Student Mindfulness Resource

In this unit we investigate the causes of cancer. Many high school students have experienced or been impacted by cancer or know somebody who has. Some high school students may have been diagnosed with cancer themselves or had a close friend or family member diagnosed. Some may have lost a loved one to cancer. As a result, the topic of cancer can be very upsetting for both students and teachers, even in a biology context.

If at any time you need additional social or emotional support to engage with this content, you can
- approach your teacher privately,
- reach out to a counselor, social worker, or mental health professional, or
- talk to your caregiver(s) or another trusted adult.

You also have access to mental health resources outside your school or home, such as these:
- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call, text, or online chat 988 (English, Spanish, ASL)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357) (English and Spanish)
- National Alliance for Mental Illness Teen & Young Adult Helpline: Text “Friend” to 62640

Be aware that your teacher and/or your classmates may have experienced trauma related to this topic. Approach conversations about cancer with respect and empathy, guided by your class's Community Agreements.

Some of the ways that you might be able to tell that the content in class is affecting you, your classmates, or your teacher are
- breathing rapidly or shallowly
- fidgeting more than usual
- withdrawing from class conversations
- disrupting class or engaging in side conversations not related to the content
- getting easily distracted
- becoming increasingly irritable

If you experience any of these, practice a coping mechanism listed in this resource, such as 5-4-3-2-1 or deep breathing. Once you feel a level of calmness, alert a teacher and/or speak to a safe, trusted adult such as a counselor. We recommend checking in with yourself often over the course of this physics unit.

Additionally, if you see a classmate who is exhibiting some of these behaviors during science class, be compassionate. Check in with your classmate and/or let your teacher know what you noticed and why you are concerned.

Something that may help you and your classmates when the content of a lesson feels upsetting is mindfulness strategies. Engaging in mindfulness can bring awareness to trauma that can affect your physical and mental health and allow you to address it.
**5-4-3-2-1 Strategy**
- Look at five things around you. What color are they? What shape are they? What other qualities do they have?
- Acknowledge four things that you are touching or things you can touch. How do they feel? How would they feel?
- Listen for three sounds you can hear. Tune in to them each individually.
- Breathe in and identify two smells around you. What do these smells remind you of?
- Identify one thing you can taste around you. What would it taste like?

**Box Breathing Strategy**
- Visualize a box with 4 equal sides.
- Step One: Breathe in through the nose for a count of 4.
- Step Two: Hold breath for a count of 4.
- Step Three: Breath out for a count of 4.
- Step Four: Hold breath for a count of 4.
- Repeat.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation Strategy**
- Starting at the feet, curl your toes under and tense the muscles in the foot. Hold for 5 seconds, then slowly release for 10 seconds. During the release, focus attention on the alleviation of tension and the experience of relaxation.
- Then repeat for the muscles in the lower legs.
- Repeat for the hips and buttocks.
- Repeat for the muscles in the stomach and chest.
- Repeat for the muscles in the shoulders.
- Repeat for the muscles in the face (e.g., squeezing your eyes shut).
- Finally, repeat for the muscles in the hand, creating a fist. You can move through this sequence backward and repeat it as often as you would like.

**Guided Imagery Strategy**
Visualize a relaxing environment by either recalling one from memory or creating one through imagination (e.g., a day at the beach). Consider these questions:
- What do you see? (e.g., deep-blue color of the water)
- What do you hear? (e.g., waves crashing along the shore)
- What do you smell? (e.g., fruity aromas from sunscreen)
- What do you taste? (e.g., salty sea air)
- What do you feel? (e.g., warmth of the sun)

Sustain the visualization as long as needed or able, focusing on taking slow, deep breaths throughout the exercise. Focus on the feelings of calm associated with being in a relaxing environment.

Often, it is not enough to apply these strategies on your own. If you need additional support, let your teacher or another trusted adult know and ask them to help connect you to a mental health professional or other resources that can help.

**Prompt 1:** What other strategies do you use to ground yourself when you feel upset, sad, or angry? You can jot them down here to reference during this unit.
Prompt 2: Although you are not required in this unit to write down or share your personal experiences related to cancer, for some, the exercise of recording or talking about an experience can be positive. If this is true for you, please feel free to record your reflections in your science notebook for your teacher to read. You can also record your reflections below and/or on the back of this handout if you would like to keep them private. You can volunteer your experiences at any time but make sure to let your classmates know ahead of time if your story might be upsetting.