

# IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN OUR CLASSROOMS



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# INTRODUCTION



English learners experience psychological pressure or trauma when starting over in a new country, especially in the post pandemic environment. This presentation provides specific examples of strategies that help reduce stress and improve mental health such as practicing mindfulness, using meditation exercises, effective accommodations, and relaxing classroom activities.





# English Language Learners

English learners (ELs) experience psychological pressure or trauma when starting over in a new country.

Refugee students run away from dangerous locations and seek asylum in a safe place.

Internationally adopted children are suddenly immersed in only a second language environment which can cause anxiety and fear.

Students from migrant families move frequently; and as a result, they lack stability in their education and personal lives (DiGregorio, 2023).

Indigenous students might mask their identity because they do not want to be made fun of

Students with interrupted formal education-have frequent gaps in academic knowledge and skills as well as emotional needs (Lawrence, 2023)

# Supporting Social Emotional Health of ELLs

Michelle Lawrence, experienced ESL teacher, provides strategies for assisting ELLs:



1. **Get to know your students by building relationships** (increasing their confidence, providing meaningful connections, informing your instruction and support).
2. **Learn about their prior experiences** (What unique population are they part of? Are they students with interrupted formal education? Are they indigenous students?)
3. **What responsibilities do ESL students have at home?** Financial, family, household, or translation responsibilities? (Lawrence, 2023)

# Supporting Social Emotional Health of ELLs



**Michelle Lawrence, experienced ESL teacher, provides strategies for setting up ELLs for success:**

- 1. Teachers need to have well organized and structured classroom.**  
*Routines, daily schedules, and individualized students' schedules must be accessible.*
- 2. Welcome students' cultures but also help them fit in the new US society.**
- 3. Encourage students' interests and activities and provide information about extra-curricular activities.** (Lawrence, 2023)

# Strategies

- Bryson (2022) suggests five ways to promote mental health:



- First, teachers need to be flexible and listen when students are sharing their personal feelings. It is very important that English learners feel safe and calm in the classroom.
- Students will need to trust their teacher and their classmates in order to speak up and share their feelings. Sometimes, it might be helpful if the teacher talks to English language learners privately to offer help.

# Strategies

- **Second, teachers must share important information about community resources and support.**

1. Fire, police, and health services;
2. Women's aid shelters;
3. Homeless charities;
4. Mental health support teams;
5. Community centers;
6. LGBTQ+ support agencies (Bryson, 2022).



# Strategies



- Third, instructors should educate ELs about practicing **mindfulness and meditation exercises**.
- Mindfulness- ability to be aware of your feelings, situation, surroundings without judgement. Exercise by running, walking or doing yoga to practice mindfulness
- Mindfulness in school- students close their eyes, correct posture, and listen to a short-guided meditation with music played at school (Armer, 2021). Benefits of using mindfulness in classroom is students' improved mood, decreased physical pain, reduced feelings of anxiety, stress and depression.



# Strategies

- **Activity- 5-4-3-2-1- is a coping technique for anxiety** – Teacher asks a student to take a deep breath and answer these questions: What are 5 things you can see?, What are 4 things you can feel? What are 3 things you can hear? What are 2 things you can smell? What is 1 thing you can taste?





# Strategies

**Fourth**, teachers can calm students when drawing or painting activities are embedded in the curriculum. Coloring and drawing activities reduce stress and allow students to express themselves (Armer, 2021)

**The fifth strategy** is about getting outside and exercising because it releases endorphins. Being outside improves students' mood, concentration, and sleep. It also reduces anxiety and stress.

# Teaching Accommodations



- Reducing stress in the classroom is very important.
- Instructors must be aware of how to deliver instructional accommodations to ELs, especially to newcomers and beginners.
- Schwartz (2021) provides helpful suggestions for ACCOMMODATIONS:
  - using Google Translate app, closed captioning when playing a video, voice typing in Google Docs,
  - increasing comprehensible input by utilizing **Total Physical Response** and **Pictorial Exchange Communication System** or illustrated vocabulary words.
  - Providing graphic organizers, sentence starters, skeletal notes, extended time to complete tasks

# Teaching Accommodations

- Offer choices of what students can say if they are called on by a teacher and do not know how to respond. The questions are listed in a [helpful anchor chart](#)

## Be an Active Learner

- May I have more time to think?
- Please reword the question.
- Where can I find more information?
- Can you give me a hint?
- Can you please explain it differently?
- What does the word \_\_\_\_\_ mean?
- May I ask a friend for help?





Teaching in a post pandemic classroom can be challenging for new teachers too. Therefore, it is essential that teachers are aware of their own gestures, body language, and the way they teach ELs.

# INTERNATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENTS COMPLETED A SURVEY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH



# List at least 3 challenges that you are currently facing

**International college students responded that challenges of studying in a foreign country are :**

- *Isolation*
- *Homesickness*
- *Lack of English skills*
- *Different food*
- *No public transportation*
- *Academic stress*



# List at least 3 activities that make you happy or calm you down



**International college students responded that they like to:**

- *Talk with their family*
- *Write down feelings*
- *Attend activities and festivals*
- *Pray*
- *Play sports*





# List 2-3 acts of kindness that someone did for you

## International college students responded :

- *Celebrating birthdays with international students*
- *Receiving gifts from a host family*
- *Being invited to an Indian restaurant*
- *Being introduced to a student center and an archery club*
- *Receiving a cup of coffee on a bad day*
- *Getting a hand-made sweater*



## Describe how teachers can improve mental health of international students

### International college students responded :

- *“They should understand that we are international students, we need extra focus and guidance as compared to other students. They should assist us regarding every assignment or final paper.”*
- *“As someone struggling with depression, it is nice to hear that my professors never lose sight of my potential as a student. When I am unable to hype myself up, their support means everything.”*



## Describe how college staff can help make international students feel welcome in the community



### International college students responded :

- *They should read about our native country and talk to student about it.*
- *They should hold a meeting or a party and introduce all the international students to the host community.*
- *They should add food from different countries to the menu at the dining hall.*
- *The staff should be patient with the international students and explain things again if they do not understand.*

# Describe what local community resources have positive and negative impact on you as an international student



## International college students responded :

- *The college international club helped me meet many international students*
- *Positive factors are being able to go for service trips, use of college library and fitness center*
- *Negative factors are lack of public transportation and access to local community*
- *Other negative factor is academic stress*

# CONCLUSION

**In conclusion, international students need assistance not only from teachers/ professors during instructional time but also from support staff and local community during their free time.**

- Harber (2021) points out that schools and colleges need to provide psychological support on campus
- Create and maintain a network of providers off campus
- Encourage new students' mental health disclosure
- Foster students' initiatives and build on peer support
- Empower your faculty and staff to be first responders

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# THANK YOU

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PRESENTATION TITLE

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