

A HURRICANE IN MY HEAD

Learning to use mindfulness



Target competency	Use lifestyle habits that contribute to well-being
Cross-curricular competency (QEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construct their identity
General objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience the potential benefits of mindfulness Focus on breathing and its variations Use various strategies to calm oneself

REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS WORKSHOP

In the last workshop, we talked about social influences. Do you remember the challenge I gave you? Tell me how it went.

* The challenge was to assert yourself by stating your disagreement when someone tried to influence you negatively.

THE ADVENTURES OF LEO AND CHARLIE

The moon has risen over Camp OFF-TRAIL and this year's adventure is almost over. It's the last night before going home. Charlie is lying in her sleeping bag, eyes wide open. She can't fall asleep.

Quietly, Charlie confides to Leo: "So much has happened! I feel really weird. I'm so glad I went climbing. The rock was beautiful. And it was great seeing you act so brave... But William and Louis were really mean with their awful prank. I can still see all those bugs crawling around! So gross! And the campfire! The barbecue supper! Yum! Oh, wait! I really can't forget to put my flashlight and gloves back in my bag. We're leaving early tomorrow morning... I feel so tired and mixed up."

Charlie then turns to Leo, who looks all peaceful and relaxed in his sleeping bag, and asks: "Leo? Are you asleep? I'm talking to you!"

"Yes! I'm asleep. At least... I'm trying," groans Leo.

"It's just that I can't sleep. It's like there's a hurricane in my head," apologizes Charlie.

Leo replies reassuringly: "Calm down, Charlie. Those are just thoughts. Breathe through your nose and close your eyes."

DID YOU KNOW?

Practicing mindfulness over the long term improves overall well-being.

The attitudes of openness, curiosity, kindness and non-judgment, among others conveyed in the mindfulness approach, help us to step back from certain situations and disconnect our autopilot. They also enable us to recognize our thoughts, sensations and emotions as harmless, even when they cause discomfort, by regarding them as temporary.

In fact, this is what can lead students to change their self-perception, integrating the idea that just because they don't feel comfortable or competent at that moment doesn't mean it will always be that way. Mindfulness puts self-awareness back into perspective by associating it with a context, rather than an immutable finality.

(Baer, 2003; Dutton, 2008; Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Before starting the activity, you'll need a clear container filled with water and coloured glitter. You can also use a snow globe to similar effect.
2. In connection with what Leo just said to Charlie, ask the students if they can explain in their own words what a "thought" is. Take their answers and use the glitter jar to illustrate the following:
 - Do you see the glitter in the container? Now, imagine that each speck of glitter is like a thought in your head. When you're feeling stressed or overwhelmed by emotions, your thoughts create a hurricane in your head (shake the jar to show them a storm of glitter). It's hard to see through this hurricane, sort of like what's been going on inside Charlie's head.
 - Do your thoughts ever feel like this? To facilitate the discussion, you can share a personal anecdote from a moment when your thoughts were racing.
3. Now place the container in front of you, motionless. Go on to say
 - Look at the glitter settling. Now you can see each piece, one by one. When you stop to breathe and take a step back, what happens to your thoughts? Exactly the same as with glitter: they settle down. Then you can pay more attention to them and understand them better.
4. Explain that this is what we call practicing mindfulness. Mindfulness means focusing all your attention on something that's happening in the present moment. It's about observing and feeling with curiosity and kindness what's going on inside and around you.
 - Can you think of anything that always takes place in the present moment, here and now? (For example: breathing, heartbeat, senses, body, etc.)
5. Ask the students to close their eyes if they wish and to concentrate on their breathing. Tell them to become aware of their sensations, the movement and rhythm of their breathing for a few minutes.
6. Then ask them to stand up. Ask them to move, dance, jump, etc. for a minute or two (you can play a catchy song). Bring them back to a sitting position and ask them to become aware of their breathing and sensations again for a moment.
7. Remind the students that just because they feel something specific right now doesn't mean they'll feel it forever. This also applies to their emotions and thoughts. Tell them it's enough to just welcome what's happening in the present moment, and if necessary, their breathing can always be a tool to help them calm down by becoming aware of themselves in the here and now. The advantage of using breathing is that it's always with us.
8. Add that sometimes they may prefer to use other ways to calm down, including things they learned in this year's OFF-TRAIL workshops. Suggest that they play a final game to remind themselves of the different ways they can promote their well-being. Along the same lines as the game "When I go on a trip, I pack...", play "When I have a hurricane in my head, I...", and list ways to calm down. If your students are unfamiliar with the game, use the supplementary sheet *When I have a hurricane in my head: Rules of the game* to explain the instructions.



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COMPLETION ACTIVITY

Explain to the students that this was the last day of Camp OFF-TRAIL for Leo and Charlie this year. Tell them that, even though camp is over, you encourage them to continue using the strategies they've learned to take care of themselves and feel good. Ask the students how they enjoyed the activities, what they remember, and what they learned. Use the reminder posters to help them or provide reminders as needed. The posters are available on the [OFF-TRAIL website](#), under Workshops and tools for students.

ENABLING REINVESTMENT

When you observe that a student is experiencing stress, emotional overload or racing thoughts, invite them to pause and use breathing to bring themselves back into the present moment. Then give them the *A hurricane in my head* handout and ask them to colour it in and, after they've calmed down, write the words that come to mind without forcing anything. You can then go back to them and get them to see things differently, more peacefully, with hindsight.

You can also take short breaks with students when they've been inactive so they can get up, stretch (by shaking themselves or doing a few small jumps), clear their minds by taking a few standing breaths, then bring their attention back to the present moment. Repeat these short breaks as needed throughout the day.

READING SUGGESTIONS

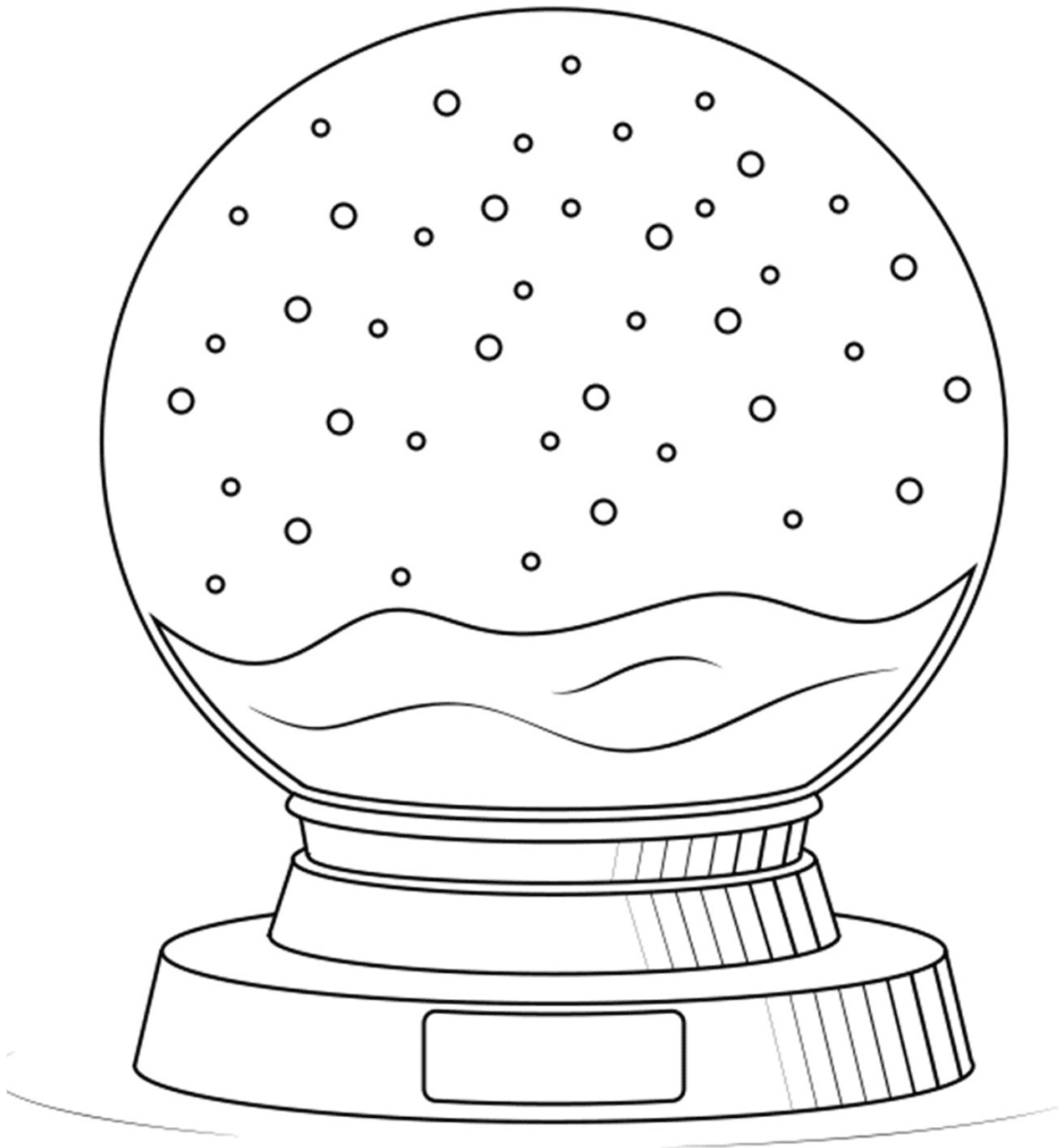
- Hanh, T.N. (2008). *Mindful Movements: Ten Exercises for Well-Being*. Parallax Press.



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HANDOUT TO PRINT
A hurricane in my head



SUPPLEMENTARY SHEET

When I have a hurricane in my head: Rules of the game

To play the game, the first student playing must say the words: “When I have a hurricane in my head, I...” and complete the sentence with a way to calm down. For example: “When I have a hurricane in my head, I concentrate on my breathing.”

The second student must take the first student's sentence and add a different way. For example: “When I have a hurricane in my head, I concentrate on my breathing and I go kick a ball.”

The goal is to compose the longest possible list of different ways, always naming them in the same order. When a player can't remember a way, makes a mistake, or adds a way that has already been named, the composition ends and the game starts over with the next student. If your students are having difficulty, you can also add collaborative self-help options (for example, if Student C can't remember the way named by Student B, they can ask Student B to silently mime their way). Students can also help each other think of new ways.

Define in advance the order in which students will take their turn (for example, starting with the first student at the back right of the class and continuing forwards, or clockwise if the students are in a circle). You can run this game with the whole class, asking students to remain in their seats, or form sub-groups so that more students can play simultaneously.

You can remind students of the OFF-TRAIL ways to calm down used in Grade 4, but above all you can suggest that they start with their own ways! Here are some of the ways we tried out during the OFF-TRAIL workshops: identifying our emotions, identifying our physical sensations, identifying our thoughts, doing gentle physical exercises, doing yoga, using cardiac coherence, asking for help, breathing, dancing, and bringing ourselves back into the present moment using a snow globe or jar of glitter.