

YOUTH PRACTICE INTERCONNECTIONS

JANUARY 26, 2020: “FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT”

This newsletter shares ideas and activities from [Youth Practice at Clouds in Water Zen Center](#) with the community. Class contents vary with the needs of the students. Visit cloudsinwater.org/youth-practice/interconnections.

Mister Rogers said that feelings are important. Mister Rogers was right! Mindfulness of feelings is a skill that will help us in many ways.

There is an old idea in science that feelings and emotions come from a primitive part of our brain. So, we might think that feelings are less important than thoughts. But [more recent research](#) suggests that this is [not exactly true!](#) Feelings and thoughts work together at a high level. Feelings lead to thoughts, and thoughts lead to feelings.

Feelings are what drive us. They are also a big part of how we communicate with other people. Ask yourself: have you ever done something without having a feeling about it? Have you ever talked to another person without having a feeling about it?

Game: Emotional Contagion

Have you ever noticed how a yawn is contagious, or a laugh, or a smile? This is something called [emotional contagion](#). Scientists think our brains may have [special cells](#) that help us read the body language of other people.

A lot of communication happens through body language, most of the time without us even realizing it. Moods tend to spread, almost like a virus!

Let's try an experiment. Everyone line up and spin the wheel, which will land on one of [eight basic emotions](#): joy, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, interest, surprise, acceptance. (Other lists are possible.) Act out that emotion, and approach other people who will be acting out their own emotions. What happens? Do your emotions want to change? Do the feelings in the room spread? We may need to refine the rules to this game as we go along.

Song: Respect Polka - [Lyrics](#)

It's good to remember that everyone has feelings. One way of showing respect for people is by taking their feelings seriously, like Mr. Rogers does. When we bow to the buddha nature in each-other, we are bowing to beings that have feelings.

Song: Under That Bodhi Tree - [Lyrics](#)

Let's name a feeling that we can let "just float on by," so that we can see our true nature.

Song: Junk Mail - [Lyrics](#)

This is a song about the kind of thoughts that come up for people. Thoughts usually have a feeling that goes along with them. This song makes an important point: our feelings are not always 'true'. We can accept feelings as information, without thinking that they are 'us'.

Song: Ephemeral World - [Lyrics](#)

This song was written by a teen at Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon. It's funny because it's to the tune of "Material World" by Madonna. But it's also pretty deep! This song is particularly good to sing when we're upset by some failure of our own "that happened during the day."

What is some of the helpful advice from this song?

- Count your breaths in silence to help calm down.
- Remember that emotions come and go.
- "Happiness is doing our best, and letting the rest be."
- "Crazy drama is part of living life," for everyone.
- Take the cosmic view of things.
- If your problems aren't too bad, it can help to poke fun at them with a boppy Madonna tune.

Open the Altar

Offering blessings and concerns... and feelings.

Guided Meditation: Experiencing Feelings

This meditation is very simple: close your eyes, and *feel*. Is there a feeling there? Can you put a name to it? It's great if you can, but you don't have to. If you spend enough time just observing a feeling, it may eventually occur to you what it is. Sometimes, if you have a feeling, and then get caught up thinking about what it means, that can lead to anxiety. Is this feeling good or bad? Should I be having this feeling? For now, just come back to the feeling itself. Feelings can be pleasant or unpleasant, but they are not good or bad; they just are. It is actions that can be labelled as good or bad, and at the moment, we're just sitting here. Meditation is a chance to get more comfortable with our feelings, letting them come and go. This can help broaden our awareness; we might get new ideas or insights.

Part 2 - Age Group Activities

Check-in: How are you?

How are you 'feeling'?

The Wisdom of Baby Yoda #1

[Watch "You Want Some Soup?" on YouTube](#)

or ["The Mandalorian" S1:E4](#) time 07:00-09:54

Do you know about Baby Yoda? He's very popular right now. **But did you know he might have something to teach us?** In this clip, two people who should be friends are fighting. Baby Yoda intervenes in an unexpected way.

- Does Baby Yoda's calmness change the situation? How?
- Why do you think the two people were fighting? Do they really want to fight?
- Have you ever been in a fight (physical or not) that seemed important at the time, but later seemed silly?
- Is Baby Yoda practicing mindfulness?
- Is Baby Yoda being generous? Keep in mind three kinds of generosity: giving of material goods, giving of attention and fearlessness, giving of the Dharma.
- Is it significant that food is involved in this situation?
- Is Baby Yoda always calm? Does he have other feelings?
- Who would you rather be: one of the people fighting, or Baby Yoda? Why?
- Is the goal of Buddhism to be more like Baby Yoda?
- Could the two fighters represent monkey mind (reactive thoughts and feelings), and Baby Yoda represent awareness?
- Is it sometimes wise to wait and watch how things develop? When is it better to act?

Mister Rogers Meets Koko The Gorilla

[Watch Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: You & I Together \(#1727\)](#) from time 3:10-15:15

or ["Won't You Be My Neighbor"](#) from 1:16:28-1:18:13

Koko was a gorilla who learned basic sign language. In this famous scene, Mister Rogers goes to meet Koko.

- How do Mister Rogers and Koko get along so well?
- Is Koko practicing mindfulness of feelings?
- Is it better to fight a gorilla, or befriend a gorilla? (Mr. Rogers weighed 143 pounds; Koko weighed 280 pounds.)
- Do you think Mister Rogers might have been afraid of Koko? If so, how did he work with that?
- Have you ever made friends with an animal? What was that like?
- Have you ever had emotions that were strong, like a gorilla? What did you do with them?

At the start of every show, Mr. Rogers always changes his shoes and puts on his cardigan sweater. This is an example of a **ritual**. Rituals like this can help us know what to do, and put us in the right frame of mind to do it.

Koko often watched "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" on TV. When the real Mister Rogers visited, she immediately embraced him, and wanted to take off his shoes!

Do you think this ritual helped Mister Rogers and Koko get along? Can you think of other rituals that help people get along?

This story is from the article "Can You Say...Hero?" in Esquire Magazine, which was the inspiration for the movie "It's A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" starring Tom Hanks... an excellent movie.

Mister Rogers Has A Sense Of Humor

[Watch Mister Rogers' Neighborhood: You & I Together \(#1727\)](#) from time 17:37 - 22:10

Lady Elaine takes strong action when a gorilla enters "The Land of Make Believe."

- Why does Lady Elaine sound the alarm?
- Is she right to do so?
- Have you ever been sad because someone seemed afraid of you? What did you do about it?
- Is it appropriate that Lady Elaine calls Lady Aberlin "toots"? (Note that Lady Elaine is voiced by Fred Rogers, who also writes the scripts!)
- How can a sense of humor help us work with feelings? (Can it ever get in the way?)
- Is this scene actually about Mr. Roger's own feelings?

Mister Rogers and Mindfulness

[Watch "Won't You Be My Neighbor"](#) from 36:20-39:37

This segment talks about feelings, silence, mindfulness, breathing... compare it to Buddhism!

"Children have very deep feelings, just the way parents do, just the way everybody does. And our striving to understand those feelings, and to better respond to them, is what I feel is the most important task in our world." - Mr. Rogers

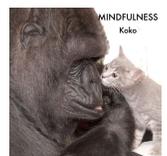
- What is the relationship between silence and attention?

(In Class) Hand out Magnets

Craft: Building A Neighborhood

Continue building your ideal neighborhood. Can you add something scary to it? What happens?

For the younger students, we'll have blocks available to build a neighborhood with. For older students, there will be paper and colored pens, to draw with during discussion.



Credits Youth Practice Leader: Kikan Howard. Grades 1-6 Teachers: Leslie Stoy, Towa Kurt Errickson, Jishi Megan Henrichs, Dylan MacWilliams.