

## Activity

Pass out an individual student sunflower worksheet. Please have students write their own definition of hope in the center of their sunflower.

### 1) Why is Hope Important?

Did you know that people who have hope do better in life? Hopeful people have better grades, they do better in their jobs, and they have closer relationships with friends and family.<sup>1</sup>

Hope is a characteristic we can learn and develop. The amount of money you have, how many friends you have, what your family is like, or where you live does not determine if you are hopeful. You can build hope yourself no matter what, and then once you have it, hope will thrive in your life.

We will be learning some skills and tools to help us have hope that we can take with us anywhere. The more we practice these skills, the more hopeful we will become, and then more successful too.

### 2) How to Create a Hopeful Mind

Did you know there are different parts of our brain that affect our thoughts and feelings?

- a) Can you remember times when you were angry, upset or frustrated and it seemed you couldn't control how you acted?
- b) Can you think of a time when you were focused and remember what you learned?

There are two areas of the brain called the upstairs and downstairs brain.

Upstairs Brain: Helps us make good decisions, gives us control over our feelings/emotions and our body, and helps us understand the feelings of others (empathy). We use it to learn new things and when we feel hope. We want to stay in the upstairs brain.

Downstairs Brain: Controls our survivor instincts. This part of the brain is important to keep us safe when we are in danger and helps us react if we are in trouble. We feel strong emotions like anger and fear.

For example, if a lion were attacking a zebra, the zebra must react quickly to fight the lion or run away to escape the danger. The zebra cannot spend much time thinking about what to do. It must just react to survive.

This means when we are in the downstairs brain if we feel angry, upset, scared or frustrated, it can be really difficult to learn and remember information. It's hard to make good choices and have hope.

In order to have hope, we need to stay in our upstairs brain rather than letting our downstairs brain take over.

## Tools We Can Use to Help Us Stay Hopeful

There are tools we can use to help us calm down when we are feeling intense emotions like fear and anger.

1. **Deep Breathing.** This calms our body and nervous system down. Breathe in deeply and breathe out so that you hear the air coming out. This helps get us back in the upstairs brain.
2. **Visualization.** Close your eyes and think of one thing that makes you happy. Try to hold this image in your mind for at least 30 seconds. This often helps us calm down, improve how we feel, and become more hopeful.
3. Writing down what you are thankful for or keeping a **gratitude journal**. When you pay attention to 3 things a day you are grateful for, you are focusing on what is good in your life. This helps us stay hopeful even if there are events out of our control that challenge our hope.
4. **Meditation.** Find a quiet place, keep your body still, and focus only on breathing. If it helps when you are beginning, you can count to five in your head as you breathe in, and count to five in your head as you breathe out. The goal is to quiet your mind/thoughts. Meditating helps our memory, relaxes us, improves our sleep, increases our creativity, and is good for our emotional well-being.
5. Doing **creative activities**. Playing, using your imagination to make up stories, art projects, or playing a musical instrument or just some creative ways to help release our tension and stress.

### Activity

On student sunflower, have students look at the examples of tools they may use to help calm down, stay in their upstairs brain, and remain hopeful.

- a) On the designated petal, have them write one tool they will use to have hope.
- b) Next, have them write a time that they can use their hope tool.

### 3) Hopeful Purpose

An important aspect of a strong hope foundation is knowing that you have a purpose and are an important person. Recognizing what you like to do helps discover your purpose. There is no purpose better than another.

### Activity

Have students write down one activity that they enjoy doing and are passionate about on their student sunflower.

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<sup>i</sup> See Lopez (2013), p. 53-61