

## Weekly Social Fitness Challenge

This activity is inspired by the Heroic Imagination Project. At the HIP, they believe one must work on their social fitness through daily workouts. Just as a person exercises to condition their muscles and develop muscle memory, a person can do regular Social Fitness workouts to prepare themselves to act courageously, wisely, and compassionately in challenging social situations.

Similar to an exercise routine, the weekly challenges will cover strengthening and flexibility exercises such as practicing courageous conversations across a variety of social situations, taking the perspective of others, showing appreciation, and expressing gratitude.

In that vein, you will be practising your Social Fitness for this class. Here are the expectations for this assignment:

1. Every Monday, begin the weekly Social Fitness Challenge assigned.
2. Make an effort to follow the challenge for an entire week.
3. Record your thoughts / observations / experiences on the challenge.
4. Submit a journal of your weekly challenge for assessment the following Monday.
5. Share your results with the class.

### **Things to consider / helpful tips:**

- Writing down a specific behavioural goal is a great way to maintain focus on your goal.
- Success does not depend on the outcome; acknowledge yourself for making the effort!
- Developing a self-supportive statement is a helpful alternative to automatic thoughts.
- Practicing courageous conversations with a partner can help you to build confidence and skill when it comes time for the real conversation.

<b>MARKING RUBRICS</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Poor</b>
<p><b>Reflections:</b> Ability to integrate behavioural goal into real-world experiences and analyse issues with a critical attitude</p>	<p>Ability to proficiently demonstrate reflection and deep thinking of acquired knowledge and concepts, and integrate them into different issues from wide range of perspectives (e.g. different contexts, cultures, disciplines etc.); creative solutions and critical thinking skills demonstrated in the writing</p>	<p>Showing satisfactory ability to relate acquired knowledge to previous experiences; demonstrating attempt to analyze the issues from a number of different perspectives</p>	<p>Includes description of events, and a little further consideration behind the events using a relatively descriptive style of language; no evidence of using multiple perspectives in analyzing the issues</p>	<p>Only includes mere descriptions of theoretical knowledge; no reflection is demonstrated beyond the descriptions</p>
<p><b>Presentation:</b> Articulation and organization of ideas and perspectives</p>	<p>Writing is well-focused; arguments or perspectives are precisely defined and explained; coherent flow in developing an insightful idea demonstrated</p>	<p>Arguments or perspectives are clearly stated; organized flow in writing but not deep enough to be very insightful</p>	<p>Arguments or perspectives are vaguely mentioned; the writing lacked an organized flow and the ideas were hard to follow</p>	<p>Do not show any original thinking or perspectives; chaotic in organization and presentation of ideas</p>
<p><b>Completeness:</b> Incorporation of the journal entries into a whole, demonstration of the learning process</p>	<p>Concrete connections between journal entries into a whole; demonstrating clear steps in the developmental learning process</p>	<p>Journal entries can be generally connected; still able to observe how the student develops during the learning process</p>	<p>Weak connections between journal entries; development gained from the learning process is hardly observed</p>	<p>No connections between journal entries; entries are mere descriptions of events rather than showing a sequence of learning steps</p>

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #1**

*Smile at 10 strangers to spread good will.*

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #2**

*Go out of your way to open the door/hold the door open for someone.*

The first step in helping someone in need is to notice that someone needs help. Opening the door/hold the door is a simple way to practice situational awareness, so when a more challenging situation arises you will be better equipped to overcoming situational forces and act heroically.

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #3**

*Write down what you find interesting and valuable about a different person each day.*

The judgments you make about others depend not only on their behaviour but also on your interpretation of their actions within a social context. By taking a few minutes to acknowledge the unique qualities of an individual you can learn to see past stereotypes and develop appreciation for those who are different from you.

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #4**

*Write down 3-5 things every day for which you are grateful.*

The definition of gratitude is the quality or feeling of being grateful or thankful and appreciative.

Keeping a gratitude journal, where you write down five things each day you feel grateful for has been associated with greater well being according to the research of Robert Emmons, described in his book, *Thanks!*. You may be grateful for particular colleagues, loved ones, or what you found to be fun or meaningful during the day. Examples may also include the color of the sky or your first cup of coffee, or how your morning exercise routine left you feeling refreshed and alive.

You may notice, as you do this, that you are more likely to acknowledge a colleague or friend, or a member of your family. According to the research, you are also likely to notice within weeks that you feel happier and healthier.

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #5**

*Give a sincere compliment to at least one person every day this week.*

There are two very different ways that you can respond to your daily experiences. One way limits your choices, diminishes your creativity, and narrows your point of view. This response is referred to as mindlessness. The other possible way in which you can respond to your experiences is known as mindfulness. It does just the opposite. Mindfulness and mindful-reflection give you the power to perceive a wide range of potential responses to a given situation and to choose the one that seems right to you.

When you give someone a compliment you are making a mindful choice to create a positive environment by helping those around you feel good about themselves.

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #6**

*Throughout the day, take short breaks to practice mindfulness through breath awareness. Be sure to sit comfortably and close your eyes.*

The following guide will lead you through a breath awareness exercise. This is only one example of many ways to develop mindfulness through breath awareness. We encourage you to find one that best serves your needs.

Take a few moments to “simply be.” Experience the moment. Notice sounds, physical sensations, thoughts and feelings – without trying to do anything about it. Continue like this a little while, allowing yourself to relax.

Now, bring attention to the breath. Simply notice the breath as it moves in and out – as the body inhales and exhales. Notice how the breath moves in and out automatically, effortlessly. Don’t try to manipulate it in any way. Notice all the details of the breathing experience – the feeling of the air moving in and out of the nose, the way the body moves as it breathes, etc.

If your mind wanders away from the breath, that is fine. That’s a part of the meditation! When you notice that you are no longer observing the breath, simply smile at the thought you were having, then bring your attention back to the breath.

In time, you can become aware of the tendencies of your mind. You will see how it resists certain thoughts and tries to hold onto others. The natural settling down of the mind allows you to notice these underlying tendencies and let them go. If you experience a resistance to what is occurring, an attempt to change what is happening, or a tendency to hold on to some experience – let it go. Focus only on your breath.

### **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #7**

*Practice asking for help.*

This week's challenge may sound simple. However, asking for help is not an innate ability at which all people excel. Asking for help is a skill that can be developed through practice. Everyone differs in the situations in which they feel comfortable asking for help. This week's challenge is to encourage you to step outside of your comfort zone and ask for help in situations where you would normally avoid doing so.

In two experiments, social psychologist, Tom Moriarity, demonstrated the importance of asking for help in order for observers to feel personally responsible for your well-being. In the first experiment, New Yorkers watched as a thief snatched a woman's suitcase in a restaurant, when she left her table. In the second, they watched a thief grab a portable radio from a beach blanket, when the owner left it for a few minutes. In each experiment, the would-be victim (the experimenter's accomplice) had first asked the soon-to-be observer of the crime either "Do you have the time?" or "Will you please keep an eye on my bag/radio, while I'm gone?" Asking for the time elicited no personal responsibility and almost all of the bystanders stood by idly as the theft took-off. However, of the people who had agreed to watch the victim's property, almost every bystander intervened. They called for help, and some even tackled the runaway thief on the beach!

*The encouraging message is that we can often convert apathy to action and transform callousness to kindness just by asking for it. The mere act of requesting a favour forges a special human bond that involves other people in ways that materially change the situation. It makes them feel responsible to you and thereby responsible for what happens in your shared social world.*

## **Weekly Social Fitness Challenge #8**

*Help someone feel included in a group setting.*

Research initiated by psychologist, Henri Tajfel, in the 1970's has shown us that all it takes for us to begin to carve out our social worlds into "us" and "them" is the random flip of a coin.

Only minutes after being divided into the A or B group by the coin flip, the participants in Tajfel's experiment rated members of both groups on various attributes, such as intelligence and likability. Overwhelmingly, people rated the members of their own group as more likable and intelligent. They also rated the members of the other group as having less variety in personality than individuals in their own group. Within the span of only a few moments, these ordinary people began to stereotype the other group and to treat them with discrimination – even though the members of both groups were complete strangers at the beginning of the experiment. Tajfel called this phenomenon the *minimal group paradigm*. Imagine how difficult it must be to break into an established social group, when the members of the "in" group have developed prejudices against those who are not members of their group. By reaching out to someone who is not a member of your social group, you can facilitate the group's acceptance of new members.

Tajfel, H., Billig, M. G., Bundy, R. P., & Flament, C. (1971). Social categorization and intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 1, 149-178. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2420010202