

Other animals, in a constant and mostly unmediated relation with their sensory surrounding, think with the whole of their bodies.

—David Abram



EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning

Body Maps: Feeling Emotions in the Body

Level: Lower Elementary (K-2)

Timeframe: 20-30 minutes

Concepts:

- Coping Skills
- Emotional Literacy
- Mind-Body Connection



Big Ideas For This Lesson

We have all heard children describe their **emotions** in relation to a physical space in their body. When sad or lonely, a child might say, “My heart hurts;” when nervous or excited we often hear the phrase, “I have butterflies in my stomach;” or when overwhelmed with joy it may feel like, “My chest is exploding.” These **metaphors** have long existed in human language, but are there more to them than simple metaphors? Is it possible that there are universal, physical locations of emotions in the human body? A growing number of scientists seem to think so.

In a recent [Bodily Maps of Emotions](#)¹ study, over 700 participants were asked to paint where they felt certain emotions on a blank silhouette of a body. Researchers found remarkable similarities in the location and expression of emotions in the human body. This, in combination with the increasingly large body of [Mind-Body Research](#)² gathered over the last decade, suggests that there is a distinct link between our mind and our body. Simply put - our thoughts and emotions have a clear physical effect on our body.

So why is this important and how can you teach it to your students? Using mindfulness as a lens, we can help students to first recognize various **physical sensations** in their body and then to reflect on what particular emotion or event each physical sensation is related to. Awareness is the first step to change in any situation. If we want to help students regulate their emotions we must first help them be aware that they are having emotions. The human body happens to be a perfectly tuned early warning system to keep us in touch with our emotional state. Through increased awareness comes increased self-regulation. Helping young children through a difficult emotional experience starts by, “Where do you feel it in your body?”



Essential Vocabulary

Body Map
Body Scan
Emotions
Metaphor
Physical Sensations
Sticky Emotions

Materials

- Crayons or colored pencils for the Body Map: SEL Journal
- Emotions in Your Body Themed Read-Alouds (Optional):
 - [Grump Groan Growl](#) by bell hooks
 - [Sometimes I'm Bombaloo](#) by Rachel Vail
 - [The Way I Feel](#) by Janan Cain



Preparation

1. Draw a silhouette of a body on the board similar to the templates the students will be using.
2. Practice a [Body Scan](#)³ on your own.



Teaching Script

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

Teaching Note: This lesson is best taught through direct experience. While some introduction is necessary, try to limit explanation on the front end, allow plenty of time for practice and reflection, and then provide follow-up information after the lesson is complete.

Remind students that since their last SEL lesson, they've been working hard to name their feelings and emotions.

Then simply ask students:

| *Can we feel emotions in our body? Where do we feel them?*

Teaching Note: If these questions seem to be too complex for your students, prompt them a bit more by asking, "Has anyone ever heard someone say, 'I've got butterflies in my tummy,' or 'I have a broken heart.?' They are giving you clues to where they are feeling those emotions in their body! When someone is nervous, they might feel it in their tummy. When someone is sad, they might feel it in their heart. When someone is mad, they might feel it in the chest or their head. Where in your body do you feel your emotions?"

Encourage students to reflect on a particular experience of an emotion (e.g., joy, anger, fear, excitement, sadness). Then prompt them to remember where they felt it in their body.

You may need to coach students away from storytelling (e.g., "One time I was mad at my brother...") with simple and direct questions like, "What was the emotion you felt at that time?" or "Where in your body did you feel that emotion?"

For students who are struggling to make the connection, provide them with cues such as, "It sounds like you were angry. Where do you feel anger in your body? In your chest? In your hands? In your head?"

This is an excellent point in the lesson to read-aloud one of the feeling emotions in your body themed stories. Often, it is easier for young children to recognize the feelings and emotions of characters in stories than it is for them to recognize and name their own feelings and emotions.



GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

Teaching Note: Once the class has discussed a few concrete examples of feeling emotions in their body, it is time to guide them through a direct experience of a body scan. The body scan is a highly effective method for increasing self-awareness and self-regulation. The basic premise of the body scan is to direct attention to different parts of the body in sequential order, typically beginning with the toes and moving to the head.

To keep young children engaged in this meditation, it's best to make it a little silly. One recommendation is to use a robot voice. Tell students that you have been trained as a 'Stress-Bot' and can teach them how to scan their bodies for feelings. You can choose to ask the questions below rhetorically or actually have students provide answers after each body part.

The following abbreviated version of a body scan meditation has been adapted from [Stress Bot: Do the Body Scan](#).⁴

Have students find their mindful bodies and cue them through at least three mindful breaths.

- a. *Put your hands on your head. Close your eyes. How is your head feeling? Do you see any colors?*
- b. *Keep your eyes closed. Put your hands on our heart. How is your heart beating? Fast? Slow?*
- c. *Hold out your hands so that they touch (open your eyes to see how I'm doing it). Now close your eyes. How are your hands feeling? Cool? Warm? Soft?*
- d. *Rub your hands together. Slowly. Now quickly! Stop! How do they feel?*
- e. *Put your hands on your belly. Big belly breath in. Big belly breath out. Are your hands moving up and down? How does your belly feel?*
- f. *Put your hands on your knees. Give them a little squeeze.*
- g. *Wiggle your toes. How are they feeling?*
- h. *Let's all take one more, big belly breath together and then open our eyes.*



REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

If you allowed the questions during the scan to be rhetorical, then facilitate a group discussion at the end of the guided practice. If you discussed the questions with the students as you went along, then skip to the Body Map: SEL Journal Page reflection. Questions for reflection could include:

- “How was your body feeling?”
- “Did you see any colors?”
- “Was your heart beating fast or slow?”
- “How did your hands feel? Cool? Soft? Warm?”
- “What did your hands feel like after you rubbed them together?”
- “What did your belly feel like when you did the big belly breaths?”

Once we start to notice where we feel certain emotions, we can recognize these signs early and calm ourselves down before having a tantrum or getting angry. For example, if I notice my fists clenching up, that can be my signal to take a break and cool down.

For our journal page today, we are going to color in a body map of where we felt an emotion in our body when we did our Stress-Bot Body Scan.

Show students the Body Map: SEL Journal Page with the body outline. Allow at least 10 minutes of drawing and reflection.



EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

Reflect on it

- *What emotions did you notice?*
- *Where did you feel these in your body?*
- *What did they look like or feel like?*
- *Would anyone like to share what they drew?*
- *Did anyone have any really ‘sticky’ emotions? Were you able to get ‘unstuck’?*
- *Did anything change once you took time to notice your emotion?*
- *How can you do this on your own?*
- *When would it be helpful?*

Journal it

Have students complete the Feeling Faces: SEL Journal Page for this lesson, drawing faces showing different feelings. Allow students to use mirrors (if you have them) to see their own faces expressing the emotions!



EXTENSIONS

Classroom

- Keep copies of blank Body Maps in the cool down area for student use along with drawing materials and emotional vocabulary chart.
- Practice the [Stress Bot: Body Scan](#)⁴ and Body Maps daily this week and re-visit throughout the school year as needed.
- Promote empathy by encouraging students to share the pictures of their Body Maps.

School-wide

- Use questions, “*What emotion are you feeling?*” and “*Where do you feel that in your body?*” as de-escalation strategies.
- Link Body Maps to art projects, either in art class or homerooms.
- Combine this lesson with anatomy lessons where applicable.
- Link “feeling emotions in body” to Physical Education through noticing how different emotions and physical activities affect heart rate, pulse, etc.



REFERENCES

1. Nummenmaa, L., Glerean, E., & Hietanen, J. (2013, December 30). Bodily maps of emotions. Retrieved July 1, 2015, from <http://www.pnas.org/content/111/2/646.abstract>
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3. UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center. (n.d.). Free Guided Meditations. Retrieved April 14, 2016, from <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>
4. Kids Relaxation. (2012, March 26). Stress Bot: Do The Body Scan. Retrieved from <http://kidsrelaxation.com/uncategorized/stress-bot-do-the-body-scan/>