

# Supporting Parents in Transformational Times:

## Meeting the Unique Social and Emotional Needs of Their Gifted Children



**St. Charles CUSD 303**

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# What is Giftedness?



**“Giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm. This asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching, and counseling in order for them to develop optimally.”**

**Columbus Group, 1991**

# Characteristics-Affective



## PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS

- Insightfulness
- Need to understand
- Need for mental stimulation
- Perfectionism
- Need for precision/logic
- Excellent sense of humor
- Sensitivity/empathy
- Intensity
- Perseverance
- Acute self-awareness
- Nonconformity
- Questioning of rules/authority
- Tendency toward introversion



Source: Silverman, 1993

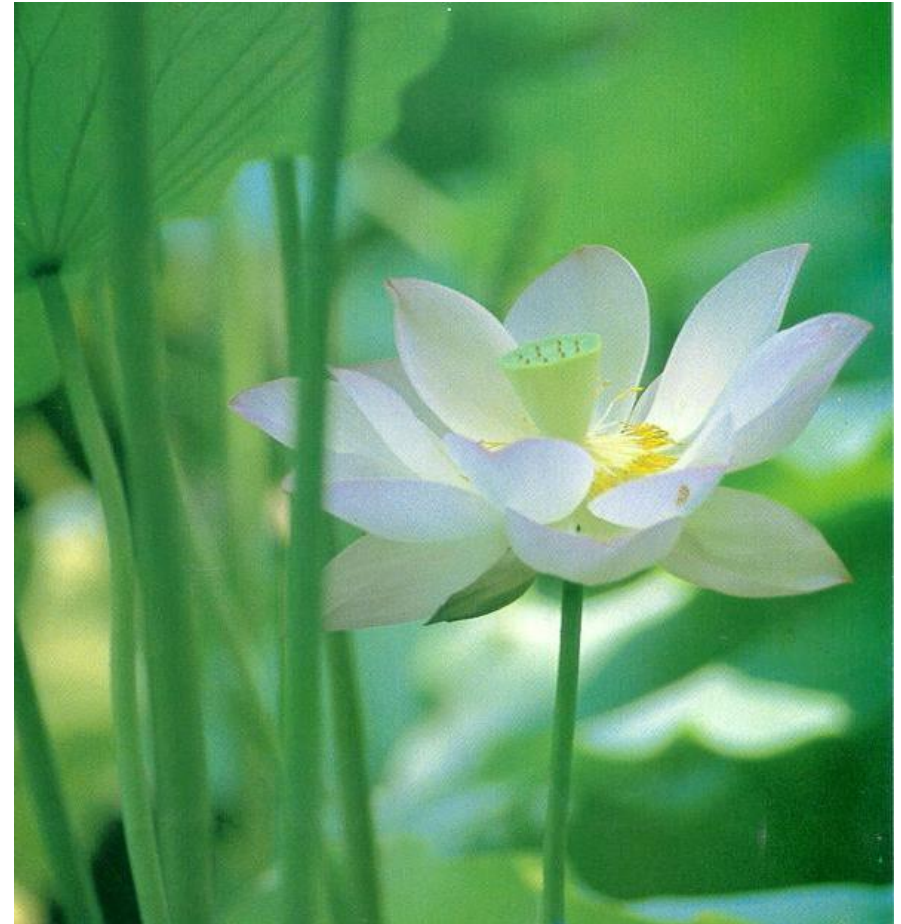


# Characteristics- Emotional Sensitivity



- Deep interpersonal relationships;
- Heightened awareness of the feelings of others;
- Heightened awareness to the emotional tone of surroundings;
- Confusion surrounding the lack of perceived concern of others;
- Feeling compelled to act on empathy, concern for others, environment; or
- Possible somatic (i.e., physical) expressions; incongruity with words/actions of others; lack of vocabulary to explain feelings.

Source: Kane & Zakoian, 2014

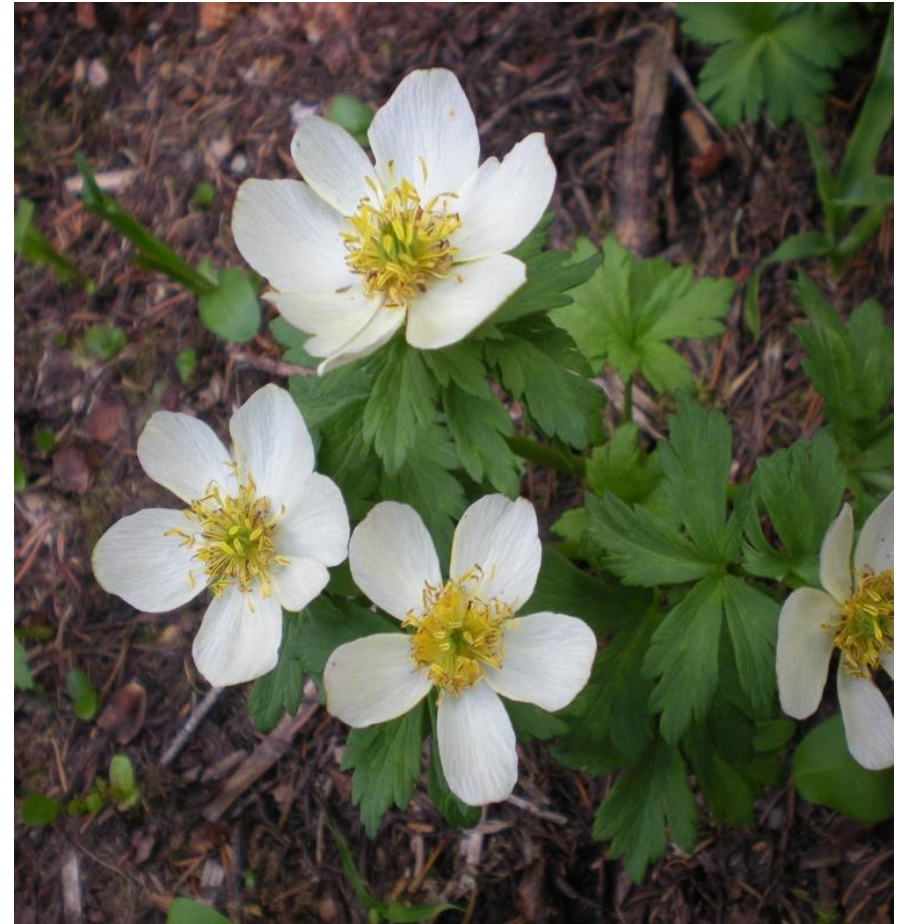


# Characteristics-Intuitive



- Early involvement and intuitive knowing,
- Interest in metaphysical ideas and phenomena,
- Advanced metaphorical thinking to solve problems (e.g. snake swallowing tail-Crick and Watson DNA)
- Creative approach to all endeavors,
- Ability to predict/interest in the future (FPS activities)

Source: Clark, 2013



# Recognize the Differences for Gifted People



## PERSONAL

- Emotions connected to expectations and perceived competence-tyranny of competence; perfectionism
- Lack of knowledge of own giftedness
- Increased duration, frequency, and intensity of emotion
- Lack of understanding by others

## SOCIAL

- Strong emotions may overwhelm others
- Competence perceived as threatening by some; bullying?
- Recognize the emotions of others and struggle with acceptance of the negativity exuded by others



(Kane, 2017)



# Why is Well-being Important?



According to National Institute for Mental Health in the United States:

**“Just over 20 percent (or 1 in 5) children, either currently or at some point during their life, have had a seriously debilitating mental disorder.”**

<https://www.nimh.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-disorder-among-children.shtml>



According to the CDC in the United States:

**In 2021, more than 4 in 10 (42%) students felt persistently sad or hopeless and nearly one-third (29%) experienced poor mental health.**

CDC's [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Data Summary & Trends Report: 2011-2021](#)

# Stress and Learning Don't Mix



**“Stressed kids can’t learn. The brain does not focus well; it does not integrate information, it does not remember information well when it learns.”**

**“Being highly stressed also disrupts the architecture of the brain and places kids at a greater risk for anxiety and depression as they age.”**

**William Stixrud, Clinical Neuropsychologist**



# The Concern for Well-being



- **Some gifted children are overwhelmed by emotions related to global issues: homelessness, war, famine, disease**
- **intense concern for others can also threaten emotional well-being**
- **may feel powerless to act; no agency**
- **may feel overwhelmed by the emotional intensity of those around them and**
- **may experience stress, anxiety, and inner turmoil**



# The Concerns Post-pandemic



- Sense of **uncertainty** still abounds
- **Varied viewpoints** and worldviews of significant others (national leaders/teachers/parents/important family) adds to lack of emotional equilibrium
- **Decision fatigue** personally and interpersonally can be all consuming
- Enhanced need for **restoration and replenishment** can be **difficult** in competitive academic/athletic arenas
- **Concerns** about preparation for “next time”

# Why is This Relevant for Gifted Kids?



- Research by Dabrowski and others suggests that the gifted have greater developmental potential for higher level moral development as well as *unique ethical sensitivity*
- May relate to the complexity of moral issues and the intellectual demands involved in ethical judgment (Silverman, 1993)—this implies that strong feelings and strong intellect *needs guidance for pro-social development*
- New research related to HBHB (hyperbrain/hyperbody) has implications for *predispositions to psychological and physiological diagnoses* due to overexcitabilities (Karpinski, et al., 2017)
- *Mental illness* including stress and anxiety has *dramatically increased* since 2010 in children/adolescents and gifted kids are affected differently



# Stress & Anxiety: Helping Gifted Kids Cope



## Hans Selye



### Definition

- A term coined by endocrinologist Hans Selye
- “The non-specific response of the body to any demand placed upon it.”

### Implications

- Life is filled with change and adaptation
- Stress is universal and experienced by everyone
- Stress is physical; however, reactions are unique
- Awareness of personal reactions is essential
- Identifying sources of change and resulting stress can be helpful



# Stress & Anxiety: Helping Gifted Kids Cope



## Hans Selye



### Distress

Caused by negative situations

- Underachievement
- Multiple passions
- World events
- External pressures
- Internal pressures
- Illness/injury
- Intensity/sensitivity/perfectionism

### Eustress

Caused by positive situations

- All A's; high grades/scores
- Top prizes
- First class performer
- Attractive
- Highly creative, innovative
- Social competence

# Stress & Anxiety: Helping Gifted Kids Cope



## Sources of Stress for Gifted People

### Situational

- Conflict between our values and the values of others (what is and what ought to be)
- interpersonal disharmony
- lack of intellectual stimulation or challenge
- challenges beyond our capability to respond
- threats to emotional or physical well-being
- lack of resources to accomplish a task
- time constraints

### Self-Imposed

- setting excessively high standards for ourselves
- fear of failure, fear of success
- negative self-talk
- emotionally loaded/highly evaluative beliefs about ourselves and our environment
- believing that everyone should love, respect, and praise us
- buying into others' negative evaluations of us
- catastrophizing
- worrying

### Existential

- global concerns (e.g., nuclear disaster, war, poverty, world hunger, the environment)
- idealism
- anger at fate
- isolation
- need for meaning and purpose

# Stress & Anxiety: Helping Gifted Kids Cope



## Giftedness and Perfectionism-Two-sided Coin

### Immobilize

- Lack of challenge and/or stimulation may lead to creating complexity
- Competition for grades/prizes
- Accustomed to success; failure avoidant
- Incapable of meeting inner standards or meeting expectations of others
  - Paralysis
  - Underachievement

### Energize

- Passionate drive to create
  - Move beyond limits thought possible
  - Experience “flow”
- Envision possibilities where none exist
- Push beyond reasonable limits
- Experience great joy commensurate with the struggle

# Channeling Perfectionism



## Teachers Can Help

- Provide rigorous and challenging work
- Ensure opportunities to struggle
- Praise for effort not achievement
- Develop safe environment for risk-taking
- Focus on learning experiences not only the final product
- Allow for multiple attempts to work toward mastery

## Parents Can Help

- Appreciate the trait
- Reframe “mistakes” as learning experiences
- Model how to set priorities for yourself
- Model how to initiate project (or two or three) instead of procrastinating
- Recognize the positive and negative aspects of perfectionism



# Two Things Heard in Schools/Homes



**CALM DOWN**

**PAY ATTENTION**



**Can we teach our kids to do these things?**

**Can they learn to find a quiet spot inside and focus?**

**YES they can!!**

# Protective Factors and Tools for Coping



- **Gratitude**
- **Optimism**
- **Emotional Courage**
- **Kindness**
- **Mindfulness/Attention/Compassion**

6

habits of  
happiness  
worth  
cultivating

**PAY ATTENTION**

Studies show that mindful people have stronger immune systems and are less likely to be hostile or anxious.

**GIVE THANKS**

Research reveals the enormous power of simply counting our blessings. Regular expressions of gratitude promote optimism, better health, and greater satisfaction with life.

**DROP GRUDGES**

When we forgive those who have wronged us, we feel better about ourselves, experience more positive emotions, and feel closer to others.

**PRACTICE KINDNESS**

Being kind to others makes us feel good. Altruistic acts light up the same pleasure centers in the brain as food and sex.

**KEEP FRIENDS CLOSE**

Social connections are key to happiness. Research indicates it's quality more than quantity. Make time for those closest to you.

**GET MOVING**

Regular exercise increases self-esteem, reduces anxiety and stress, and may well be the most effective instant happiness booster of all.

# GRATITUDE



**“Gratitude has one of the strongest links to mental health and satisfaction with life of any personality trait—more so than optimism, hope, or compassion.”**

(Emmons, 2013, p.9)





# Gratitude: Three Aspects of Appreciation



## *1. Noting Gratitude to Oneself:*

**Note to oneself things that one can be grateful for (on a weekly basis)**

## *2. Savoring:*

**Note to oneself or others what one appreciates aesthetically, like a beautiful sunset, a good meal; mindfulness**

## *3. Expressing Gratitude to Others:*

**Express appreciation to those people one values**



# Activity:

## *Three-Good-Things Exercise*



**We instruct the students to write down daily three good things that happened each day for a week. The three things can be small in importance (“I answered a really hard question right in language arts today”) or big (“The guy I’ve liked for months asked me out!!!”).**

**Next to each positive event, they write about one of the following: “Why did this good thing happen?” “What does this mean to you?” “How can you have more of this good thing in the future?”**





**Early work on developing optimism by Martin Seligman in *The Optimistic Child*.**

**The program includes the cognitive elements of:**

- **Catching automatic thoughts,**
- **Evaluating thoughts,**
- **Challenge automatic thoughts with accurate explanations,**
- **De-catastrophizing.**

# Optimistic Explanatory Style



- **One of the most essential elements in fostering optimism is for children to see models of an optimistic explanatory style.**
  
- **Adults can help by:**
  - Reframing an experience realistically; acknowledge the unpleasant or negative and balance with positive (not Pollyanna)
  - Accept negative reactions and provide alternative explanations
  - Help coach or use social stories to provide alternative explanations





# Promoting Kindness



- **Smile cards-random acts**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pglINepdQUE&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.kindspring.org/>

- **Kindness curriculum**

<https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum>

- **Healing power of kindness**

<http://ccare.stanford.edu/>

- **Kids Can: Children Changing the World**

<http://www.nick.tv/together-for-good/>

<https://www.servicespace.org/about/cubs/?nid=97>

"The brain circuits important for social emotional learning interact with circuits that are important for cognitive learning – so if one is anxious, stressed or emotionally unbalanced, this has deleterious effects on the circuitry for other types of learning."

Richard Davidson,  
Center for Healthy Minds



# WHAT IS EMOTIONAL COURAGE?



**Emotional courage is the ability:**

- to stand in one's truth with authenticity
- to strive for compassion, empathy, and kindness (for self and others)
- to live with respect for the planet and the life that it holds.



**(Kane, 2015)**

# WHY IS EMOTIONAL COURAGE ESSENTIAL?



- Can be overwhelming as a gifted youngster to understand the magnitude of the world's ills and feel unable to respond in a meaningful and purposeful way
- To self-advocate and have the courage of personal convictions can be daunting when faced with a solo voice—skills are needed
- Complexity of the gifted child's inner world converges with real-life dilemmas and the stressors in their life escalates
- Asynchronous development may lead to feelings of alienation and isolation



# EMOTIONAL COURAGE and ERRORS



**We all make mistakes. Think about a time that you made a fairly significant mistake.**

**What was your self-talk?**

**How did you tell the story? To your family? To your friends? To your kids?**

**Provide the tools that are needed to help overcome feelings of failure after making mistakes. How can you model emotional courage?**

**Our task must be to free ourselves by  
widening our circle of compassion to  
embrace all living creatures and the whole  
of nature and its beauty.**

**- Albert Einstein-**





# What are Contemplative Practices?



- **Contemplative practices quiet the mind in order to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight.**
  
- **Contemplative practices have the potential to:**
  - to bring different aspects of one's self into focus,
  - to help develop personal goodness and compassion, and
  - to awaken an awareness of the interconnectedness of all





- **Contemplative practice have the potential to:**
  - help people develop greater empathy and communication skills,
  - improve focus and concentration,
  - reduce stress and enhance creativity.
- **Over time, these practices cultivate insight, inspiration, and a loving and compassionate approach to life.**
- **They are practical, radical, and transformative.**



Source: <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/>

# Contemplative Practices to Strengthen Well-Being and Calm



**Purpose: quiet the mind, focus attention, adopt a receptive attitude**

- mind-body connecting; walk the labyrinth
- visualization
- practice imagery/fantasy
- deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation
- Tai-chi; Brain Gym
- bibliotherapy, cinematherapy
- journaling
- experiences in nature
- time with pet
- artistic practices (calligraphy, mandalas)



# TWO VERY DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS MADE INCREDIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO OUR UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS



## 1) A Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh

### ART AND SCIENCE



## 2) A Physician, Dr. Jon Kabat Zinn



# What is Mindfulness?



**Mindfulness is paying attention to your life, here and now, with kindness and curiosity.**

**Dr. Amy Saltzman**





# What is Mindfulness?



***"Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment."***

***- Jon Kabat-Zinn***

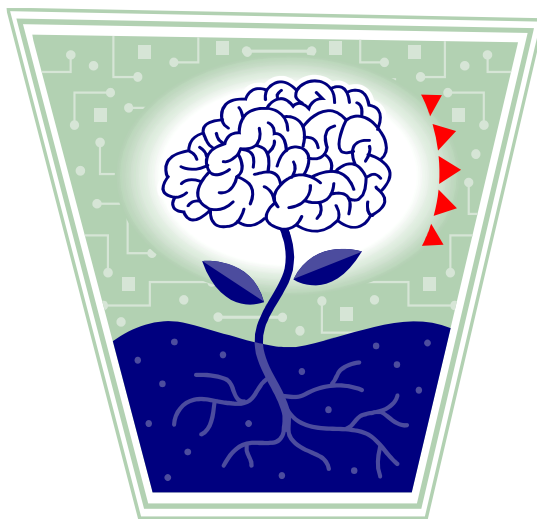


# Cognitive Science Agrees



**“Neuroscience supports the idea that developing the reflective skills of mindsight activates the very circuits that create resilience and well-being and that underlie empathy and compassion.”**

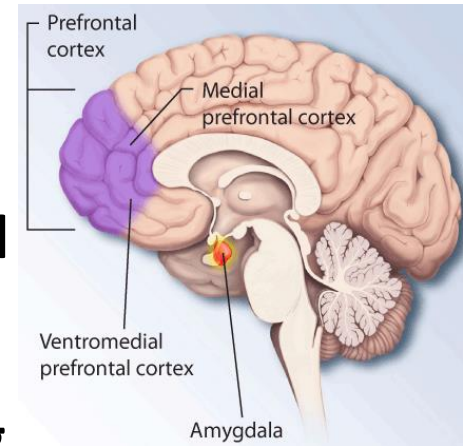
**(Siegel, p. iv)**



# They are SO smart! Why doesn't this come easily like everything else?



- Executive Functions are developmental—they take time to unfold
- The prefrontal cortex is the last part of the brain to come online—some say not fully developed in males around age 25
- Expectations of self and others is that this should be easy but there can be significant struggles
- Confusion about how my mind/body is betraying me---not in synch
- No one talks about it; seems as if everyone else is managing just fine



# Mindfulness Microbursts: Any time & Anywhere



- Mindful walking
- Three deep breaths (in through the nose and out through the mouth)
- Savor the moment using your senses
- Positive self-talk
- Affirmations directed towards self or others
- Smile inward and/or smile outward with intention
- Listen deeply
- Cloud appreciation/watching rain/ponder shadows
- Sitting still like a statue
- Body scan then tighten and release tension



# The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education



- **Compassion unfolds in response to suffering, beginning with our recognition of it**
- **Expanding beyond mindfulness, compassion arises both on the personal level of our individual relationships and on the global level of cultures and nations interacting with one another**
- **With compassion, our empathy for the suffering of others can give rise to altruism – bringing immediate and long-term happiness and tranquility to our lives**



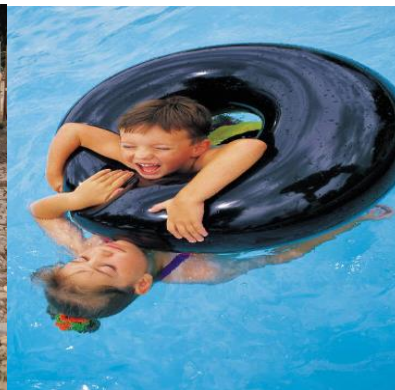
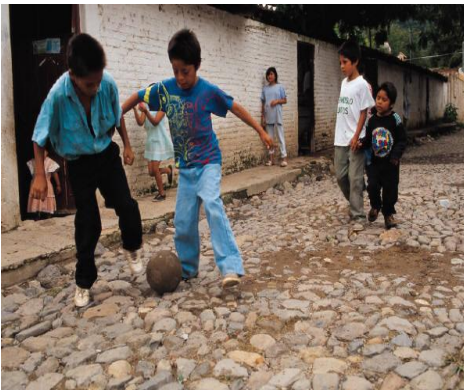


# Fostering Compassion



**"...our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people. This is a morally defensible aim for education in the 21st century."**

**(Noddings, 1992)**



# Tools to Strengthen Emotional Empathy



**Teach self-soothing techniques that are aligned to personal style such as:**

**meditation,**

**visualization,**

**deep breathing,**

**mindfulness,**

**yoga,**

**journaling, calligraphy**

**Singing/chanting**

- **Develop strong grounding practices and spend time in nature**
- **Create a “feelings vocabulary” for deeper understanding**
- **Use active listening techniques**



# Tools to Strengthen Personal Compassionate Empathy-Start with YOU!



- **Model self-care to your children/students/co-workers and let others know that it is OK to take time for relaxing and recharging**
- **Start small and be aware of the effectiveness of small steps (Loving-kindness meditation)**
- **Share what you have learned with others (pay it forward)**
- **Limit the amount of negativity when you are able (self-monitor violent images)**
- **Work to maintain overall balance in all areas**



# Compassion Training: A Skill to Be Learned



## Daily Practices for Well-Being at Work

- 5** Mindfully meditate five minutes each day
- 3** Identify three good things each evening
- 1** Extend at least one act of kindness each day

<http://investigatinghealthyminds.org/compassion.html>

# From Feeling to Doing

The Darley and Batson (1973) study helped to define compassion as being more than empathy and sympathy. Compassion involves action, doing something to help.





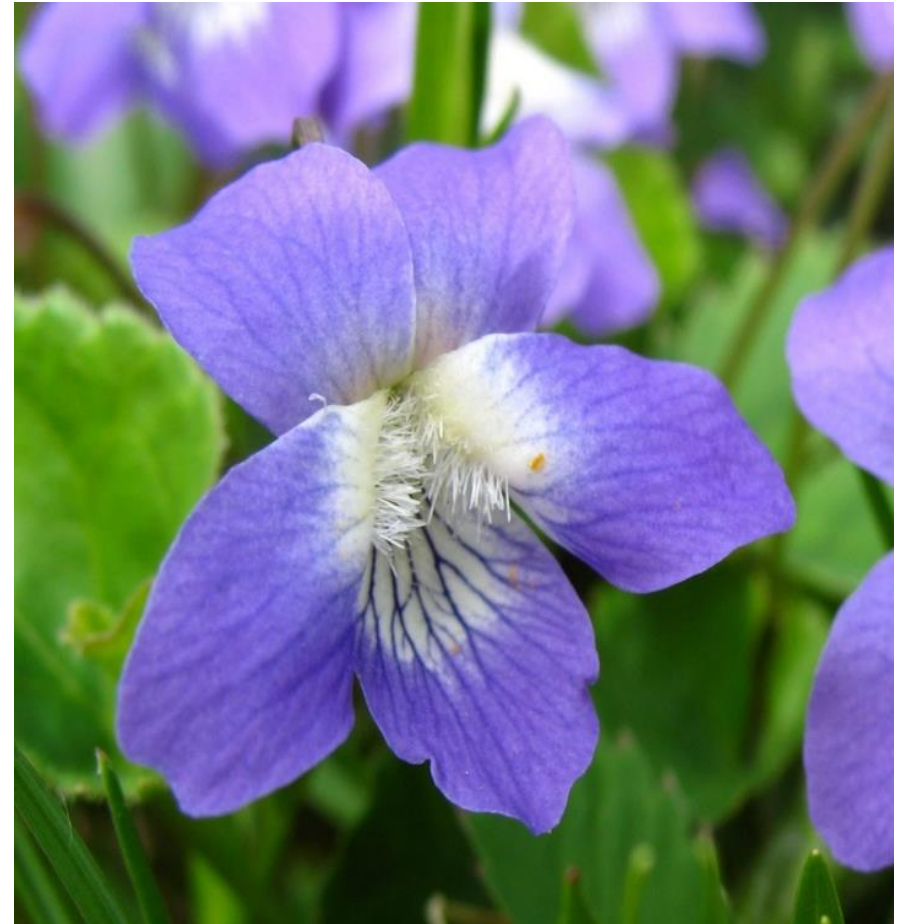
# BENEFIT MINDSET



**Everyday leaders who seek to ‘be well’ and ‘do good’**

**Focus purposefully on *why* they do what they do**

**Believes in developing their strengths and meaningfully contributes to a future of greater possibility**



# Ash Buchanan's Benefit Mindset



## BENEFIT MINDSET EXAMPLES

**Sharing gifts and talents**

**Expressing gratitude**

**Strengthening relationships**

**Contributing to the environment**

**Promoting social justice**

**Being a good listener**

[benefitmindset.com](http://benefitmindset.com)

[#benefitmindset](https://twitter.com/benefitmindset)

# The Power of Service Learning



- ▶ **Provide examples of the “power of one”**
- ▶ **Explore areas of passion aligned with ways to be of service**
- ▶ **Think globally, act locally and think globally, act globally**
- ▶ **Encourage a sense of community in the child’s school, neighborhood (actual or virtual)**
- ▶ **Connect with like-minded families (Honeycomb project-  
<https://www.thehoneycombproject.org/>)**
- ▶ **Provide opportunities to be of service**



(Kane, 2009)

# How can adults help?



- **Model emotional courage, mindfulness, to myself and for others; participate and practice**
- **Provide opportunities to experience optimism, empathy, and compassion at home and school**
- **Foster inner growth by sharing stories/anecdotes of spiritual pathfinders**
- **Demonstrate to or invite those who are "intense" the many ways to seek peace and inter-connectedness**
- **Explore the different pathways of experiencing mindfulness with gifted youngsters.**

# Closing



*Breathing in I calm my body...*

*Breathing out I smile...*

*Dwelling in the present moment,  
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

*-Thich Nhat Hanh, 2010*



*American Wildflower Meadow*

Special thanks to Kathy Nilles for slidedeck design



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[www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu](http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu)

## **Mindfulness in Education Network:**

[www.mindfulled.org](http://www.mindfulled.org)

## **Center for Investigating Healthy Minds**

[www.investigatinghealthyminds.org](http://www.investigatinghealthyminds.org)

## **Compassion: Bridging Practice and Science**

<http://www.compassion-training.org/>

## **The Science of a Meaningful Life**

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

## **National Association for Gifted Children –Family Support**

[https://nagc.org/page/family\\_tip\\_sheets](https://nagc.org/page/family_tip_sheets)

# APPS



## Stop, Breathe, and Think:

Free mobile app that is suitable for young people and contains mindfulness and compassion exercises. Children as young as 2-3 can begin to access mindful sitting for brief periods of time.

## Calm:

Free website and mobile app with guided meditation and relaxation exercises

## Insight Timer:

Free mobile app with many variations of bells and tones to help guide practice

## Headspace:

Free app with guided meditations for all ages.

## MindShift:

Developed by AnxietyBC, this free mobile app was designed for teens with an emphasis on coping and mindfulness