

How To Use the Heroes Circle Curriculum

Why We Created This Curriculum:

Being a kid is hard. Every day, children are bombarded with personal, family, academic, and environmental stressors, which impact how they respond to the world around them. Without the proper tools and an outlet for emotional expression, everyday stress can grow into chronic stress. If left unmanaged, chronic stress can lead to frustration, anger, depression, and physical illness. It can even become toxic in the school environment, with violent consequences.

We help students learn how to recognize their stress and manage it effectively. The Heroes Circle Elementary Program is centered on a specialized, standards-aligned curriculum that helps students combat the negative effects of stress. The program is also beneficial for teachers and other school staff who have the common goal of fostering a safe school environment. We all want happy, healthy, successful children.

How It Helps Students:

The Heroes Circle Elementary curriculum is designed to help students learn more about:

- the nature of stress
- how the brain and body respond to it and
- proven techniques to manage their stress

During each lesson, students will have the opportunity to practice martial arts breathing, express their feelings, share their thoughts, and build empathic relationships by listening to other people's perspectives. Students can move through the school day with a sense of calm, clarity of mind, and refocused attention on learning because they can be assured that they have been heard and validated.

The Heroes Circle Elementary Program is designed to help students:

- build awareness of stress, their personal stress response, and how stress affects their bodies and minds.
- enhance their awareness of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors associated with stress.
- improve their understanding of how stress impacts their relationships, decisions, and the school environment.
- express feelings, process experiences, and engage in dialogue about relevant issues.

How The Heroes Circle Is Different from Other Programs:

360-Degree Approach: The Heroes Circle engages everyone in the school building. We believe that every adult in the school building plays a critical role in every student's well-being. That means that all adults, from classroom teachers and administrators to school safety officers and lunchroom supervisors, must have tools to understand and manage their stress before they can help students do the same. We provide robust professional development and other support throughout the school year. This 360-degree approach creates a safe environment that fosters learning and contributes to a more positive school climate.

Teacher's Discretion: We respect that teachers understand their unique classroom culture better than anyone. We respect that teachers understand their unique classroom culture better than anyone. We have designed our curriculum so that they can customize our lessons to fit the needs of their classroom. Because we know that teachers' time is valuable, we have designed each lesson to take about 15 minutes to teach.

Aligned to Educational Standards:

All lessons are aligned with the CASEL Competencies:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| • Self-Awareness | • Relationship Skills |
| • Social Awareness | • Responsible |
| • Self-Management | Decision Making |

Lessons also meet the following standards:

- Michigan Health and Physical Education standards
- National English Language Arts standards, specifically Speaking, Writing, and Listening

The Heroes Circle Curriculum Includes:

★ Videos

The Heroes Circle Program is based on a series of videos about the brain and how it works, stress and the body's physical response to it, and various age-appropriate coping strategies.

★ Lesson Plans

Lesson plans are organized around key topics. There are five lesson plans per unit designed to be completed within a week. Each unit includes a video, step-by-step directions for teaching the lesson, scripted suggestions for teachers, discussion questions, and activity sheets for student self-reflection. Lesson plans are easy to follow and can be completed in 15 minutes each day.

Day 1: Watch [FOCUS: Social Awareness]

Students will watch a video that helps them understand difficult feelings of stress, fear, or anxiety. Next, students will respond to the content of the video during a brief teacher-led discussion. Discussion questions are rooted in CASEL Social Awareness competencies and can be used to initiate whole-class, small group, or partner conversations.

Day 2: Think [FOCUS: Responsible Decision Making]

Students will participate in a deeper discussion about the video content. Discussion questions are rooted in CASEL Responsible Decision-Making competencies and can be used to initiate whole-class, small group, or partner conversations.

Day 3: Discuss [FOCUS: Relationship skills]

Relationship skills]. Students will engage in discussions about stress and how it can impact interactions, relationships, and communication with others. Discussion questions are rooted in CASEL Relationship Skills competencies and can be used to initiate whole-class, small group, or partner conversations.

Day 4: Apply [FOCUS: Self-Management]

Students will work independently to apply the unit concepts to a self-reflective activity. Each of the Day 4 lessons includes a themed activity sheet. Discussion questions are rooted in CASEL Self-management competencies. Students are encouraged to complete the activity sheet independently.

Day 5: Share [FOCUS: Self-Awareness]

Students will share their personalized activity sheet responses. Discussion questions are rooted in CASEL Self-awareness competencies and can be used to initiate whole-class, small group, or partner conversations.

★ Activity Sheets

Self-reflective activity sheets allow students to process what they've learned and apply it to their own life. There is one activity sheet per unit, based on each week's video content. Students will be invited to share their activity sheet responses on Day 5.

★ Discussion Questions

Thought-provoking, CASEL-aligned discussion questions are included in each lesson. Questions are designed to encourage students to think, feel, reflect, build awareness, dialogue, practice techniques, make important connections between and among concepts, and build positive relationships with other students.



We created this program because **IT'S HARD BEING A KID**

Elementary school students face stress every day. What could they be stressed about?



- Family relationships and responsibilities
- School expectations and workload
- Navigating the ups and downs of peer relationships
- Pressure from social media
- World events and the future

When a student deals with chronic stress, it impacts everything about their life.



- Physical wellness
- Relationships
- Mental wellness
- Academic performance
- Self-esteem

The Heroes Circle Program offers students **POWER PEACE PURPOSE**

1

Power: The Breath Brake

The Breath Brake® is a proven and powerful tool for managing stress that students can use to self-regulate anytime, anywhere.

2

Peace: Critical knowledge and self-awareness

Students will gain a significant understanding of:

- how the brain responds to stress
- the impact of stress on the body and mind
- their personal stress response
- how and when to use the Breath Brake
- how to effectively manage stressful situations with calm and clarity

3

Purpose: Teaching others; teaching the world

Students breathe in the light and blow out the darkness to find power. Members of the Heroes Circle help, inspire, and heal one another, one breath at a time.

QUICK START GUIDE

EASY AS 1-2-3



Begin with a Breath Brake.

Instructions at the beginning of every unit

Follow step-by-step procedures for each lesson.

Day 1 - Watch video and lead a brief discussion about the topic and key points

Day 2 - Think more about the topic and key points then discuss as a class, in small groups, or in student pairs



Day 3 - Discuss key points in the context of real examples and discuss the situational effectiveness of a Breath Brake

Day 4 - Apply and personalize topic and content to individual student experiences; activity sheets included for students to reflect and apply the learning to their own experiences

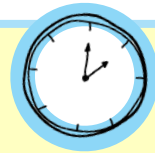
Day 5 - Share knowledge, experiences, and personal insights about the topic



End with Power Peace Purpose

Instructions at the beginning of every unit

**Time: 15 minutes,
five days per week**



You can find all
materials online at
HeroesCircle.org/SupportMaterials

- ✓ Weekly Videos
- ✓ Lesson plans
- ✓ Activity sheets
- ✓ Standards alignment
- ✓ Breath Brake video
- ✓ Meditations

LOOK FOR THESE ICONS



Unit objectives and Vocabulary



Suggested script or talking points
for teachers



Yellow pages - Lesson plans that include
CASEL-aligned discussion questions



CASEL Competencies:

Social Awareness



Responsible Decision Making



Relationship Skills



Self-Management



Self-Awareness

Teaching the World, One Breath Brake at a Time.



What is a Breath Brake?

The **Breath Brake®** is an interventional breathing technique based upon martial arts principles. It combines movement with each breath to put the brakes on stress chemicals secreted by the adrenal gland. It is the most central technique taught to our Heroes Circle community as a way to help them manage their response to pain, anxiety and stress.



The Benefits of Somatic Breathing

Every time we have tension somewhere in the body, the stress response creates a muscular tightness. Using the Breath Brake to relax your muscles reverses the stress (sympathetic response), resulting in relaxation (parasympathetic response), which will shut off the adrenal glands production of glucocorticoids (stress chemicals).

Benefits of power breathing and our unique Breath Brake technique include:

- * Lowered blood pressure and heart rate
- * Reduced lactic acid build up in muscle tissue
- * Balanced levels of O₂ and CO₂ in the blood
- * Improved immune system function
- * Increased physical energy
- * Enhanced feeling of calm and wellbeing

How To Do a **BREATH BRAKE®**

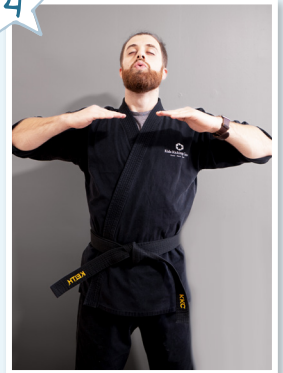
Set your feet shoulder width apart. Begin by rubbing your hands together, feeling the warm energy we create. This is our “Chi.”

1



Turn your hands over and begin to push them slowly to the floor. As you exhale through your mouth, allow your chin and head to gently fall downward to your body.

4



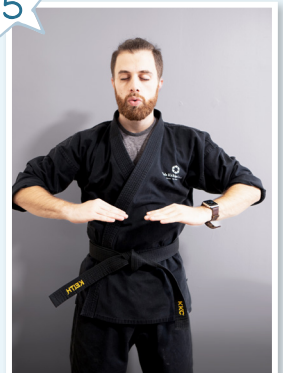
Relax your shoulders and let your chin drop to your chest, laying your hands at your waist, with your palms up. Imagine a powerful light. That light can represent the things that make you feel happy, strong, safe and loved.

2



Feel your neck, shoulders and chest relax as you slowly blow out from your mouth. As you exhale, push your hand down and blow out the darkness, which can represent things like anger, fear and pain.

5



“Breathe in the light” for three seconds as you raise your hands up – through your belly, chest and neck. The breath follows and fills those spaces. When your hands reach the top, take one last breath, filling your lungs and holding onto the feeling of light for another three seconds.

3



When your hands pass your navel and you are almost out of air, give one more push of the exhale, relaxing your stomach and the rest of your body. Even if you could not see the light or the darkness, just focus on the feeling of your body rising and falling like a wave.

6

