



Greater  
Good  
Science  
Center

[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

# Science of a Meaningful Life for Students

April 15, 2013

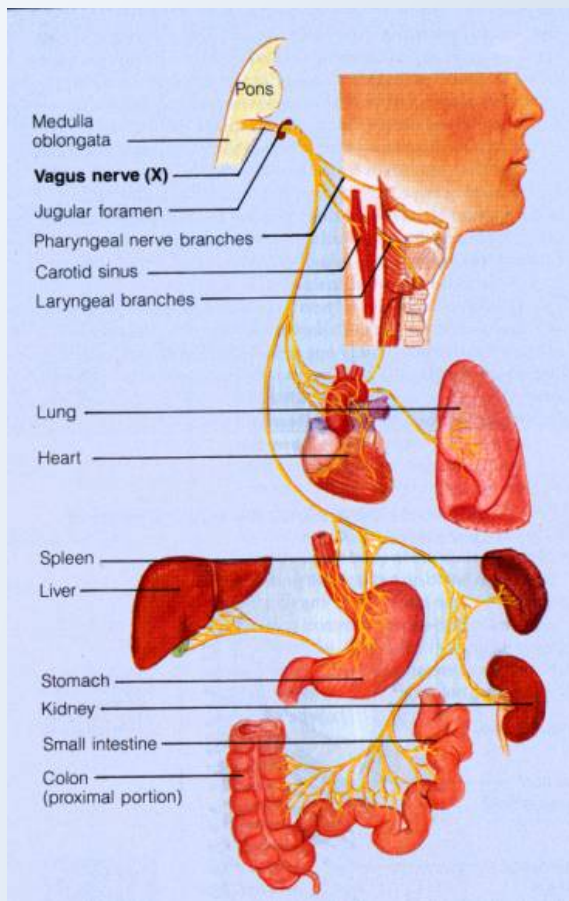
Vicki Zakrzewski, Ph.D.  
Education Director

Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley

[vzakrzewski@berkeley.edu](mailto:vzakrzewski@berkeley.edu)

<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu>

# The Vagus Nerve



- Helps coordinate interaction between breathing and heart rate.
- Vagal superstars:
  - More positive emotions
  - Stronger relationships
  - Fifth graders with stronger vagal profile intervene when a kid is bullied

To activate:

- Breathe in for a count of 3 and breathe out for a count of 6



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

# Learning Objectives

In this workshop, you will:

- Explore the latest research showing how leading a meaningful life is good for both you and your students;
- Learn how the science on awe, hope, self-compassion, mindfulness, and gratitude can be integrated into the classroom;
- Practice research-based tools for fostering awe, hope, self-compassion, mindfulness, and gratitude in yourself and your students.



# Agenda



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

9:00-12:00  
(1-2 breaks)

- Overview of the Science of a Meaningful Life
- A framework for bringing the Science into education
- **AWE:** Inspiring students to engage in life
- **HOPE:** Helping students plan for success

12:00-12:45

**Lunch**

12:45-2:30  
(1 break)

- **SELF-COMPASSION:** The art of being kind when it all goes to \_\_\_\_\_
- **MINDFULNESS:** The art of noticing without judgment
- **GRATITUDE:** The “thank you” that connects us all
- Final reflections

# Happiness (Peterson, 2006)

## 1. Hedonic treadmill



## 2. Flow

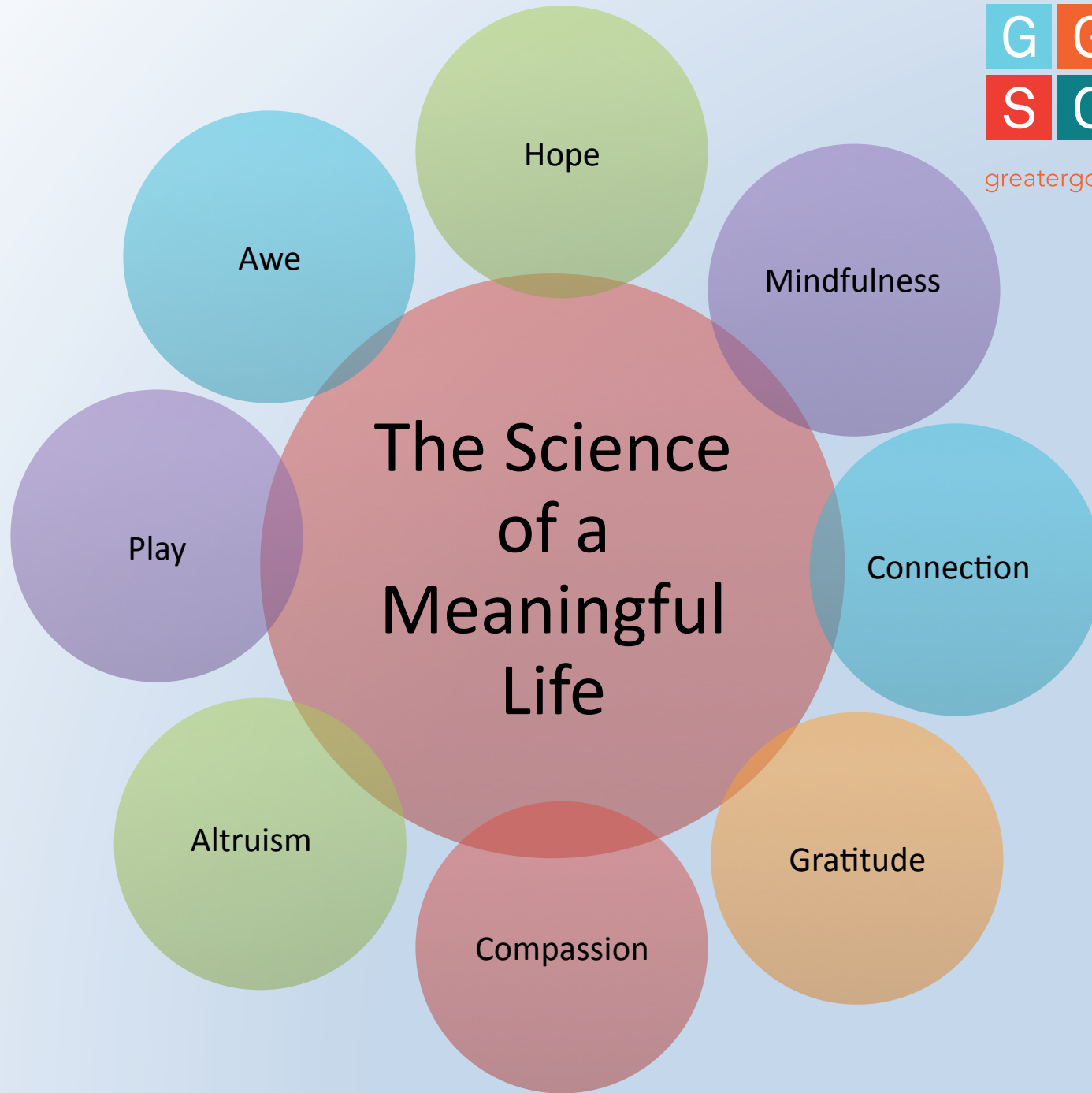


## 3. Meaningful life

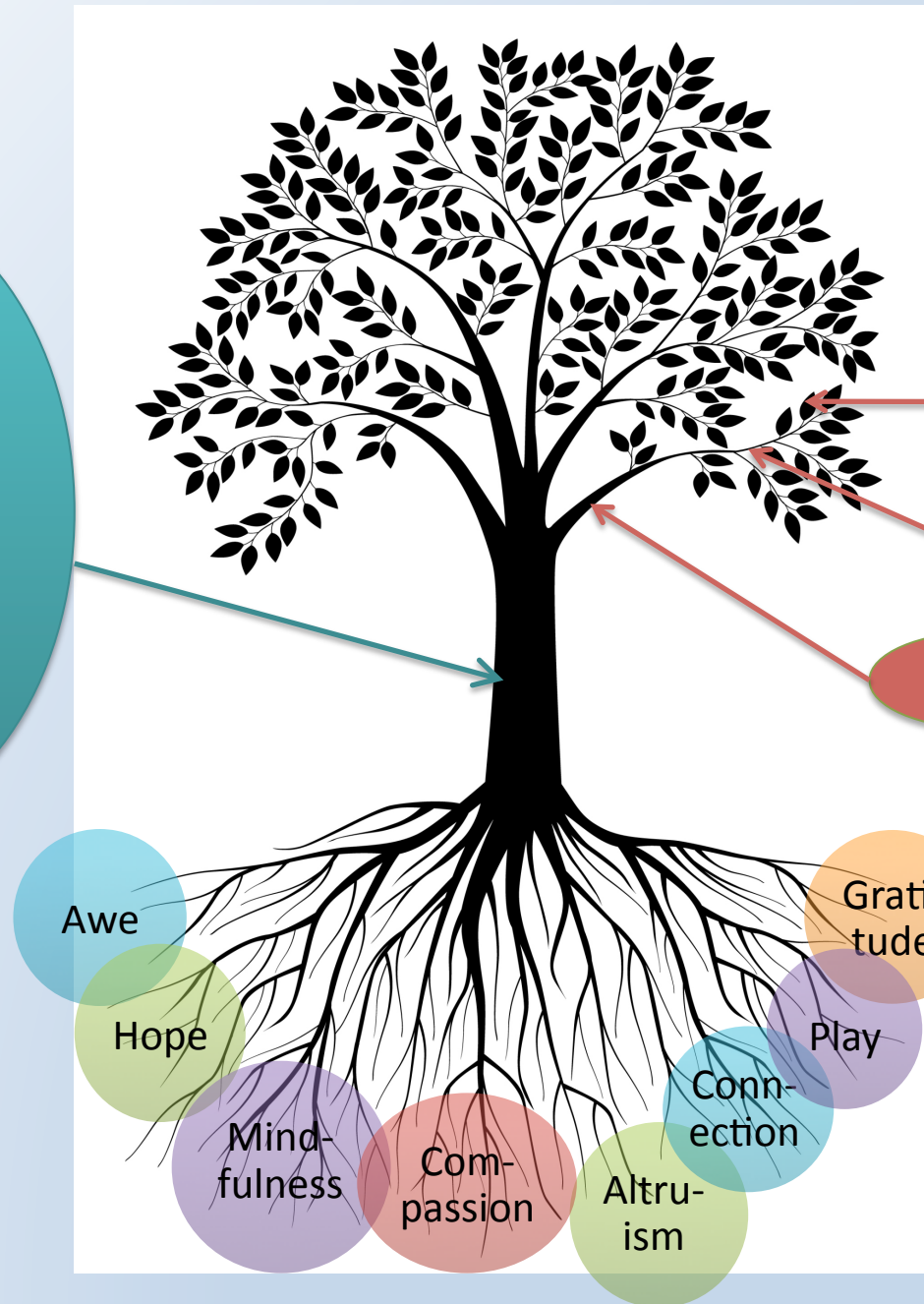


[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

What IS  
“a meaningful life”?



- Executive Functions
- Critical Thinking
  - Creativity
- Curiosity/Passion
  - Self-Efficacy
  - Perseverance
  - Social skills
  - Emotional Literacy/Regulation
    - Ethical Reasoning



Awe

Hope

Mindfulness

Compassion

Altruism

Connection

Play

Gratitude

Circuits

Physics

Science

# Students today... (Damon, 2009; Levine, 2008)

**Lack of purpose**

**Anxiety**

**Depression**



**Substance abuse**

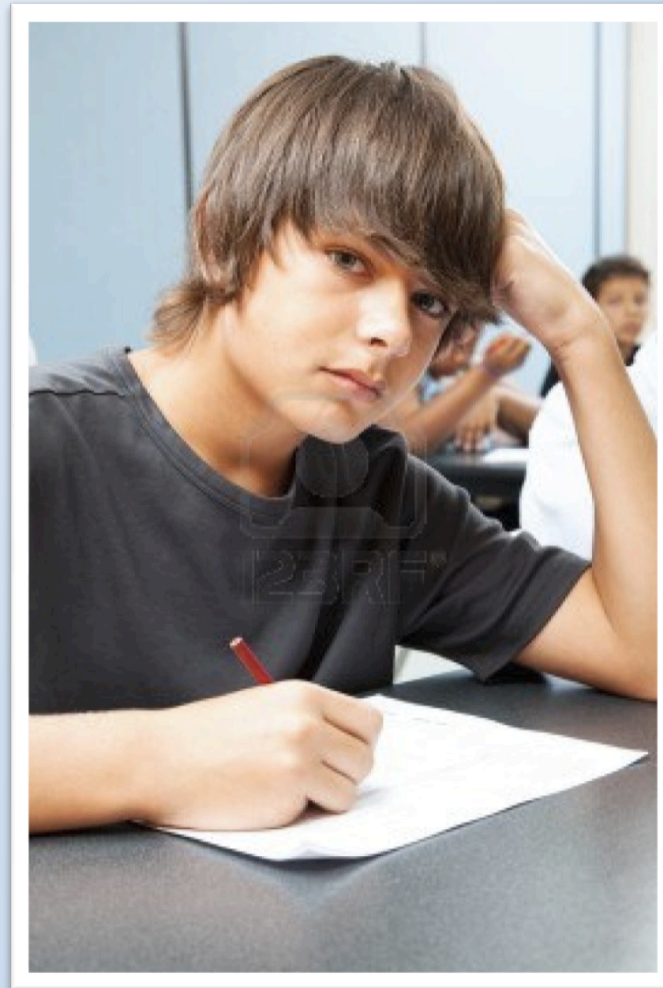
**Self-injure**

**Eating disorders**

# Brian



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)





[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)



[Video](#)



# The Experience of Awe

(Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)



1. Sense of vastness
2. New perspective on the world and our place in it

# Mental and Physical Effects of Awe...

(Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

- We get goose bumps and an expansive, warm swelling in the chest
- Lessens the focus on self and highlights our common humanity
- Connects us to something larger than ourselves



# What Generates Awe?

(Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

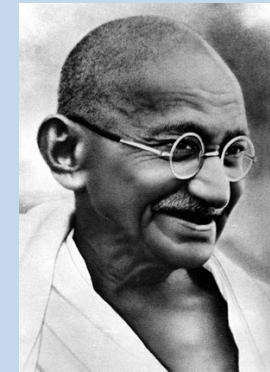
- Nature



- Art



- People



# Characteristics of Kids High in Hope



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

- Can set *clear and attainable* goals.
- Able to develop *multiple* strategies to reach those goals.
- Stay *motivated* to use the strategies to attain goals, even when the going gets tough. (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)





# Students High in Hope:

- Greater academic success
- Stronger friendships
- More creative & better at problem-solving
- Lower levels of depression & anxiety
- Don't take failure personally—they use it to improve performance.
- **More optimistic** (Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

# Developing Hope

(Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

1. What's most important to you? Why? Looking back on your life, what do you want to be remembered for? Why?



2. List the broad categories of what's most important to you (e.g., family, friends, school, sports, environment, future career).

# Developing Hope

(Lopez, Rose, Robinson, Marques, & Pais-Ribeiro, 2009)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

3. Pick one category you could improve. Create 2-3 goals that are specific, measurable and take a “solutions-oriented” approach.
4. Rank those goals in order of importance.



5. Breakdown the top ranked goal into steps.
6. In case you encounter obstacles to any of these steps, visualize at least 1 different pathway to reach that goal.

# Two More Things About Hope...



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

## 7. Tell stories of success.



## 8. Enjoy the process!

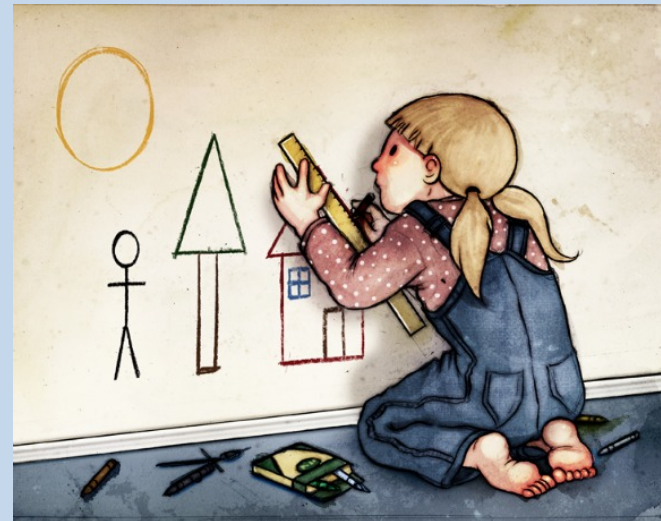




# What Hinders Hope?

## PERFECTIONISM (Covington, 1984; Dweck, 2007)

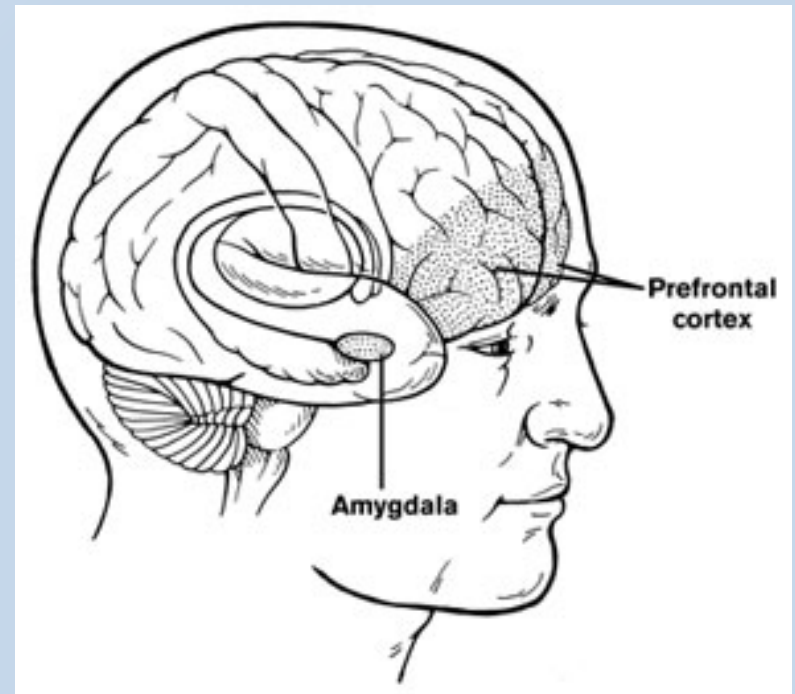
- Created by environment, not inborn
- Focus is on making mistakes, not success
- Fueled by fear of failure, avoidance of criticism (even constructive), frustration, disappointment
- Keeps kids from taking risks, embracing challenge, learning from their mistakes & enjoying their successes



# What Hinders Hope?

## LOW RESILIENCE (Davidson & Begley, 2012)

- The role of the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala



## Test Your Own Resilience! (T/F)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

- If I have a minor disagreement with a close friend or spouse—closer to “No, it’s your turn to do the dishes” than “You cheated on me?”—it typically leaves me out of sorts for hours or longer.
- If another driver uses the shoulder to zoom up to the front of a long line of traffic waiting to merge, I am likely to shake it off easily rather than fume about it for a long time.
- When I have experienced profound grief, such as the death of someone close to me, it has interfered with my ability to function for many months.
- If I make a mistake at work and get reprimanded for it, I can shrug it off and take it as a learning experience.
- At a party, if I’m having a conversation with an interesting stranger and get completely tongue-tied when he/she asks me about myself, I tend to replay the conversation—this time including what I should have said—for hours or even days afterward.

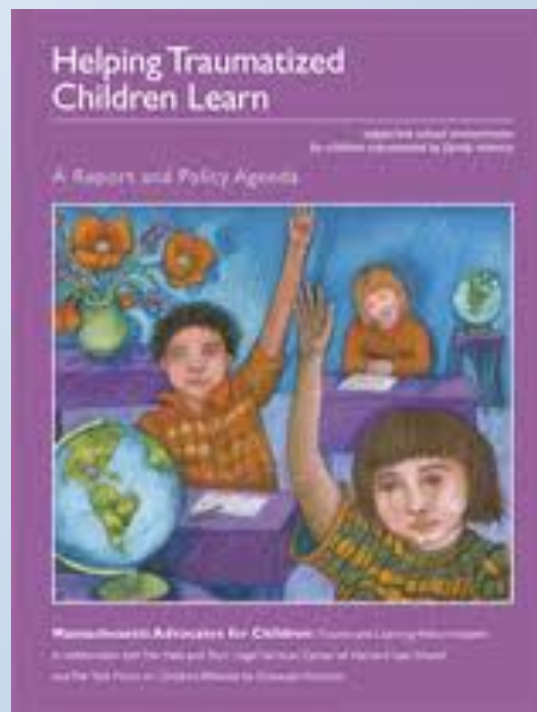
From: Davidson, R., & Begley, S. (2012). *The Emotional Life of Your Brain*.

# What Hinders Hope?

## TRAUMA



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

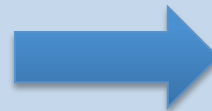


*Helping Traumatized Children Learn*

[http://www.massadvocates.org/documents/HTCL\\_9-09.pdf](http://www.massadvocates.org/documents/HTCL_9-09.pdf)

# Self-Compassion (Neff, 2011)

The practice of quieting the inner critic, replacing it with a voice of support, understanding, and care for oneself.



# 3 Components of Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2011)

- **Self-Kindness** vs. Self-Judgment



- **Common Humanity** vs. Isolation



- **Mindfulness** vs. Over-identification

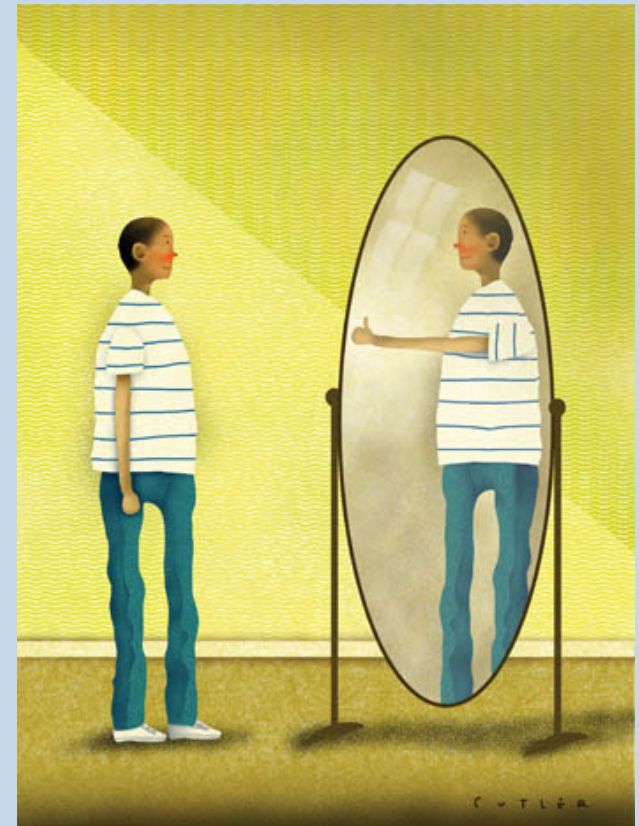




# Benefits of Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2011)

- **Reductions in:** Anxiety, depression, stress, perfectionism, body shame, fear of failure
- **Increases in:** Life satisfaction, happiness, self-confidence, optimism, curiosity, creativity, gratitude
- Greater compassion & empathy for others and more forgiveness of others



## 3 Practices of Self-Compassion

(Neff, 2011)

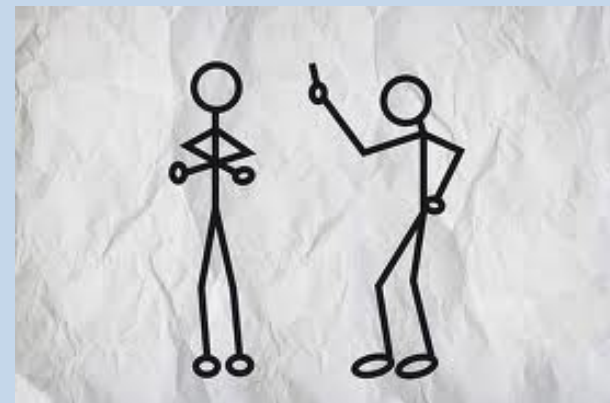
- Talk to yourself as you would a best friend



- Self-squeeze



- Breathe-in, breathe-out compassion





# Mindfulness

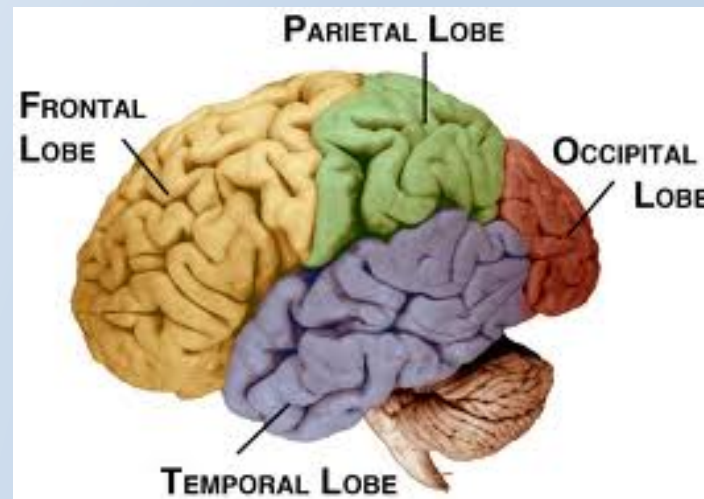


[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)



*“The awareness that arises out of intentionally paying attention in an open, kind, and discerning way”* (Shapiro & Carlson, 2006)

# Mindfulness and Brain Plasticity (Davidson & Begley, 2012)



# Benefits of Mindfulness



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)



## Boosts:

- Positive emotions & resilience
- Attention skills (and neural mechanisms)
- Memory



## Reduces:

- Stress & anxiety
- Depression (and prevents relapse)
- Negative emotions
- Post Traumatic stress

# Mindfulness Practice

- Sitting meditation



- Walking meditation



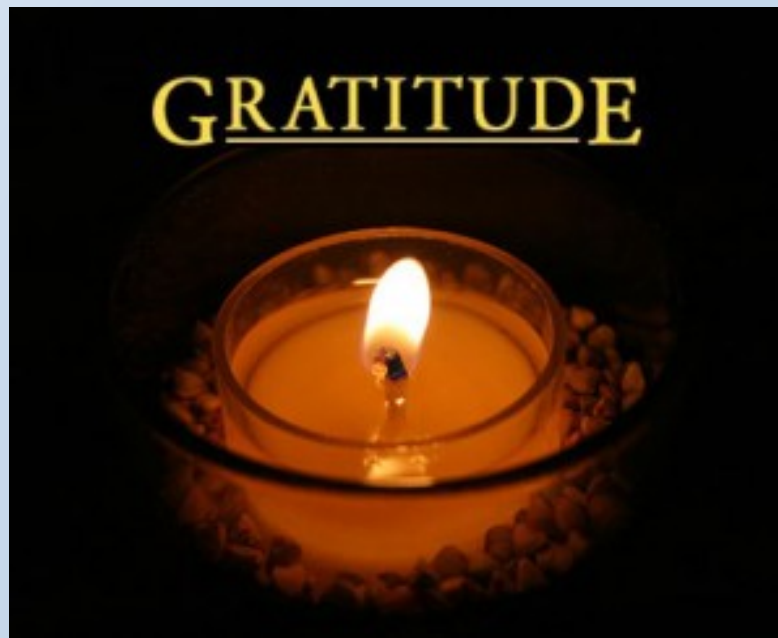
- Loving-kindness meditation

# Gratitude (Emmons, 2007)



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

“...an affirmation of goodness -- that there are good things in the world, gifts and benefits we’ve received.”



# Why Gratitude is Good...



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

1) Strengthens social ties.

2) Increases self-worth.

3) Middle school students who practice gratitude (Froh, 2008):

- Higher levels of optimism
- Increased life satisfaction
- Decreased negative feelings
- Greater satisfaction with school





# Taking Gratitude Deeper...

- Notice intentions
- Appreciate costs
- Recognize the value of benefits



# Gratitude Activities

Gratitude journals

Gratitude letters



Gratitude classroom calendar

Stream of gratitude  
(Mindful Writing) (Broderick, 2013)

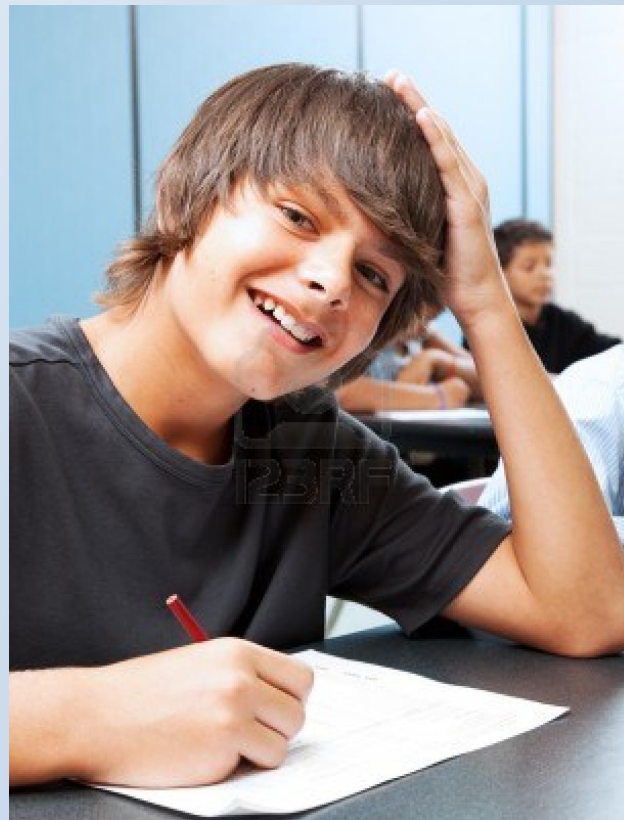




# Brian



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)





[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

Act as if what you do makes a  
difference. It does.

-William James

# You are a part of the Greater Good...



[greatergood.berkeley.edu](http://greatergood.berkeley.edu)

## Participate!

- ✓ Summer Institute for Educators – June 28 – July 3, 2013
- ✓ Sign up on the site for our monthly e-newsletter. It's FREE.
- ✓ Become a member to support our work and enjoy benefits! 50% discount for educators. Special code: GGeducators
- ✓ Follow us on Facebook and Twitter (@GreaterGoodSC)
- ✓ Consider a tax-deductible donation

