# Chapter 15: Activities

## **A Wellness Approach to Teaching Physical Education**

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In addition to the specific activities you choose for physical education, you can also do certain things on an ongoing basis in order to plan and teach in a wellness-oriented way. The following activities and suggestions serve as examples of how you can practice a wellness-oriented approach to teaching, both in and out of the physical education classroom.

1. Check-in: Reflect on living a balanced, healthy, mindful life (physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and socially).
2. Practice a “mindful minute” every day upon waking.
3. Make a conscious effort to be mindful of all thoughts, words, and actions.
4. Engage in mindful lesson planning.
5. Tell stories. When you regularly share with students your personal journey and your struggles to stay well, you help them understand that they are not alone in their thoughts and feelings—that they are connected to others.
6. Model and encourage healthy behaviours that are good for both the self and the planet. Here are some examples:

* Bring a reusable water bottle to school every day and drink from it throughout the day.
* Use a reusable coffee mug every day.
* Pack a “litterless lunch” every day (and discuss with students how to create litterless breakfasts, snacks, and dinners).
* Rethink prizes and rewards. For example, bring in mandarin oranges for a Halloween treat instead of chocolate and invite students to decorate them like pumpkins. You can also show students how to make healthy smoothies by bringing in your blender and making simple smoothie recipes in front of the class.

1. Show a little vulnerability. It is not uncommon for teachers to appear “perfect” to students—like a “rock” with no struggles. Demonstrate your humanness to students; doing so shows them that being strong includes self-awareness and acknowledging when something is affecting us. Explain that being strong also involves mustering the courage to show emotion and ask for help. Discuss with students how you work through such times.
2. Practice being nonjudgmental. For instance, try taking the view that there are no “good days” or “bad days”—just different experiences. Instead of saying, “I’m having a bad day,” reframe your thought and say, “My experience today was . . .” or “I noticed today. . . .” Thus, rather than label experiences as “good” or “bad,” students can learn to understand that various experiences and life events will happen and can help us grow and learn.

The following activities will help you incorporate wellness principles and practices into your classroom.

# 1. Circle of Acceptance

***Learning Goals***

* Students will experience what constitutes a safe space and participate with kindness and compassion.
* Students will discuss their experiences in past physical education classes.

***Setup***

This activity should be completed on the first day of your class. Have the class sit in a circle.

***Instructions***

Ask students, “What do you think of PE—thumbs up, thumbs sideways, or thumbs down?” They may be afraid to answer honestly. To show the way, you need to answer honestly. Explain some of the challenges you have experienced in PE as a student or teacher. Once students hear some of your stories, let them know that they can be honest (no judgment here!).

Next, ask students, “What are some things you like about PE? What are some things you don’t like about PE?” Invite students to share some of their stories.

Explain to students that this is the Circle of Acceptance and that anything said in the circle is okay as long as it is respectful. Remind them that we all have our own likes and dislikes, and they can list anything they don’t like about physical education. As long as they are respectful, they can voice their personal opinions. Point out that we all need to be aware of the variety of personalities, likes, and dislikes in the class.

Explain that PE can be organized in many ways and share some wellness-oriented ideas that connect with the stories students have shared.

Here are some additional questions that may be helpful:

* Why were you so excited when we came down to the gym?
* What do you like about physical education as compared with the classroom?
* What does that feel like?
* How does your body feel when you are running around?
* How is that different from the classroom?
* What are your favourite games or sports?

Then explore the other side of the coin by asking questions such as the following:

* Who does not like coming down to the gym?
* What does that feel like for you?
* What games and sports do you not like?
* Why do you not like those activities?

***Variations and Differentiation***

If you have a group of students who feel uncomfortable with voicing their opinions, you can have them face the outside of the circle so that they don’t see anyone else’s thumbs-up or thumbs down responses. You can also invite students to write their thoughts on note cards or draw symbols or pictures.

***Assessment Look-Fors***

If you are sincere in your delivery of this message and pay attention to students’ responses, you will be able to make formative assessments at the end of this activity. Of course, you will see the obvious verbal remarks and physical gestures that reflect how students are feeling. However, you must also look for more subtle indicators, such as looks, sighs of relief, revelations, smiles, and expressions of acknowledgement on their faces. The look on their faces when they realize that someone is actually listening to their concerns, likes, and dislikes will give you an excellent start for building community in your class.

***Safety***

Remind your students to be gentle and kind.

# 2. Mindfulness 101

***Learning Goals***

Students will learn how to slow down, pay attention to how they feel, and use breathing techniques to become presently aware.

***Instructions***

Ask students, “How are you feeling?” and invite a few students to share with the class. Remember who those students are so you can ask them again at the end of class.

***Start of Class: Mindful Minute***

Practice belly breathing with your students by using the following prompts:

* Sit on the floor, either cross-legged or kneeling.
* Place one hand on your stomach.
* Close your eyes.
* Inhale for a count of four, then exhale for a count of four.
* As you inhale, your stomach should rise; as you exhale, your stomach should fall.
* All breathing should be done through your nose (if necessary, breathe through your mouth).

Start with 30 seconds, then increase the duration as students become more comfortable with the practice. You can also have them do multiple cycles (10 or even more). Remind students that they should make no effort to breathe; instead, they can just allow the breath to happen on its own.

When the sequence is finished, have students sit with their eyes closed and relax. With their eyes still closed, ask the following questions.

* Primary: How are you feeling right now? (Add prompts if necessary.)
* Intermediate: Use the questions in the following list. Have students keep their answers to themselves. We do not want to single out any student with extenuating circumstances, such as a difficult situation at home. Once this process becomes the norm, it will help students focus and reflect.
  + Did you get a good night’s sleep last night?
  + Did you eat breakfast this morning?
  + How are you feeling right now?
  + Set a goal for today’s class (e.g., to have fun, blow off steam, try a new game).
  + Be safe—that is, be responsible for your own safety and that of others in class.
  + Open your eyes, and we will begin the class.

***Middle of Class: Quick Check-In***

When your students are in the middle of an activity, game, or task, stop them suddenly and have them check in about how they’re feeling. You can ask a few simple questions:

* Who’s having fun? Are you smiling? Look around—who else is smiling? (social dimension)
* Get in groups of four and share one word to describe how you’re feeling—for instance, good, energized, happy, flat, or excited. (emotional dimension)
* Are you sweating? Do you feel warm? (physical dimension)
* (For intermediate students) Locate your heartbeat and estimate your heart rate. (physical dimension)
* (For primary students) Place your hand on your chest and feel your heart beating. (physical dimension)
* What have you learned about how it feels to be active and healthy? (intellectual dimension)
* Describe the energy in the room. Do you feel connected to others? (spiritual dimension)

***3. End of Class: Reflection***

Gather students to sit down and settle. Have them close their eyes again or just sit quietly with eyes open to reflect. Ask again, “How are you feeling? How are you feeling after being active and playing?”

Once your students become comfortable with one another, they can start sharing some of their answers aloud at the beginning and end of class. Ask specifically who feels better and why.

Remind students to stop and check in with how they’re feeling when they are outside of school. Discuss examples of when they might do so—for example, before or after playing in a soccer game, walking the dog, or participating in a gymnastics class.

# 3. Yarn Toss

***Learning Goals***

Students will develop understanding of interconnectedness by feeling the effects of various actions applied to a string of yarn that connects them to one another.

***Instructions***

Bring a ball of yarn long enough to span the circle the same number of times as there are students in your class. For example, if you have 20 students in a circle with a diameter of 5 meters, would need at least 100 meters of yarn.

Students sit or stand in a circle (or another shape of your choice). One student begins with the ball of yarn and tosses it to another student. While holding the ball, the second student identifies another student to throw to. When the ball is tossed to the next person, the tosser holds on to the string of yarn. This process continues until all participants have tossed the ball and are connected by the yarn.

To demonstrate that we are all connected, simply tug on the yarn and ask students if they can feel it (they will). Then ask a few students to pull on the yarn and ask if others can feel it. Next, ask students to tug on the yarn when they feel a tug. This action dramatizes a ripple effect and shows how we can affect one another through our actions.

***Variation and Differentiation***

Assign students specific characters (e.g., trees, rivers, fish, the next generation, children, business owners) and tell a story that demonstrates how actions, events, and words can affect other people and nature either positively or negatively. Discuss what we can do to maintain strong, healthy relationships.

Place an object (e.g., beach ball) on top of the web of yarn. Ask a few students to try to move the object, then have the whole class work together to move it. Discuss the difference between working as individuals, separate from others, and working together as a group; specifically, discuss the dynamics of respect and harmony.

Based on D. Kindt,“Yarn Toss: A Simple Activity for Demonstrating Interconnectedness in Language Classrooms*,*” *The Language Teacher* 25, no 6 (2001): 54-55. http://jalt-publications.org/old\_tlt/articles/2001/06/kindt

# 4. Healthy Habits Log

***Learning Goals***

Students will develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are critical to balancing the dimensions of wellness: social, emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual.

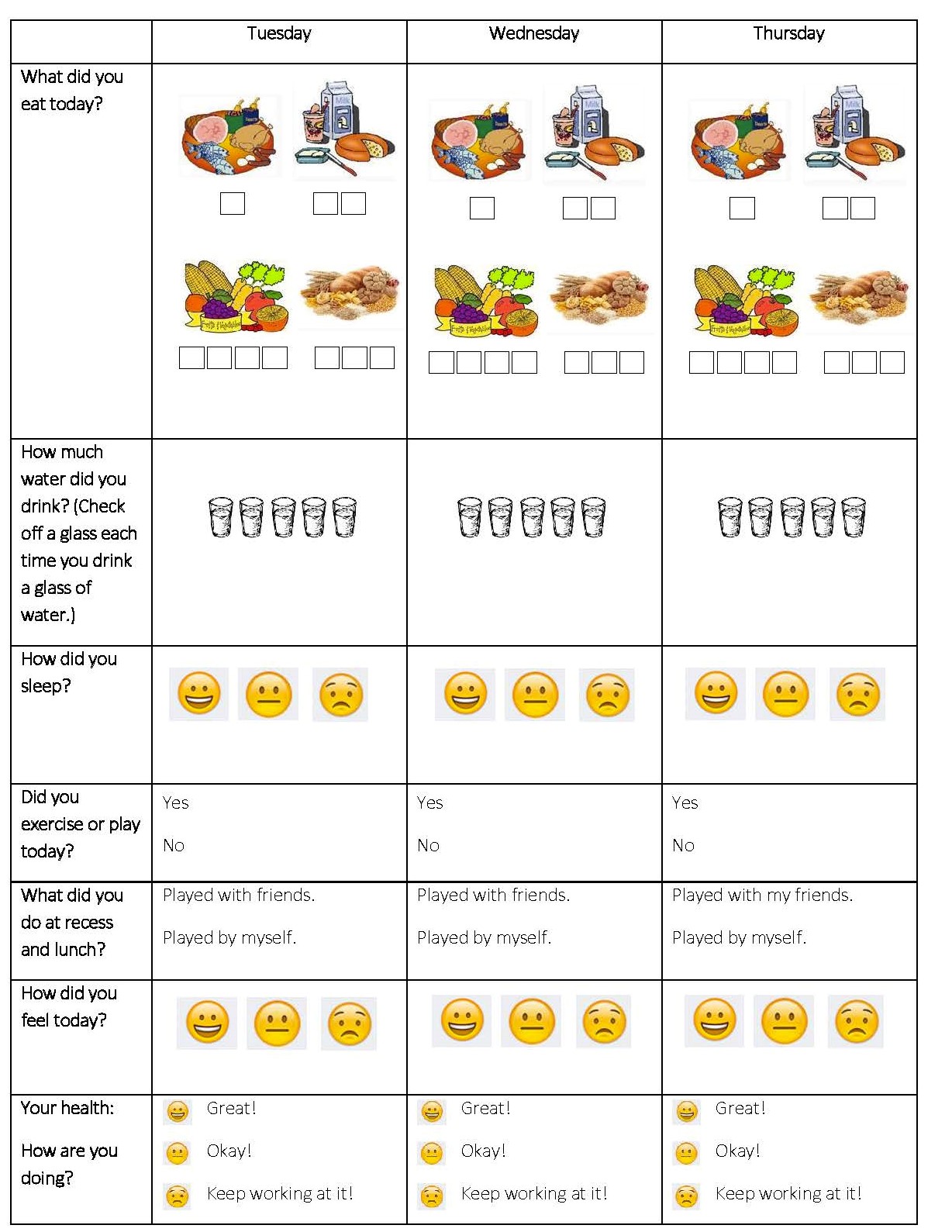
***Instructions***

Before they begin, students need to have some knowledge of Canada’s food guide (specifically, the food groups). Students will use their log to record their daily habits for two to five days, depending on grade level. Make the log suitable for your students’ grade level, comprehension, and reading abilities; in addition, take the time to help them learn how to fill out the log every day. To help primary-grade students succeed, consider using a buddy program and involving parents or guardians at home.

The following table outlines some key elements to include in the log.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Primary: grades 1-3 (2 or 3 days)** | **Intermediate: grades 4-6 (3 to 5 days)** |
| **What did you eat today?** | Students check boxes to reflect the food groups from which they ate at each meal. Use symbols to help them identify the food groups. | Students list the foods they ate from each food group at each meal. |
| **How much water did you drink?** | Students check off how many glasses of water they drank. | Students record how many glasses they drank and the times of day when they did so. |
| **How did you sleep?** | Have students circle the appropriate symbol (e.g., thumbs-up or thumbs-down; happy, neutral, or smiley face). | Students record what time they went to sleep and what time they woke up and calculate how many hours they slept. |
| **Did you exercise or play today?** | Students circle *yes* or *no*. | Students write down each activity and its duration. |
| **What did you do at recess and lunch?** | Students check the appropriate response:  I played with my peers.  I played by myself. | Students check the appropriate response:  I hung out with my peers.  I hung out by myself. |
| **How did you feel today?** | Students circle one of three faces (happy, neutral, sad). | Students use words or draw a picture to describe how they felt. |
| **Your health:**  **How are you doing? How healthy are your habits?** | Students circle one of the following descriptions (you can add a smiley face or other visual for each): Great! Okay! Keep working at it! | Students assign themselves a score from 1 to 10 for each day. |

Here is an example of a healthy-habits log for primary-level students.

**Primary Healthy Habits Log:***Circle or check what you are eating or drinking and feeling.*

***Safety***

Emphasize to students that the log is not a prescriptive plan. We are simply looking at our overall wellness, not counting calories. Explain some of your own habits as a teacher—for example, occasionally eating dessert or sweet snacks. Remember: “Everything in moderation—including moderation!” Students are not being assessed on what they eat or how much water they drink but on their ability to identify patterns and healthy habits.

***Assessment Look-Fors***

The most important aspect of this activity is not *what* students’ habits are but *how* they reflect on them. Students and parents need to know that you are not judging; to the contrary, you are helping them identify both their good habits and any areas in which they need to improve.

Attach a self-reflection page to the back of the assignment for students to fill out at the end. Primary students can tally up happy faces, thumbs-ups, and so on for each category; you can also ask students to share their overall thoughts about their habits. Intermediate students can do more of a written reflection by answering the following questions:

1. What was my daily average?
2. Am I happy with my habits? Why, or why not?
3. What good habits should I continue with?
4. In what areas could I improve?
5. What surprised me most about my habits?
6. Was this assignment helpful? Was it fun? Why, or why not?