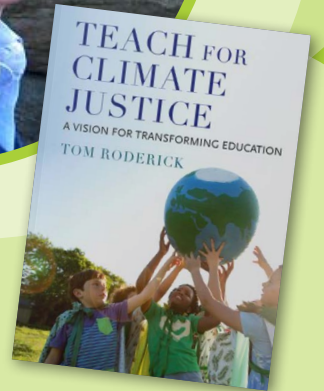
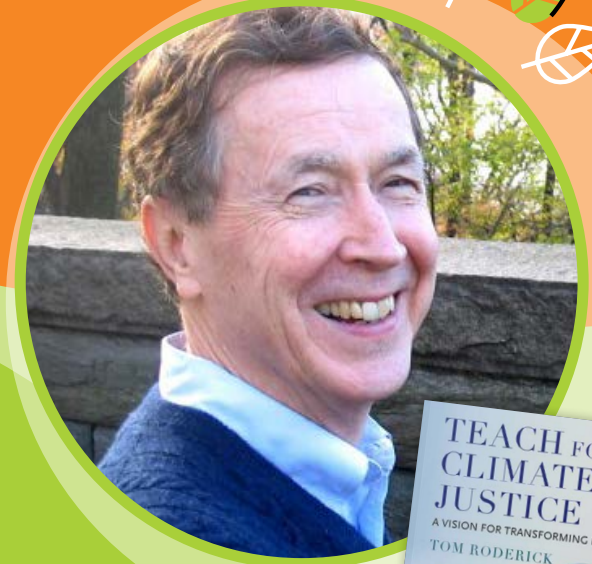


# RESOURCE PACKET



Tom Roderick,  
Educator &  
Award-Winning  
Author

Social and  
Emotional Learning:  
The Missing  
Piece to Address  
Climate Change





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# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: THE MISSING PIECE TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE

Today's youth face rising levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, with climate change adding to their worries. Educators are uniquely positioned to help students build the skills to understand, express, and manage the strong emotions triggered by climate change and other crises.

One Step partnered with Tom Roderick, long-time educator and award-winning author, to offer educators strategies, activities, and inspiration to support students in developing the skills and mindsets needed to address the climate challenges of today and the future.

Start by watching this on-demand webinar to listen to Tom share:

-  Why social and emotional learning is essential for effective climate education
-  Ways to create safe spaces for students to express themselves
-  Techniques for facilitating constructive conversations about climate change and other controversial topics
-  Approaches and action-oriented steps to help students create a better future

[Watch Webinar](#)

Then, dive into the rest of this packet to explore resources to support the activities and strategies Tom discusses and models in the webinar.

**ENJOY!**

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## What Is Social and Emotional Learning?

Morningside Center defines social and emotional learning (SEL) as the process by which we develop our capacity to understand and manage our feelings, relate well to others, deal well with conflict and other life challenges, make good decisions, and take responsibility for improving our communities — from the classroom to the world.



Each of these competencies is made up of a number of skills. For example,

**Understanding and managing our feelings** involves, among other things, the ability to be aware of and name our feelings, an understanding of the physical cues to emotions, insight into what triggers certain emotions, and the ability to express emotions appropriately and constructively.

**The ability to relate well to others** requires the ability to read the emotions of others, empathize, listen actively, and communicate assertively. It also includes the capacity to understand similarities and differences; to work respectfully across gender, race, ethnic, religious, economic, ability, and other types of differences; and to examine one's own assumptions and stereotypes.

**Dealing well with conflict and other life challenges** involves emotional self-management, effective listening and communication skills, and an understanding that what one asks for in conflict and what one really needs may not be the same. It also includes the ability to come up with alternative solutions to conflicts, skill in evaluating possible solutions, and a commitment to solving problems in a way that meets the real needs of all parties.



**Making good decisions** requires awareness of the motivations behind our choices; engages students' ability to assess the consequences of those choices; encourages students to think about how decisions they make will affect them, others, and the larger community; and helps students look back at decisions made and assess their impact.

**Taking responsibility for improving our communities** harnesses the skills described above in the service of social justice. It entails an understanding of what justice means and the ability to identify situations of injustice, as well as familiarity with the actions of those who have made a difference in our society. It also requires that students see themselves as capable of taking responsible action and are willing to take meaningful action, both individually and with others.

Taking time to slow down and focus on these skills is something that may be new to your students. Yet the ability to step back and notice our feelings and thoughts, as well as how we are interacting with others, is foundational to developing and using social and emotional competencies. Throughout the 4Rs curriculum, there are activities that help students to pay attention to their sensory experiences, thoughts, and emotions in the present moment. These activities may involve simply noticing their breathing, attending to sounds, or being more aware of their physical movements. Building this kind of awareness encourages students to pause, notice what is happening inside and outside themselves, and respond thoughtfully rather than react automatically. Research suggests that when these types of activities are used regularly, they may help students feel more centered, manage their emotions more effectively, and increase both attention and social-emotional competency.



## Group-Building Activities

These activities work best if students are seated in a circle, but you can adapt them to students seated in rows or at tables.

### Introductions

Start by saying your name and something you like to do in one word that ends in -ing. For example, "I'm Joshua, and I like swimming." Then ask a student to say their name and something they like to do in one word that ends in -ing. The student sitting next to that student says their name and something they like to do that ends in -ing. And so on, until everyone has had a chance to introduce themselves in this way.

### Stand Up and Applaud

This activity will help students learn about each other. Use the statements below and add others you think will work well with your students. You'll be asking students to stand if the statement is true for them. If the statement is true for you, you should stand as well.

Ask students to stand if they

- did something fun with a friend recently (what did they do?)
- play sports (which sport?)
- are into music (favorite artist?)
- have read a book recently that they'd recommend
- have a collection of some sort (what kind?)
- have a pet (what kind?)
- are into skateboarding
- went to a movie recently (which movie?)
- like pizza (what toppings?)
- took a trip during the summer (where?)
- After each standup, encourage a couple of students to share briefly.

Explain that now you're going to say a few more statements, and "This time, when students stand up, we're going to applaud for them." You'll lead the group in enthusiastic rounds of applause for these students.

Ask students to stand up if they:

- sometimes take care of younger children in their family [applause]
- speak more than one language (what languages?) [applause]
- play a musical instrument (what kind?) [applause]
- had their birthday in the past month [applause]
- helped somebody recently (what did they do?) [applause]

After the activity, ask the class, "How was this activity for you? What did you learn? How did you feel doing it?" Begin by responding to the question(s) yourself. Then ask student volunteers to share.

## Name Games

You'll need a soft ball or bean bag for this activity. Explain that you'll toss the ball to a student who will say their name, followed by the whole group together saying, "Yes!" That student throws the ball to someone who says their name followed by "Yes!" from the group. And so on, until all have had a turn to say their name and get their Yes.

**NOTE: Make sure the "Yes!" for each student's name is a strong "Yes!" Lead the way by shouting a strong "Yes!" If the students don't join you in a strong "Yes," tell them they can do better and have them repeat the "Yes!" (with you leading) until they make it strong.**

A variation on the name game: As students toss the ball to each other, the group will shout out the name of each student who catches the ball, until everyone has caught the ball. Do a couple of rounds.

## Birthday Lineup

Ask students to get up out of their seats. The object of the game is for them to line up in order according to when their birthdays occur during the year. Do they understand what they are supposed to do? There is a catch: during this activity there will be no talking.

When they are done, ask the person who believes they have the earliest birthday in the year to share their name, birth date, and something new and good in their life. Ask the rest of the students (in birthday order) to share these things as well.

Again, debrief the activity by asking students to take turns sharing their answers to each of the questions below:

- What was the activity like for you?
- What did you learn?
- How did we figure out where to place ourselves in relation to each other?

**Make up your own games to help students learn each other's names and get acquainted.**

# Community Agreements

The process described below for creating Community Agreements works best if spread over several days or meetings with the group.

## Values Important in our Friendships

Ask students what values are important to them in their friendships. For example, many people feel that honesty is important in a friendship. Ask students to share some other values that are important in a friendship. Call on a couple volunteers to share their thoughts.

Next ask students to think of a definition for the value they shared—what does that value mean to them? Model for students by saying, for example: “When I say I value honesty in a friendship, I mean ‘telling the truth.’” Hold up a sample paper plate decorated with the value and definition that you shared in your example.

Distribute paper plates and markers in an assortment of colors to students. Ask students to write down their value and their definition on the paper plate. Ask students to be creative and decorate their plate in a way that best highlights their value.

Give students about 15 min. to decorate their paper plates. Let students know that they will be presenting their values to the rest of the group in the next session. Collect paper plates at the end of the session.

## Sharing Our Values

Pass out value plates made in the last session to the students who created them. Give students a couple of minutes to review their values and definitions and to add anything if necessary.

Ask students to take turns presenting their value plates to the group. Ask students in presenting their artwork to talk about why their value is important to them in a friendship. After each student presents their work, they will display it on a bulletin board table along with all the others.

## Proposing Community Agreements

Explain that the class will now create Community Agreements so that the class will be fun, productive, and safe. Community Agreements are commitments that members make to each other about how they will treat one another. Community Agreements are values in action.

Suggest that students use their value definitions as inspiration for their Community Agreements. For example, the definition of honesty might lead to the community agreement “Tell the truth.”

Community agreements can also address behaviors for making the classroom safe and productive.





Go over the criteria for a good agreement, as follows:

- Positive: The agreement emphasizes the behavior we want rather than the behavior we don't want.
- Specific: The agreement describes specific behavior, for example, "One person talks at a time" or "Use put-ups, avoid put-downs" rather than a vague statement like "We respect each other."

Distribute colored index cards and pencils to the students. Ask the students to write their proposed agreement on their card.

Invite students to take turns sharing the proposed agreement they've written on their card and say why they believe it's important. They can place their card on the bulletin board or table along with their value plates.

As students read their proposed agreements, record their proposed agreements on chart paper.

After all the students have had a chance to contribute their ideas, work with the group to combine similar ideas to arrive at a short list of Community Agreements that capture all the students' concerns.

If the students haven't thought of such agreements as "one mic" (one person speaks at a time) or confidentiality, add them.

**NOTE on Confidentiality:**

Explain that what is shared in the class stays in the class. The only exception to the confidentiality agreement is when someone shares that they or someone else is being abused or threatening to harm themselves. In that case, you'll need to report it to the guidance counselor.

Of course, what we *learn* is used in the classroom wide world, everywhere we go.

## Get Buy-in for the Agreements

Going down the list of agreements one at a time, ask for a "thumbs-in" signal from students who agree to uphold each agreement. (Students thrust their thumbs toward the center of the circle.)

The goal is all "thumbs-in" for every agreement, meaning that we are all on board with these agreements. Periodically, you'll briefly review the Community Agreements and get thumbs-in to indicate commitment to the Agreements.

**NOTE:** Sometimes a student will disagree with a proposed agreement. If that happens, take the student's concern seriously. Ask the student to explain the concern and open it up to discussion with the group. Do they agree with the student's concern about the agreement? Why? Why not? If you don't have time to hear the student's views right now, put the issue in the "Parking Lot"—that is, you put off discussion of the issue for another time.



## Post the Agreements

After getting buy-in, prepare a poster with your Community Agreements neatly written out. If possible, engage a couple of students to help decorate the poster. You'll post this and review it with the students periodically and as-needed.

## Add Agreements If Necessary

You can add community agreements as the year goes on if challenges to a caring classroom arise that call for problem solving and new agreements.

## Have a Heart: Make the Classroom a Put-down-free Zone

In preparation for this activity, you'll need to cut out two large hearts from construction paper.

### Put-Ups and Put-Downs

If the students don't already know about put-downs, introduce the idea that a put-down is a negative comment about a person. Elicit examples of put-downs (but don't write them down so as not to reinforce them). Ask the students what they think a put-up is. Elicit examples of put-ups. Make a chart of put-ups. Explain that in our classroom, put-downs are not allowed. Put-ups are welcome. When you and the students hear people using put-ups, you can acknowledge them and add them to the chart.

### Have a Heart

Explain that our feelings and our classroom community are greatly affected by how we talk to each other. We'll now do an exercise that illustrates the effects of put-downs.

Tape one of the hearts to your chest. Tell the students a story like the one in the box below, tailored to their age and experience. Each time the student in the story experiences a put-down, rip off a piece of the heart and let it fall to the floor. By the end of the story, the heart will be in pieces. Discuss: How is \_\_\_\_\_ feeling? Have you ever had a day like this? Ask for several volunteers to share.

Now tape the second heart to your chest, have some crayons or markers of various colors at hand, and retell the story, pausing before the place where each put-down occurred in the first telling to allow a student to suggest a put-up instead. (The put-up shouldn't be false or untrue, but it should be something supportive and positive.) When a student provides an appropriate put-up, color a section of the heart with a crayon or marker. Discuss: How is \_\_\_\_\_ feeling now? Ask for several volunteers to share.

Ask the class, What does this exercise suggest for our classroom? Call on a few volunteers to share and give their reasons. Elicit that we'll all be happier and more productive if our class is a place where we use put-ups and not put-downs. Add that that applies to you as the teacher, too. I'm going to notice when I hear a put-up and write it on the chart. Suggest that "Use put-ups, not put-downs" should be one of the class's Community Agreements and get a thumbs-in from the group.



### Story for the “Have a Heart” Exercise

Jane\* had not slept well, and when her father called, she didn't get up. A few minutes later, her father shouted, “Get up, lazybones!” When Jane went into the kitchen for breakfast, her brother was just pouring the last of the cereal into his bowl. “That's what you get for oversleeping,” he teased. Jane dressed in a new combination she thought looked cool, but when her sister saw her, she laughed. “That looks stupid,” she said. Jane changed clothes, grabbed her book bag, and ran out the door to school. She decided to take a short cut. “Hey, what are you doing around this block?” some boy called to her. “We don't like your type around here.” “You're late!” the teacher said when she came into her classroom. He wrote her name on the board. Later, the teacher asked her to read aloud. When she said one of the words wrong, some of the kids laughed. At lunch, when she went to sit down with some girls, they said, “No room here. You'll have to sit over there.” On the way home from school, Jane was running along and tripped over a crack in the pavement. She went sprawling down on the street and ripped a hole in her pants. When her mother saw Jane, she saw the hole before she saw the rest of her. “You ruined your pants,” she said. “I can't keep you in decent clothes!”

\* Substitute a name for Jane that is not the name of anyone in your class.

# Introduction to Active Listening

## The Three Ps:

- Pay good attention
- Provide gentle encouragement
- Paraphrase

You might open by saying that to develop close friendships and be a good leader, you need to be a good listener. We'll now do some activities to help us improve our skills in "active listening." Active listening is listening so that the speaker knows you care and feels encouraged to say more. The skills we'll learn and practice are "The Three Ps of Active Listening." The three Ps are 1) Pay good attention 2) Provide gentle encouragement and 3) Paraphrase (say in your own words) what you heard the speaker say.

### The First Two Ps: Pay Good Attention and Provide Gentle Encouragement

Ask for a volunteer to work with you to present a short skit. Stand and have the volunteer stand close to you and tell you something new and good in his or her life. While the student is talking, model poor listening (look away, fidget with clothes or hair, check your phone, etc.). After a minute or so, pause and ask the class what they saw—the specific behaviors that showed you were not listening well? Call on a couple of students to name the poor listening behaviors.

Ask her/him if s/he would be willing to give you another chance.

This time, as the student talks, use good listening skills: attention focused on speaker, positive body language, one mic (no interrupting), and gentle encouragement (asking questions to show interest).

Ask the speaker how s/he felt this time.

Now ask the students to suggest guidelines for good listening. Chart them as the students propose them. Typical guidelines generated by students include (1) Good eye contact (2) Positive body language (3) One mic (Don't interrupt) (4) Be open to other people's ideas.

Ask the students to pair up to practice good listening. One student in each pair will speak for a minute or two about something they like to do. The other student pays good attention, keeping the good listening checklist in mind. Keep the time and tell students when to switch roles.

Ask, "How did it feel when your partner practiced Active Listening Ps 1 and 2 (paid good attention and gently encouraged you to talk). Call on some volunteers to share.



## The Third P: Paraphrasing

Another skill of active listening is paraphrasing. Prepare and post a chart of the steps in paraphrasing, as follows:

- The speaker talks while you listen
- You paraphrase what the speaker has said, and ask, "Did I get it right?"
- You listen as the speaker says, "Yes, you got it," or says more to clarify what he or she meant to say.
- You paraphrase again, and ask, "Do I have it right now?"

Ask the students what they think paraphrasing is. Elicit that paraphrasing is saying in your own words what someone has said.

Model paraphrasing by asking for a volunteer to come up and talk about his or her favorite sport or game. With the volunteer, go through the paraphrasing steps listed on a chart.

Referring to the chart you posted, go over the steps of paraphrasing.

Now switch roles with the student volunteer. Ask the student to listen, going through the steps of the third P, paraphrasing, while you talk about your favorite sport or game.

Now give the students a chance to practice in pairs. This time they will share with their partners a good day they had recently and what made it good.

Keep the time for the students, as follows:

- a minute and a half for the speaker to talk while the listener listens
- another minute or so for the listener to paraphrase
- another minute or less for the speaker to correct the paraphrase or add anything they want to add

After the exercise is finished, ask the listeners how it was to listen and paraphrase. Was it easy? Difficult? If so, how? Then ask the speakers how they felt having someone pay good attention and then paraphrase what they said.

Now have them reverse roles, with the speakers talking about the same questions. Again, keep time for them. When they're done, ask the listeners how it was to listen and paraphrase. Then ask the speakers how they felt having someone pay good attention, and paraphrase what they said.

Give students opportunities to practice the Three Ps and build their active listening skills by inviting them to pair up and take turns sharing in response to prompts you give them. Debrief by asking several volunteers to share how it went.

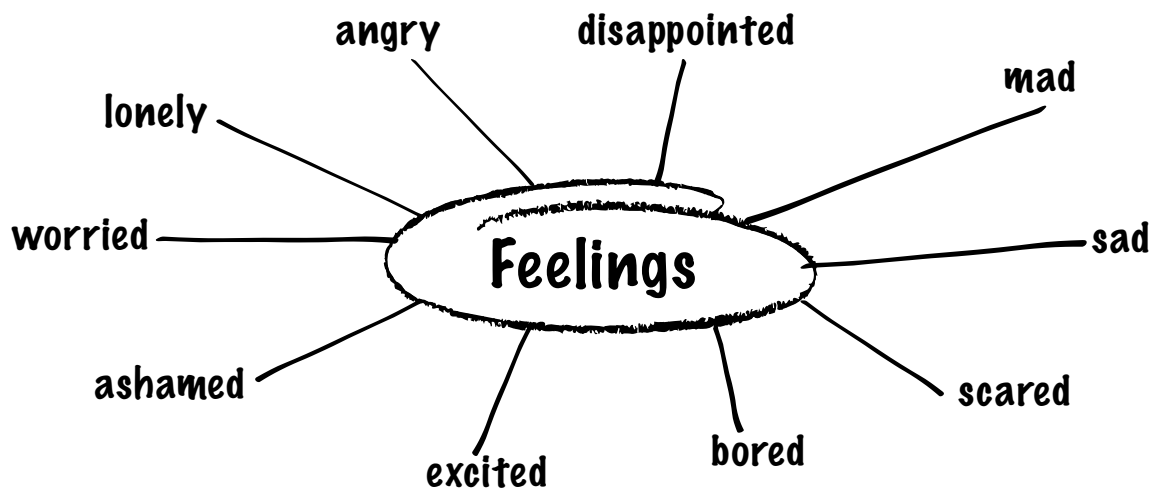
## Expanding Students' Feelings Vocabularies

### Feelings Web

Write the word "FEELINGS" in the middle of a piece of chart paper and draw a circle around it.

Ask students to think of words that name feelings. As students say words that name feelings, chart them. See how many words your group can generate in a few minutes. Draw lines connecting the feelings words to the word "FEELINGS" at the center of the chart.

Your web might start out looking something like this.



Tell the students that you'll keep the web and post it for each session. As feelings words come up in discussions, songs, poems, and stories, you and the students will add those words to the web to add to our feelings vocabularies.

Go around the room or the circle to give each of your students the opportunity to say one word that names what they're feeling right now.

## Feelings Share Out

This activity involves choosing a feeling from the Feelings Web and telling a story about a time we felt that way. Give students a minute or two to choose a feeling they want to talk about. Begin by choosing a feeling and telling a story about a time you felt that way. Now go around the room or the circle for students to share. They can pass if they want to.

**NOTE:** Be aware that strong feelings might come up during this activity. Leave plenty of time for students to talk about their experience and regroup as necessary before moving to the next person. Choose carefully what feeling you want to share.

## Acting Out Feelings

Think of a simple everyday activity like erasing the chalkboard, or sweeping the floor, or hanging up a coat. Write words that name feelings on index cards and put them in a container of some kind. A child draws a word and does the common everyday activity in a way that expresses the feeling on the card. The class has to guess the feeling.

## Mashed Potatoes

Here's another activity for practicing expressing and reading feelings. Take a simple term like "mashed potatoes." Ask for volunteers to say "mashed potatoes" in a way that expresses one of the feelings on the chart of feelings words. The class has to guess what feeling is being expressed. Model the activity yourself first.



# Cooling Down Practices

## Mini Lecture

All of us have feelings all through the day. Sometimes we have feelings that we welcome—for example, excitement, pride, pleasure, satisfaction. Sometimes we have feelings that are difficult—for example, fear, anger, disappointment, frustration.

Even so-called negative feelings can be positive if they lead us to do something that makes the situation better. But sometimes strong feelings, even when they're "good" feelings, can get in the way of our best thinking. Sometimes when feelings become intense, thinking goes down, and we do things we wish we hadn't done.

To avoid mistakes like that, it's a good idea to pause, stop the action, and chill to give ourselves a better chance to do the right thing. We pause to give ourselves a chance to think of the *smartest thing* to do. Does this make sense? Why? Why not? Take some responses from students and discuss.

## Sharing Our Cooling-Down Practices

Go around the room or the circle to give each of your students the opportunity to share the thoughts and techniques they use to cool down when they're angry or have another strong feeling. Tell them they can pass if they want to. Begin by sharing your favorite cooling-down technique. As you and the students share, write the ideas down on the chart labeled Cooling-Down Techniques. Their responses will probably include strategies like counting to 10, taking a walk, and taking a deep breath.

Explain that these techniques are very helpful in the moment when you're angry. They can help you calm down so that you can think better.

## Mini Lecture on Self-Talk

One of the best strategies for calming ourselves down is to talk to ourselves. When something happens to trigger a strong feeling, we can make ourselves more upset or less upset by what we say to ourselves.

For example, a school safety agent yells at you for no apparent reason. If you say to yourself, "No one treats me like that and gets away with it," you are likely to make yourself angrier. But if you say to yourself something like, "He must be having a bad day, but he's not going to ruin mine by getting me in trouble," you're on the way to cooling down. It's not okay for the person to treat you disrespectfully, but if you can calm yourself down, you may be able to think of a smart way to deal with the situation—a way that changes the situation for the better or at least keeps you out of trouble.

## Inventing Self-Talk for a Real-Life Situation

Invite students to recall a time recently when they were angry. Give them a couple of minutes to think of something they might say to themselves to calm themselves down when their anger is triggered in that way. Model the activity by sharing an example of self-talk you might use to deal with a situation that triggers your anger.

### Go Round

After the students have had time to think, go around the room or the circle for students to share the anger trigger they have chosen and a simple sentence they might say to themselves so that they don't lose their cool when their anger is triggered. Tell them they can pass if they want to.

Here are some typical examples of self-talk:

- "I refuse to let you ruin my day"
- "Have a great day. I'm stayin' focused on winning mine."
- "You're not goin' to throw me off my game! I won't give you the satisfaction."
- "I'm on the way to a great day!"
- "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round. . .I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin', marchin' on to freedom land" (from a Civil Rights Movement freedom song)
- "Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on" (also from a freedom song)

The last two examples of self-talk above (from Civil Rights freedom songs) may be especially effective. You may want to find them on YouTube and teach them to your students.

In conclusion, make three points about self-talk:

1. You say it to yourself, not to the other person
2. You're not sweeping the problem under a rug
3. You're buying time and a clear mind to think of the smartest thing to do

### Going to a Peaceful Place

In this activity students will go in their minds to peaceful place. Show them what you mean by describing a peaceful place you have in mind. For example, "My peaceful place is a beautiful pond of still water surrounded by pine trees on a warm sunny day."

Invite students to close their eyes and make pictures of peaceful places in their minds. Tell them to give you a thumbs-up to show you that they have a peaceful place in mind.

Once they're ready, give them a minute or two to be in their peaceful places. When the time is up, whisper for students to stand and begin a round of quiet, gentle fist bumps around the circle.

Going in our minds to a peaceful place is a great way to chill and calm down when we're experiencing a strong negative feeling. Recalling pleasant memories is another good strategy.

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## Listening Circles for Sharing Feelings About Upsetting Events

When upsetting events happen in the world, strong feelings may arise. Listening Circles give people a chance to share what's on their minds and feel the support of their community.

Here are guidelines for facilitating a Listening Circle:

- You'll need an object to use as a Talking Piece and a timer.
- Ask participants (students or adults) to sit in a circle. Introduce the topic and explain that a Listening Circle is a chance to share thoughts, feelings, concerns, and questions about the topic.
- Participation must be voluntary. Ask if there's anyone who doesn't feel comfortable participating and provide a place they can go during the Listening Circle.
- Begin by asking participants to pair up and talk with the person next to them. This is called a Pair-Share. First one person talks while the other listens actively, paying good attention, making eye contact, maintaining good body language. Then they switch. You will keep the time, letting them know when it's time to switch. Set the timer based on your knowledge of your group. Three minutes each generally works well. Explain that if a person stops talking before their three minutes are up, they should just enjoy the silence (rather than letting the other person take the time). There are several reasons for starting with Pair-Shares. They give people a chance to clarify their thinking before sharing with the whole group. They provide airtime for people who are uncomfortable talking in a large group and may increase their confidence for talking in the large group.
- After the Pair-Shares, explain that each person will now have up to three minutes to share with the whole group. Anyone can pass if they want to. Again, you'll keep the time. Introduce the Talking Piece. It should be an object that has some personal meaning for you related to connection, caring, friendship, solidarity. Start the timer, share what you want to share, and then pass the Talking Piece to the person on your left or right. The Talking Piece goes around the circle in order, inviting each person to speak, though, as mentioned above, they can pass if they want to. When one person is speaking, the others in the group pay attention but don't comment. Depending on the size of your group and the depth of engagement with the topic, you may want to do an additional round or two. The circle finishes after every person has spoken. Participation should be voluntary, and what people say in the circle is confidential.

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## Guidelines for Responding When Students Express Concerns and Feelings About the Climate Crisis

Maybe a young person has seen something about the climate crisis on television, heard something on the radio, noticed a headline in a newspaper, learned some scary information in class, or heard something from a friend. They share their concerns and feelings with you. How should you respond? At such moments, social and emotional skills can help. Below are guidelines:

- Prepare for this eventuality by exploring your own feelings about the climate crisis. What's your stance toward it? What feelings does the crisis bring up for you? How are you handling them? What gives you hope? Who are the helpers? What are you doing to make a difference? Prepare also by rehearsing how you'll respond if a young person comes to you with feelings and wants to know where you stand. A series of Listening Exchanges with a partner, friend, or colleague may be helpful for clarifying your thinking.
- If a young person raises a concern, ask how they're feeling. Or, if a feeling comes through clearly in their tone of voice, acknowledge the feeling. *So you're feeling sad. . . [and/or angry or hopeless or whatever you sense they're feeling].*
- Use active listening to gently and matter-of-factly draw out what they've heard, what they know, and where they've gotten their information. *Please tell me more. . . Where did you learn this?*
- Affirm information you believe to be correct. Correct any misinformation. Ask if the young person has questions. Are there things they'd like to know more about?
- Say that you understand why they're concerned and acknowledge that you're concerned, too.
- Provide reassurance by saying that many people around the world are working hard to address the situation.
- Share what you are doing—how you are helping—and invite them to join you in your efforts or ask if they would like to learn more about what young people are doing to address the situation.
- Depending on what the young person says, tell them they have your support.
- If asked for information, respond, "What do you want to know?" Answer their questions if you can, or offer to join them in researching answers to their questions. But avoid providing too much information. (When asked if he wanted more information a nine-year-old told his mother, "No, Mom. Not now. I know just enough to make me want to do something about it. I'm afraid if I know more, I'll feel discouraged and won't want to do anything.")
- Above all, respond so that you keep communication open. Thank them for sharing their feelings with you and say you're always ready to listen to what's on their mind.

Adapted with permission from curricula created by Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility

## Opinion Continuum

In preparation for this activity, make two signs, one saying “Strongly Agree” and the other saying “Strongly Disagree.” Post them in opposite corners of the classroom.

Ask, “What’s an opinion?” Elicit that it’s a strong belief, judgment, or way of thinking about something. Sometimes, it’s based on fact and sometimes not.

Explain that the purpose of this activity—called Opinion Continuum—is to help students develop skills in expressing their opinions and arguing for them while listening to and respecting others who have opinions different from theirs.

Ask, Do you agree that these are essential skills for building a caring classroom community? Why? Why not?

Tell the students you’ll make a statement, and they are to go to the appropriate place according to whether they strongly agree with the statement, strongly disagree, or are somewhere in between.

Once the students have taken their places, ask for volunteers from each location to explain their opinion. Encourage some dialogue among students with differing opinions, reminding them that this is a good opportunity for practicing active listening.

If students change their minds after hearing the arguments, they can change places.

Below are some suggested statements. Choose those that will be most relevant to your group and bring forth a range of opinions.

- The best flavor of ice cream is vanilla
- Soccer is the best sport
- Parents should put limits on the amount of time young people spend looking at a screen
- The way to be popular in our school is to be good at sports
- “Sticks and stones can hurt my bones, but names can never hurt me”
- If someone is mean to you, it’s best to ignore it
- The hardest thing about being a teenager (or almost a teenager) is that adults boss you around

After the activity is over and students return to their seats, ask them how it felt to share their opinions and listen to other points of view.



## Guidelines for Facilitating Productive Conversations About Climate Disasters and Other Disturbing Stories in the News

Middle and high school students are aware of what's happening in the world. If we provide brave and supportive classroom spaces where students can share thoughts and feelings constructively, we can foster powerful feelings of group solidarity and priceless teachable moments.

Here are some suggestions:

- When a major event occurs that you know will be on students' minds, invite students to share feelings, thoughts, and reactions. When such an event occurs, Jasmine, who teaches Literature and Composition to 9th and 11th graders, opens her classes by asking, "How is your heart today? What do you need from the community today?"
- As students share their thoughts, feelings, and concerns, listen and paraphrase. Reflect and validate students' feelings.
- Once the initial shock has passed and you've helped students process their initial reactions, lead them to explore underlying issues and consider taking action.
- Provide accurate info. Don't let misinformation and stereotypes go unchallenged.
- Generate questions. By emphasizing good questions over right answers, you prepares students for the complexity of the world and the wealth of information available.
- Zoom out to identify societal and historical patterns that may be at work.
- Mourn together: Honor those who have been lost or harmed.
- Highlight acts of solidarity: Look for the helpers.
- Take loving action.

Your students may always remember how during a time of trauma and turmoil they found comfort in each other's company, felt connection, and took action.

## Practice Active Hope

“Active hope is not wishful thinking,” write Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone in their book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy*. “Active hope is waking up to the beauty of life on whose behalf we can act.”

One kind of hope is optimism. Another kind is what we hope *for*. Active hope is the latter kind of hope. We envision what we hope for and consider how we can best contribute to bringing it about. Once we’ve discerned the place where, in the words of Frederick Buechner, our “deep gladness meets the world’s deep hunger,” we get to work. Active hope is not something we have; it’s something we do.

Active hope launches us on an adventure. The stakes couldn’t be higher. The challenges couldn’t be greater. The ultimate outcome is not determined. Of course, there are risks, as there are in any adventure. But we accept those risks as we work to create a habitable world for our children and grandchildren, for all that we love, for people around the world, and for all living beings. We feel privileged to be alive at this critical time in the history of life on Earth and to join millions of others in playing our part. The Great Turning is the adventure of our time.

The adventure will inevitably stretch us, and this leads to discovery. As we offer our gifts of active hope, we discover new strengths in ourselves and others, new sources of personal and collective power, a richer experience of community, and deeper connections with our fellow humans and with nature.

The work will test our limits. Sometimes we will have to stretch ourselves until we ache and pain all over. But the reward will be abundance. We have chosen a life of great meaning and purpose. We have accepted the opportunity to develop our strengths and our power to make a difference. We are enjoying the companionship of close friends and comrades. All this, rather than the accumulation of material goods, becomes our conception of the abundant life.

The text above is an excerpt from *Teach for Climate Justice: A Vision for Transforming Education* by Tom Roderick (Harvard Education Press, 2023, pages 110-111)

## Listening Partnerships to Share Thoughts, Concerns, and Feelings with a Trusted Partner

This practice has been a lifesaver for me for nearly 50 years. Every week I meet with a dear friend and we give each other listening time. While I speak—and laugh and cry, and yawn, and sometimes tremble—he listens with delight and encourages me. Then we switch and I listen while he speaks. My friend and I have settled on 43 minutes each. Don't ask me how or why we settled on 43 minutes, but it works for us. A listening exchange can be for any amount of time.

### GUIDELINES

**Equal Time**

**Listen with Pure Delight**

**No Interrupting**

**Feelings Welcome**

**Confidentiality**

Start with five minutes each. Decide who goes first. Set a timer and the first person begins. While that person speaks, the listener pays full attention to what is being shared and maintains a positive expression even if the person is sharing sad feelings. (You don't want them to think they have to take care of you!) No interrupting. No judgment. No advice. When the timer goes off, both people thank each other, and the other person takes their turn. What's shared in the Listening Exchange is confidential.

Do this with a life partner, a close friend, or a trusted colleague at work. Listening Exchanges are as powerful as they are simple. After trying a Listening Exchange, people often say how wonderful and rare it is for someone to give them their full attention, even for five minutes, without interrupting. Now you can have it any time—once you have some partners in crime! Do a Listening Exchange at lunch, after a tough or wonderful morning. Do one after or before a challenging meeting. Do one to celebrate a victory. Use one to connect with a friend. Do one to share your feelings about some aspect of the climate emergency or the struggle for racial justice. It can be shorter or longer than five minutes—whatever you and your partner agree to.





## Pause for Centering and Reconnecting

### Three Simple Meditation Practices

Here are three practices that I use regularly. Sometimes I do them alone, sitting comfortably in silence. Other times I write in my journal or share with a partner in a Listening Exchange.

#### **Suggestion #1: For reconnecting with the sources of energy for our adventure of active hope.**

- Start with gratitude. Remember specific things or people you're grateful for.
- Honor your own and the world's pain by focusing for a few minutes on something that makes you sad or angry or worried. It can be something personal or something happening out in the world.
- Call to mind something or someone that inspires you, warms your heart, or brings tears of gladness to your eyes. It could be a leader, a grandchild, a poem, a song.
- Decide on a next step, large or small, in your adventure of active hope and consider what or who will support you in taking that step.

#### **Suggestion #2: For dealing with a challenge or reveling in a celebration.**

- Think of some news and goods? These are simply positive things you've experienced in your life recently. (The idea is to get yourself in a positive frame of mind.)
- Think of little upsets and say goodbye to them.
- Focus on a strong feeling, concern, question, challenge, or celebration. Explore it some depth: What's the situation? What feelings is it bringing up? Does it remind you of anything in the past? What's a path forward? Who or what might be helpful as you try to sort this out?
- Think of something you're looking forward to. (The idea is to get your attention up and out, away from the issue you were wrestling with, so that you bring positive energy to re-engaging with the world.)

#### **Suggestion #3: For centering ourselves as we start a day.**

- Early each day, find a quiet comfortable place to sit.
- Take several deep breaths in and out, saying to yourself, "I am breathing in, I am breathing out, I am breathing in, I am breathing out." Gently try to pay attention to your breathing.
- Take a few minutes to remember what you're grateful for, including things you accomplished the day before and anyone or anything that helped you.
- If a favorite poem or song comes to mind, say it, sing it, or read it to yourself.
- Consider your intentions for the day. What do you hope to do, be, or accomplish?
- Give yourself an encouraging send-off. It could be as simple as, "Have a wonderful day!"
- Go forth!

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