



Karen Holford

Helping Your Students to Flourish!

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the number of children and adults experiencing anxiety and other negative/draining emotions. More students of all ages are struggling to balance their emotions, and to develop resilience for the ups and downs of everyday life. When children come to school, overwhelmed by feelings that they lack the skills to manage well, it is very difficult for their brains to be ready and open to new learning.

Flourish! is a tool based on the research of psychologist Barbara Fredrickson,* who chose to study the positive and uplifting experiences that help people to flourish, rather than the negative and draining experiences that can cause distress and illness. Fredrickson identified the 10 most common negative/draining emotions: anger, fear, stress, shame, guilt, embarrassment, frustration, sadness, contempt, and disgust. She also identified the 10 most common positive/uplifting emotions: gratitude, wonder, inspiration, interest (having an engaging hobby), hopefulness, a positive sense of purpose in life, peacefulness, laughter, joy, and kindness.

Fredrickson and her team discovered the importance of learning how to balance one's emotions. As human beings live in a broken and hurting world, it is perfectly normal for them to experience some of the draining emotions. However, people can learn how to balance their draining emotions with positive emotions, to prevent them from becoming overwhelmed by distress. The research indicates that people probably need to have at least three times as many positive emotions as negative ones to remain balanced, and an even higher ratio to flourish.

Although Fredrickson's findings are recent, the apostle Paul used similar ideas to help him "flourish" when he was in prison and awaiting execution. In the fourth chapter of Philippians, Paul listed some of the things that were helping him to be resilient in the face of a distressing and frightening situation. He chose to praise God because God is always praiseworthy no matter what is happening in our lives. He chose to be kind and gentle to others, and whenever we are kind, we are blessed in positive ways, too, because this stimulates the secretion of feel-good and healthy oxytocin in the human brain. He gave all his worries to God in prayer. He chose to do things that filled him with peace such as contemplating nature and God's creation. He focused on positive and beautiful thoughts and shared that he had learned how to be content, whatever the situation.

For several years, while practicing Frederickson's ideas, I have discovered that they help me to be calmer, happier, and less stressed. This inspired me to create **Flourish!** as a simple tool to help people of all ages, including children, learn how to balance their emotions. I concluded that it would be helpful to create a set of posters focusing on the positive emotions and describing simple ways to experience each of them. Each poster contains a Bible verse, a short statement about why this emotion is important, and 10 ways to experience the positive emotion. There is also a colorful tree poster on which younger children can stick a green leaf every time that they choose to do one of the flourishing ideas or engage in related activities. A full set of these downloadable posters can be found at <http://www.ted.adventist.org/family/flourish>.

Examples of “Flourishing” Activities for the Classroom

Gratitude

- Ask students to write the letters of the alphabet down the side of a sheet of paper. Then ask them to write down at least one thing for which they are grateful, beginning with each letter of the alphabet.
- Younger children can make a gratitude list themed around the colors of the rainbow. Ask them to list or draw things that they are thankful for, that are red, yellow, orange, green, blue, and purple.
- At the end of each school day, ask students to share what they are most thankful for. Each student can call out his or her gratitude item, in turn, to create an uplifting and energizing way to close the day.

Wonder

- Create a table for unbreakable items of natural wonder. Include a magnifying glass, and some books about nature with awesome pictures. Place a timer on the table and encourage students to pause and study an object for at least one minute, to discover something new that they haven’t seen before, and to be filled with wonder at God’s awesome creation.
- Ask older students to take photos of the amazing things they see in nature. Gather these pictures and make a weekly or monthly PowerPoint presenta-

tion of their “wonder” photos. This can help them to pause and look at the beautiful things in their world.

Inspiration

- Let students choose an inspiring Bible verse each week and explore it together. Place it in the center of a bulletin board and invite students to post their anonymous thoughts in the space around the verse. This can help the students who are more introverted to respond to the verse, too, because they do not have to speak in front of others.
- Ask students to research and write a paper about an inspiring person in the Bible, in their family, or in the world today. How does this story inspire them to live their lives?

Interest/Flow

- Create a space for interesting activities or challenges in the classroom. This can be a place where students can spend time when they have finished their class work. Include challenging puzzles, nicely presented craft materials, interesting books, and age-appropriate construction kits.
- Invite parents and friends of the school who have interesting hobbies to talk to the students about their activities.



Hopefulness

- Give your class something to look forward to each day, or each week. This might be reading an engaging story aloud, chapter by chapter; showing a funny video clip; or providing a special treat if the class has achieved a weekly target.
- Gather the students' dreams and hopes, written on paper cloud-shapes, and arrange them on a bulletin board. Look for ways to encourage them to achieve their dreams.

A Positive Sense of Purpose

- Help students to identify their personal strengths, spiritual gifts, passions, talents, skills, and resources, and to use their gifts in a helpful project for the community.
- Encourage students to list several things they did well at the end of each school day. This can be very affirming at the end of a tiring day, and it can help them to identify their growth.
- Celebrate individual and group accomplishments, however big or small.
- Tell each student that he or she is beloved by God and brings Him joy.

Peacefulness

- If possible, designate a quiet corner in the classroom or in your school. Call it a "safe space" and screen the area with see-through nets and fairy lights. Play quiet music, set out soft pillows for seating, soothing books to read, battery-operated candles, and lavender to smell.
- Give students a soapy solution to blow bubbles (see Homemade Bubble Solution Recipes) because blowing bubbles is naturally relaxing for the mind and body.

Laughter

- Laughter helps to open students' minds so

that they are ready to absorb new information. Post a different cartoon or funny picture on the wall or bulletin board each week.

- Tell a short, funny, relevant story at the beginning of a classroom or read a funny book as a serialized story.
- Incorporate brain breaks, icebreakers, or games such as charades or "Minute to Win It" to help build community and generate fun while learning.

Joy

- Joy is different from laughter, because it is possible to have happy experiences that are not hilariously funny. Ask students to share their happiest moment in each week and to describe why it was so happy.
- Invite students to write stories about a time when they were very happy, or when they made someone else feel happy.

- Ask older students to interview several different people about what makes them most happy. Invite them to present their findings to the class, and to say what surprised them most about their interviewees' reactions.

Kindness

- Start a kindness jar, into which students drop a button whenever they have experienced an act of kindness from another student. Ask them also to write the act of kindness in a log-book, stating the name of the person, the action, and the date. When the jar is filled with kindness buttons, the class shares a treat together as a reward. Check that the number of buttons is the same as the kindnesses logged in the book so that students don't "cheat" by filling the jar with their own buttons!
- Choose a class kindness project to do in your community so that the students experience the blessings of sharing kindness with others.

Homemade Bubble Solution Recipes

Basic Bubble Solution

- 1 cup (237 ml) water
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) light Karo syrup or 2 tablespoons glycerin
- 4 tablespoons (60 ml) dishwashing liquid

Stir all ingredients together until dissolved.

Sugar Bubbles

- 1 cup (237 ml) water
- 2 tablespoons (30 ml) liquid detergent
- 1 tablespoon (15 ml) glycerin
- 1 teaspoon (5 ml) sugar

Mix all ingredients together until the sugar dissolves.

Colorful Bubbles

- 1 cup (237 ml) soap or soap powder
- 1 quart (946 ml) warm water
- Liquid food coloring

Dissolve soap in warm water. Mix in the food coloring until you get the shade you want.

For more ideas, see Amanda Rock, "How to Make Your Own Bubble Solution," *verywell family* (2022): <https://www.verywellfamily.com/homemade-bubbles-2764571>; Home Science Tools, "DIY Bubble Recipe: Make Your Own Super Bubbles" (2023): <https://www.homesciencetools.com/article/how-to-make-super-bubbles-science-project/>.

- Make a list together of the different ways the students can be kind, or have been kind, to one another and to their families. Gather their ideas, write them on paper hearts, and make a display of them.

“Flourishing” Teachers

Before teachers can help students to understand and balance their emotions, they need to have the knowledge and skills to take care of their own emotions. Educational administrators can plan a workshop for teachers where they learn the importance of balancing their own emotions and give them hands-on experience of some of the simple activities included on the **Flourish!** posters. (An online webinar by Karen Holford is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oizeR09tD7o>, or contact her for more details. See e-mail address at the end of this article.)

It is important for the teachers to incorporate these “flourishing” activities into their lives on a regular basis so that choosing healthy ways to balance their emotions becomes a natural way for them to respond to stressors. Then they will be better equipped to help the children balance their complex emotions.

Some schools choose to have a well-being corner in the teachers’ room, on a table, or in a basket. It may contain a beautiful book of inspiring Bible verses or devotions; a book of good humor and cartoons to make them laugh; interesting puzzles to absorb their attention; and objects of natural wonder. Teachers can also gather and share their own ideas for activities that can help them, and their students, to balance their emotions.

Blending “Flourishing” Activities Into School Routines

Flourish! can easily be adapted to a variety of school contexts. Most of the activities described on the posters can be used by different age groups and don’t need any special equipment. If the school has a social media group, simple activities can be shared with the school community on a regular basis.

“Flourishing” Rooms


An Adventist school near London, England, created a wellbeing room for the students and filled it with activities to help them experience different positive emotions. Peaceful music plays in the background. Battery-operated candles flicker safely. There is a wonder table where children can explore natural objects and experience awe, with an arrangement of beautiful rocks and shells, interesting wood and bark, and books of nature photos. Another table has craft materials and challenge-cards to inspire students’ creativity. A basket of funny books sits next to a pile of pillows to make a laughter nook. A bulletin board is covered in sticky notes with “Thank you!” messages

written on them. Interesting puzzle toys fill a large bowl on the table, and on the walls, beautiful posters of Bible verses provide inspiration.

Brain Breaks

Some of the **Flourish!** activities can be used as “brain breaks” in the classroom. Teachers can select a handful of the simple activities and scatter them throughout the school day. These experiences can give the students a positive emotional boost, which may help their brains to learn better as well as enabling them to experience the positive emotions that bring them joy and strengthen their resilience.

Finally

Flourish! is a simple, inexpensive way to integrate positive emotions into the lives of the staff and students in schools. When students experience the good and natural effects of choosing to engage with positive emotions, and practice them regularly, they will soon learn to be intentional about incorporating them into their lives. These positive emotions will help them to learn better, become more resilient, experience better mental health, and have happier relationships. The **Flourish!** posters are freely available and can be used in a variety of ways. If you wish to translate them, or if you need them in different versions (.pdf, .jpg and .psd) please contact me for the files (kholford@ted.adventist.org). 

This resource has been peer reviewed.

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*Barbara L. Fredrickson, *Positivity* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2011).