

PILLAR FOUR: CONTENTMENT & BALANCE

Notes:

Contentment & Balance Pillar Unit Summary

By practicing the Contentment & Balance skills, we can cultivate unconditional acceptance and appreciation for all experiences, regardless of whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. Instead of obsessing about having more, being more, striving for more, and always wanting more - we can rest in the completeness that is our natural state. In the fourth and final pillar, we learn that all of our emotions are our friends and allies, each of which has valuable insights about how we can access the joy that is already inside of us. The Contentment & Balance practices empower us to heal our patterns of avoiding some emotions while clinging to others. Through contentment, we can cultivate gratitude, self-compassion, and love toward all of our experiences.

By working to understand the situations that make us feel fragmented, we can use simple acceptance and appreciation strategies to find our innate completeness again. Most importantly, we learn ways to challenge our assumptions about “good” or “bad” experiences, and move toward a perspective where all situations become beautiful and important parts of the human learning experience. The purpose of this pillar is to address the times when our emotions can make us feel incomplete, as if there is something wrong with us for feeling certain ways. The Contentment & Balance Pillar allows us to find peace between the extremes of pleasant emotional experiences and difficult emotional experiences, and to appreciate all emotions as they come and go throughout the day.

The Visiting Feelings Tool will be the core practice for building an understanding of contentment and balance and the ways it can apply to our life to cultivate a sense of completeness and unconditional acceptance of all situations. Through the Visiting Feelings practice, contentment and balance will be understood as cultivating a sense of *completeness that comes from unconditionally accepting and allowing all sensations as they come and go*. The Contentment & Balance Pillar allows students to independently forge strong, healthy relationships with their emotions that are based on acceptance, love, and gratitude. It is a form of positive self-development and character building where students are encouraged to treat all sensations (physical, mental, and emotional) as valuable sources of information about their relationship to everyday experiences and their reactions to those experiences. Students identify feelings/situations that they try to avoid, and feelings/situations they try to grasp on tightly to. They then use acceptance techniques to cultivate a sense of love and appreciation for all feelings – in both themselves and in others.

We are experiencing an incredible variety of emotions every day, and the relationship we have with our emotions is an important part of developing our EI and wellbeing. It is easy to get caught up in trying to avoid unpleasant emotions like anger, sadness, and fear. When unpleasant emotions are avoided, it becomes difficult or impossible to recognize, understand, and regulate them in ourselves and with others.

The suffering that we feel from anger, sadness, and fear, for example, comes primarily from our aversive relationship to these emotions (ie. “This feeling is not acceptable”, “I shouldn’t be feeling this way”, etc.).



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Contentment & Balance Pillar Unit Summary (Cont.)

This is why unpleasant emotions can lead us to feel fragmented, un-whole, and unwell. If we instead choose to turn toward our unpleasant emotions and cultivate love and appreciation for them, the suffering becomes minimal or goes away entirely.

It is also easy to get caught up with trying to hold onto pleasant emotions like joy, peace, and triumph. When we idealize, crave, or try to hold tightly to pleasant emotions, we can feel fragmented, dissatisfied, or unwell when we're not feeling them or when they go away. In these occasions, we can imagine that something is wrong with us for not feeling happy all of the time. Our pleasant emotions can be appreciated and savored, but like all other sensations they come and go. We can maximize our wellbeing by loving and appreciating our pleasant emotions without having unreasonable expectations for them (ie., they should last forever, we need to feel them all the time, etc.). Reducing our obsession with pleasant emotions can also minimize the stress we feel each day, and allow us to celebrate pleasant emotions in a healthy way when they do show up.

Ultimately, contentment and balance progresses beyond accepting individual emotions or challenging situations, and it becomes an attitude of genuine appreciation for what it means to be an emotional human being. Using the Contentment & Balance Pillar to develop a regular practice and an understanding of the theory behind the practice, students will be able to use the Visiting Feelings Core Tool to give them a sense of completeness and self-compassion that nothing can take away from them. They will be able to use their emotions as information and data about their environment, instead of reacting to the feeling in an aversive or obsessive way. All of these are key outcomes to generating enhanced understanding and regulation of our emotions, and long-term psychological wellbeing.

ESTABLISHED GOALS (US SCHOOLS ONLY)

SEL Standard (Illinois State) Develop self-awareness and self-management (self-regulation) skills to achieve school and life success. This unit of study will target the core competencies for SEL (outlined by CASEL) of self-awareness and self-management.

IDENTIFIER (US ONLY)

Identify and manage one's attention, focus, emotions, and behaviors.

STANDARD (US ONLY)

Early Elementary:

- Recognize and accurately label emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations - and how they are linked to behavior.
- Demonstrate control of impulsive behavior.
- Identify ways to calm yourself.

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STANDARD (US ONLY) (Cont.)

Late Elementary:

- Describe your physical responses to strong emotions.
- Recognize that feelings change throughout the day.
- Practice self-talk to calm yourself.

Middle:

- Apply strategies to manage stress and motivate focused, disciplined performance.
- Describe the physical responses to a range of emotions.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS (EUS): STUDENTS WILL KNOW THAT...

1. Contentment and balance is developed by cultivating healthy, friendly relationships with all feelings using the Visiting Feelings practice.
2. Our attitude toward our emotions matters – we relate to all emotional experience with allowance, appreciation, and love instead of running away from them or trying to hold fast to them.
3. We can use our feelings as information about the world around us, instead of getting caught up with the emotion itself. This skill of creating a genuine appreciation and allowance for all feelings is critical to long-term psychological wellbeing and emotion regulation.
4. We also pay attention to others' emotional reactions with allowance and appreciation, rather than unconsciously reacting to them.
5. Students are empowered to systematically befriend each and every one of their feelings, regardless of what it is. This is instead of labeling some emotions "bad" and others "good".
6. Cultivating an attitude of acceptance and appreciation about all emotional experience allows us to feel more complete and self-loving over time, which increases wellbeing, self-compassion, and self-awareness.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (EQS):

1. What does it mean to appreciate all emotions?
2. How can we allow all feelings to come for a visit without running away from them or holding tightly to them?
3. Why does cultivating appreciation for all experiences matter? Why does maintaining an attitude of acceptance matter?
4. How can we befriend even the most unpleasant emotions?
5. How can we allow even the most pleasant emotions to leave?
6. How can we appreciate others' emotions as they come and go, and share that appreciation with them?
7. What are the strategies for cultivating self-compassion, gratitude, and self-love?

KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

Knowledge - Students Will Know:

- True happiness is cultivated on the inside out, not the other way around.
- We treat all emotions as visiting friends to develop an appreciation for all sensations.

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Knowledge - Students Will Know (Cont.):

- We can develop a friendship with all feelings, instead of running away from them, or expecting them to stay.
- When we treat our emotions as visiting friends, we can use them as information about our world instead of reacting to them.
- When someone else is experiencing an emotion, we can appreciate them for it, allow the emotion to come for a visit, and allow the emotion to go when it is ready.
- When we experience an unpleasant emotion, it's natural for us to want to avoid it. This is why unpleasant emotions can seem "negative", when in reality they are here to help us learn more about ourselves and the world around us.
- When we experience a pleasant emotion, it's natural for us to want it to stay for a long time. This is why we can feel so disappointed when pleasant emotions go away. In reality, all emotions are brief, and we can feel complete by appreciating all of them.
- The way we perceive our emotional experiences matters. We treat all emotions as friends and allow them to come and go as they need to.
- When an emotion makes us feel fragmented, un-whole, or suffering, we can use our Visiting Feelings Tool to help us feel complete again.
- When we are feeling fragmented, un-whole, unworthy, or down on ourselves – we can use our self-compassion and gratitude skills to help us feel complete again.

Skills - Students Will Know How To:

- Identify the emotions/situations that they try to avoid.
- Identify the emotions/situations that they try to hold onto.
- Cultivate a friendship of appreciation with all unpleasant emotions/situations, especially when they come for a visit suddenly.
- Cultivate a friendship of appreciation with all pleasant emotions/situations, especially when it's time for them to go.
- Generate self-compassion when they are feeling unworthy or down on themselves.
- Generate gratitude for emotions that are challenging to experience.
- Develop the "self-acceptance muscle" by allowing all emotions come and go without trying to stop them or hold on tightly to them.
- Explain why acceptance of emotions is important to wellbeing.
- Extend and apply the Contentment & Balance practices to their everyday lives.
- Construct meaning for contentment and balance in their own words.
- Explain different ways of appreciating and loving experiences in the body, mind, and emotions.
- Build the skill of allowing and appreciating what is happening in their moment to moment awareness of body, emotions, or thoughts.

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PERFORMANCE TASK SUMMARY (USING GRASPS)

Students will pick an area of their life they could improve upon and apply the Self Scientist practice to grow. Examples can be similar to the following:

- Keep track of progress in befriending unpleasant feelings as soon as they arrive.
- Keep track of progress in befriending pleasant feelings, even when it's time to leave.
- Playing with the strategies from the Visiting Feelings Tool while experiencing an emotion.
- Speaking to others in a way that communicates gratitude and acceptance for all of the feelings involved.
- Using the Visiting Feelings Tool as an opportunity to learn about the self's relationship to different situations, and speaking to ourselves in a compassionate way.
- Students can create a piece of evidence that explains how the Visiting Feelings practice helped them grow. This could be through writing, art, or any other creative expressions.

MISCONCEPTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

Misconception	Clarification
The main purpose of the Contentment & Balance Pillar is to be happy and peaceful.	While many people who practice the Contentment & Balance skills feel happier, more peaceful, and complete, this is secondary to the main purpose. The main purpose of this pillar is to unconditionally accept and appreciate all experiences as they arise, so that we can more effectively explore our present feelings as information about ourselves and the world around us.
The Contentment & Balance Pillar is about being passive, complacent, or neutral toward everyday events.	The Contentment & Balance skills are an active way to cultivate a deeply healthy relationship to all of our feelings, without running away from them or clinging to them. It is quite the opposite of feeling neutral – these skills allow us to feel all emotions fully while loving and appreciating them as they come and go. While we are open-hearted to emotions in each moment, we may decide to make a change about our experience in the next moment.

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MISCONCEPTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS	
Misconception	Clarification
The Contentment & Balance Pillar is something that we primarily use to make our unpleasant experiences more bearable.	While the Contentment & Balance skills tend to reduce the suffering that comes with unpleasant emotions, this is only part of the purpose. The main point of these skills is to cultivate an attitude of acceptance and appreciation toward all experiences.
When we are accepting and appreciating others' emotions, we have to ignore our own wants and needs.	The Contentment & Balance skills help us create the space to not only honor others' needs, but also consider our needs at the same time. By allowing emotions to be as they are, we can forge more authentic, transparent, and loving relationships with the people around us.
The Contentment & Balance Pillar is about ignoring how we really feel in order to feel more stable and grounded.	We don't ignore anything while practicing the Contentment & Balance skills. In fact, we fully allow our emotions to come and go as they need to. This creates the opportunity for us to feel complete regardless of the experience.

Community Pillar Assessment Evidence

OTHER EVIDENCE OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING	
Other Assessments	Knowledge and Skills
Turn and Talk	Have students consistently turn and talk about their use or lack of use of these strategies in their day-to-day experience. This will be used in each of the individual lessons and then shared with the whole group.

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OTHER EVIDENCE OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING	
Other Assessments	Knowledge and Skills
Lesson Reflections in Journal	Daily Reflections responding to lesson topics.
Pre/ Post Assessment	Before teaching the Contentment & Balance Pillar to students, ask them to rate how emotionally balanced they feel in their lives. Also ask them to list the emotions that they want to feel 'all the time' and the emotions that they 'never want to feel'. At the end of the pillar, give them the same rating task and see how their answers have changed.
Home Log	Students will keep a journal of the Contentment & Balance practices at home. Perhaps sitting and cultivating a friendship with a challenging emotion for one minute after feeling it.

Contentment & Balance Learning Plan — Introduction

Are there some emotions that you really like feeling, and others that you don't like to feel at all? Did you ever wonder why this is? Which emotions do you like, and which do you not like? Engage in a discussion around what students like or dislike about certain emotions. Make a list of the emotions most commonly liked and disliked, and have students compare lists. Ask students how they would feel if you had a special way to teach them how to enjoy and appreciate all emotions, regardless of whether they were pleasant or unpleasant. Ask students if they would be interested in learning how to treat all emotions as friendly visitors, and learn the important information that all emotions are trying to share with us – instead of running away from the emotions or trying to hold onto them.

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Contentment & Balance Learning Plan — Lesson Overview

Ten Lessons are provided with this pillar, which move through the very basic fundamentals of developing a personal self-acceptance practice. We begin with understanding that we can be aversive or obsessive about certain situations/emotions, and we learn that sustainable happiness comes from appreciation of what is present now – not what we want to happen in the future. We learn to cultivate unconditional love and gratitude for all feelings as they simply come and go. A self-compassion practice is used to maintain a loving relationship to the Self and practice the Visiting Feelings tool in everyday life. Be sure to reteach any of the lessons at any time based on student needs. Some lessons may need more time, and others less. In general, they are meant to take around 30 minutes.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Introduction to Contentment & Balance	Types of Relationships to Emotions (aversive, clinging, accepting)	Obsession With More vs. Appreciation of Enough	Allowing Unpleasant Emotions to Come and Go	Allowing Pleasant Emotions to Come and Go
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Visiting Feelings Core Practice	Cultivating Gratitude for Feelings	Cultivating Self-Compassion	Unconditional Acceptance of Self and Others	Contentment & Balance in Everyday Life

