

Lesson: Emotions in Our Body

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Overview & Purpose

In this lesson we help students notice sensations in the body and mind to gain greater understanding of emotions. We'll begin by asking students to notice where and how they feel emotions in themselves. We'll discuss some of the physiological reactions that happen in the body naturally and why (faces, body, posture). We build on the basics from the breath, body scan, thought-spotting, and brain lessons in previous weeks.

Key Points

1. Emotions are neither positive or negative, they are just part of being human
2. Emotions bring energy and information to us and then they move on
3. Mindful breathing can calm our brain's stress alarm so that we can think more clearly before we choose what to do
4. We combine the body scan and the mental noting techniques like those in thought-spotting to notice the sensation and degree of sensation of emotions in our body.

Lesson Outline

1. We get physical cues from our emotions- many subconscious. These cues often start small and increase until we notice them and acknowledge what they are trying to tell us.
2. Mindfulness helps us notice our emotions/feelings
3. When we become aware of the cues of our emotions we can notice them, listen to them, and relax ourselves before they take us over and we do something we may regret
4. Dr. Daniel Siegel's "Name It to Tame It" works for emotions as well as thoughts

Materials Needed

PNAs 2014 graphic: Topography of Emotions (See Resources at end of this document)

Activity

Raise your hand if you remembered to watch your thoughts since our last mindfulness class? How did it go? Was did you notice? Were you able to give it a one word name? Were you able to let it go?

Today, we are going to try to do something similar, but we'll be trying to notice our feelings/emotions. But unlike the words and images that thoughts pop into our heads, we feel emotions in our bodies.

Have you ever said or done something that you wish you could take back? Have you ever overreacted to something small and felt really bad and gotten into trouble? Yeah, me too. The problem is that a lot of the time our emotions get going even before our brains know what's going on. At first we just feel a little uncomfortable, then annoyed, and then....!

With mindfulness we use the deep thoughtful, breaths to calm our Alarm/ Stress Response (Fight/Flight/Freeze) so that we can use another mindfulness tool to notice what is going on in our body, name the emotion, and decide if and what we should do next.

But first we have to be aware of how the emotions feel in our body when they are trying to get our attention.

Discussion questions:

- Where do you feel [happy, love, sad, angry, fear] in your body; how does your body know when you are (happy, angry, scared)?

- What would your heartbeat be like if you were ____? Would it be fast or slow? Would you be tense or relaxed? What is happening in your mind? Are there nice thoughts or mean thoughts? Now say to yourself, it's just [name the emotion].
- Do several emotions, ending with a pleasant one.

Show them the PNAs graphic. Use the 4 figure one for K-4, a 8 figure one for 5-7, and the full graphic with the 16 figures for 8-12.

Here is a picture of the heat and energy that moves through us when we feel an emotion. In this study, these feelings came about just with words, just by talking. Yellow is the hottest and strongest, red is pretty hot too. Black is neutral- just fine, and blue is cold and slow. Let's look at a few. Are there any that stand out to you? Any that look just like you thought they would? (They almost always notice how the hands on anger are so yellow. Also, that anger and love look a lot alike. The older kids usually are drawn to how eerie depression looks and how much shame looks like Spiderman). This graphic always produces a lot of discussion.

Discussion Points:

1. **Happiness** and love light us up all over! It just feels good- the mind is clear, the heart/chest is wide and warm. This emotion will pass too, but we need to soak in it a little while. Notice just how good it feels.
2. **Anger:** Look at those hands- lots of energy and heat building up there. It's uncomfortable and we just want to punch, or throw or do something to get it out of us. So when you're starting to feel a little tense or uneasy, try to notice your hands. If they are tensing up- stretch them out, shake them around, maybe take a deep breath and try to send some good air to relax them. Also, notice the forehead (PFC/Smart Part)- it's cloudy isn't it? Yep, that's what happens, we aren't thinking clearly when we're really angry. This is a great time for some mindful breathing, tell yourself, "it's my anger", and use your mindful breathing to bring yourself back on-line before you decide what to do next.

3. **Fear:** The heart is pounding, but our body gets still. All the energy/ tension is in the head, chest and belly. We're cloudy in thought too. Do you think that's why we sometimes get a stomachache when we're scared? Headache? Do any of you guys feel like this when you're scared?
4. **Sadness:** The heart hurts, the head hurts and our body just slows down. It doesn't want to do anything. It's almost like sadness just gives us a time out.

So how can we use mindfulness to become aware of our emotions? Remember the body scan? When we took a few moments to notice sensations in the different parts of our body? We can use this when we start to feel uneasy- pause and check-in and see how we are really feeling right now.

When we notice a difficult emotion coming on, we can become aware of it and pause. Take a moment to get to know it a little better. Just as we gave each thought a one word name, we can call out our emotion too. "That's my anger. I hear you. Thanks for trying to protect me but I got this. I'm going to breathe a few times and get my PFC back online so I can decide what to do next."

Scientists estimate that an emotion only lasts between 30 seconds and 2 minutes if we don't attach a story and start reeling with memories and projections. So give yourself a break with mindful breathing to relax the stress response, notice, name it and just watch as the emotion reduces in size. A few more breaths and the energy and chemicals will move on out.

Let's get into our mindful bodies, take a few deep breaths, start with the top of our head and see if we can notice any cues of emotion.....

How did it go? Did you notice anything? What did it feel like? Little, medium, big? What happened when you used your breathing to soothe yourself? How could this be useful to you in the future?

RESOURCES:

Dr. Dan Siegel video on "[Name It to Tame It](#)"

Where Do We Feel Emotion In Our Bodies?

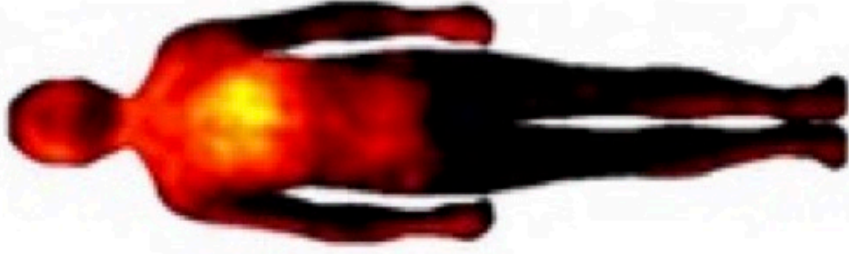
Happiness



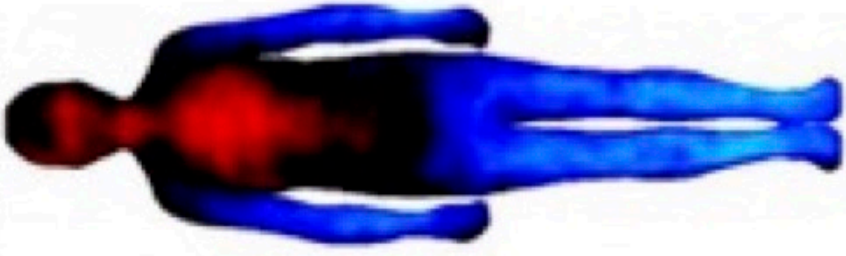
Anger



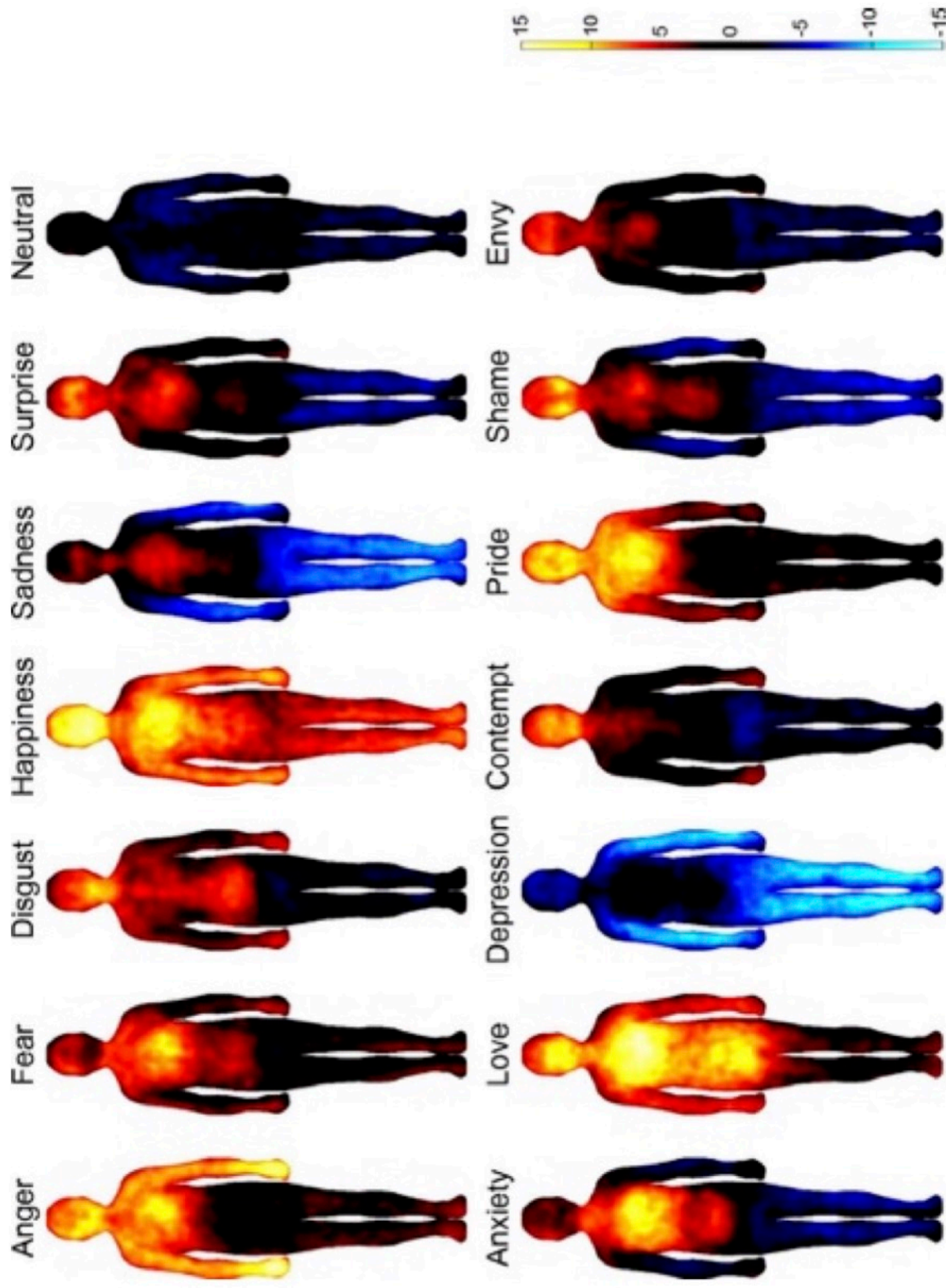
Fear



Sadness



Bodily topography of basic (Upper) and nonbasic (Lower) emotions associated with words.



Lauri Nummenmaa et al. PNAS 2014;111:646-651