, ask each student to share how they think that went using 3-5 words, before transitioning back to the day's agenda.

"IT IS THE SUPREME ART OF THE TEACHER TO AWAKEN JOY IN CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND KNOWLEDGE."

- ALBERT EINSTEIN

CULTURE COUNTS

Tips for helping students with trauma during stressful times

By Dan Hesler

The holiday season can be a very joyful time and create many positive memories/experiences for many; however, at the same time, the holiday season can add extra stressors for both staff and students.

Many of our students thrive with the structure and the predictable environment that is created within the school setting.

Students with past trauma can have a hard time around the holidays. Many students might be triggered by the holiday themes created in our classrooms, causing either a trauma flashback or trauma reenactment. It is imperative that we use helping strategies if we are seeing this occur in our classrooms.

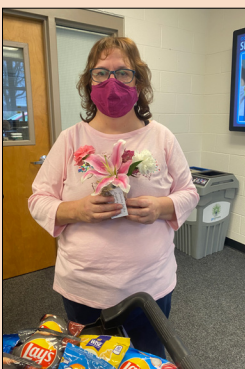
During the holiday season, students need extra support with self-regulation, and staff should also keep in mind the importance of asking trauma-informed questions.

Need some tips for how to accomplish this? The strategies listed in the box (at right) can help.

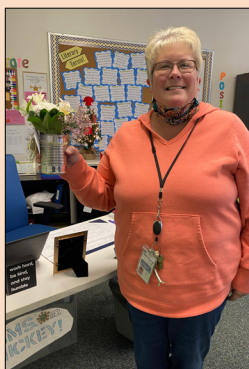
Helping Strategies

- Keep to the routine as much as possible.
- Provide opportunities for self-regulation, including:
 - Breathing activities
 - Mindfulness activities
- Use active listening when responding to students
 - "I am sorry you are having a hard time."
 - "It looks like you are very frustrated."
- Instead of asking how your weekend was or how your holiday was, ask the following Trauma-Informed Questions:
 - What is one kind thing someone said to you?
 - What is one kind thing you did for someone?
 - What is one thing you are grateful for?
 - What is something you are good at?

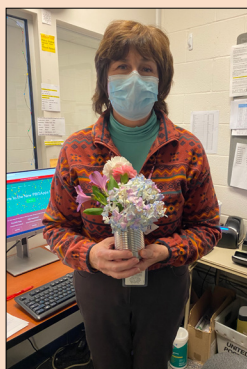
The power of flowers - and kindness. Here are some additional smiles from staff members at Crown Road Campus who received a bouquet of flowers recently from students in the OCM BOCES Transition Program at Onondaga Community College.



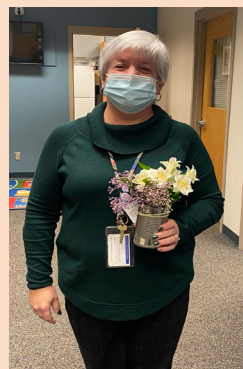
Megan Ladouceur



Michelle Hickey



Sue Dominic



Brenda Cussen



Chrissy Woodring