

Compassionist Training Manual

INFORMATION OVERVIEW

Who are we?

Underground Kindness is a non-profit organization, bringing Compassionists into the classroom to introduce young people to the practice and philosophies of stress reduction and mindful living. Our preventative approach involves students in programs that focus on both physical and emotional wellbeing. Our workshops, classes and presentations are educational, experiential and empowering.

What is a Compassionist?

A classroom presenter, also known as a 'Compassionist', is defined as: A professional member of the community who shares their wisdom and experiences with students to foster self-awareness for a healthy mind, body and spirit. **Compassionists teach practical tools and techniques that focus on both physical and emotional wellbeing.** A Compassionist honors ones self and others by practicing unconditional acceptance and compassion while embracing opportunities to engage and encourage students in the present moment.

Why do we do it?

Students are often overwhelmed by academic, social, environmental and financial pressures, creating stress that they may feel unequipped to handle/process in a healthy/effective manner. Through our compassionists, **we offer programing that encourages self awareness, self expression and mindfulness, as avenues for practicing positive life skills and stress management.** By imparting a variety of wellness methods and tools, our students are empowered to navigate the inevitable challenges of life with wisdom, strength and self-honesty.

How do we help?

It is our vision to encourage and nurture the 'whole student,' through compassionate, all-inclusive classroom programs. Underground Kindness and our Compassionists create a learning space that is free of judgment, expectations and competition.

Our goal is to provide programs that support the growth of our teens into self-reflective, expressive, happy, healthy members of society. To

this end, we endeavor to assist their capacity for self-care and expand their abilities to empathize with others. Students who are offered opportunities to relax, develop self-awareness and practice inter-personal skills, are more available for learning, are more willing to share their talents, and through compassion for self, are able to **ripple that back out into their world.** (Friends, Family and Community)

Our work in the Community:

We currently offer a Core Curriculum that address several aspects of personal development with 10 classroom presentation/workshop experiences. □ We partner with 12 Compassionists in our community. □ We support SHS, SMS and JJC in the Sandpoint Area. □ Classes are FREE to the students and schools, through the generosity of grants and donations.

WORKING WITH OUR YOUTH

What are the principles?

Underground Kindness operates on a few basic principles, with each Compassionist expanding the scope of our vision by bringing in her/his rich experiences and perspective. This simple outline is intended to bring cohesion between your knowledge and our vision.

Principles:

- Every youth is capable of living a healthy, fulfilled life
- Each student deserves our care, support and encouragement
- A child experiencing wellbeing is more able to share their unique gifts
- A teen who develops self acceptance is more kind to others
- Wellness includes all aspects of body, mind and spirit
- Tools and techniques for wellbeing can be integrated into any lifestyle
- Early prevention is more effective than treating future symptoms
- Our example is our best teaching tool □

Why is it important? □ The experiences Underground Kindness shares with our youth are transformative. At an age when they are beginning to envision their futures, while feeling the pressure and expectations of social and academic stress, learning positive, healthy behaviors is invaluable. With the support of Compassionists, students build resiliency, form healthy habits and coping strategies, and are introduced to a variety of creative and healing modalities.

Many young people may have already been exposed to numerous traumatic experiences, whether it be divorce, abuse, bullying, disempowering peer-pressure or loss of a loved one. The message our Compassionists share can be healing and empowering, helping young people to grow from past experiences and not be limited by them. **Underground Kindness is filling a need that schools systems do not have the time/budget/teachers to address.**

Cultural Considerations

The differences between peers can be significant. In being effective change agents and educators, it is imperative that we use inclusive language and exercises, accessible to everyone. Bringing biases into the classroom can compound issues and stress, cause confusion and conflict in familial relationships, and inhibit the imagination and success of an individual. Not only is it important to understand the unique situations of our students, but also have a keen sense of our own cultural values and beliefs.

Compassionists are not to tell what is right or what is wrong, but to empower young people to discern for themselves. Our goal is to empower teens to enhance their lives, not to impose our opinions or personal values on them. Therefore, our material must be universal, and our delivery versatile in order to be applied to diverse groups and individuals. **The key is to deliver your ideas, tools and techniques as things that the students are invited to try, to see if it ‘works for them.’** Also, when introducing ideas and skills that originate from spiritual cultures or practices, we must present the relative, practical, useful information, leaving out religious/spiritual vocabulary, dogma, or myths.

Our students

Every student is unique and each comes from a varied background that affects his/her interest and ability to learn and grow. Some factors are inhibiting, while others promote success and an ability to take risks. Our personal prejudice toward any socio-economic stratification may be the biggest inhibitor to a student's ability to participate or assimilate new information. Some stratifications and associated prejudices to be aware of: Rich/ Poor□- Urban/ Rural□- Liberal/ Conservative□- Cultured/ Uncultured

Compassionists

Respecting the differences between yourself and your students begins with recognizing your unique experiences and influences. Our mission is to empower youth to see themselves as the authors of her/his own story. Do you know yours? These questions are intended to stimulate self-reflection. The process of developing self-awareness is a long one. Remember, we are all on the road to self-discovery.

What kind of family do you come from? How are your experiences unique?
What are your values? How do you hold them in comparison to others?
Do you have an opinion about what is Right/Wrong? Normal?
What is your idea of Success?
What are some things people wouldn't know about you just by looking?

Teaching for Underground Kindness □

Teaching is improvisational. It requires an excitement for the unknown and the ability to completely change directions in an instant. It is an honor to be in a helping relationship with young people, and we are in service to them. Our teachers must be able to recognize where opportunities present themselves, and go with it. This asks a balance between planning and 'winging it.' The preparation then lies in your personal preparation. Being in your truth becomes the practice. **Knowing your subject and having a 'bag of tricks' to engage and often entertain the students, is KEY.** Your goal must be about igniting the students' desire to interact and share about the topic you are presenting and less about what they think of you. **Asking questions and encouraging participation is extremely important!!! □**

What are we addressing? □

Underground Kindness was created to address prevalent sources of stress and imbalance in a young person's life. It is important to remind yourself why you are there, before beginning a class. Young people are up against a changing world, what can you bring to the classroom to help navigate?

Body image / Appearance

Bullying □ / Abuse / Trauma

Health / Hygiene / Weight

Climate change

War □

Caffeine / Drugs / Alcohol □

ADD □

Being 'plugged in' all the time
Dating / Sex□

Gender Equality/ Racism□
Career expectations
Information overload
Family dynamics / Divorce
Social pressure□
Depression□
Anxiety□
Feelings of being disconnected□
Poverty / Finances

What are we teaching?

No matter what content you are teaching, Underground Kindness looks to make the connection to mind, body and spirit. It is our goal to give students practical guidance to integrate wellness practices into their lives.

- Stress management
- Resiliency
- Making wise choices
- Diet (what feels good, what serves you, how to take care of yourself)
- Relationships
- Communication skills
- Anatomy
- Self-awareness
- Balance
- Identity
- Seeing life as a story in which you are the Author
- Virtue
- Affirmations
- Healthy self-esteem
- Relaxation
- Breathing
- Mindfulness
- Modalities for physical well-being
- Intuition
- Teamwork
- Compassion and Empathy
- Passion and Purpose □

Dynamic Engagement □

Reading the mood: Teaching becomes a meditation of being in the moment, maintaining a flow of information between you and your students. Walking into a classroom with expectations of how the class will need to behave is a poor strategy. Your teaching plan must hinge on the fact that you can not predict the mood of the class. You can take into consideration the time of day, the season of the year, etc, but effective life-skill teaching requires the teacher to be able to meet the student where they are, and teach accordingly.

UK classes have many of the same qualities as a conversation, not that of a lecture. To engage the students in the material, to get to the heart of the matter, you must be able to connect. You won't know how that is going to happen before the class begins. Be prepared to improvise! And adapt your material to the tone of the class at that present moment.

With consideration to flexibility and improvisation, there is also a need to establish the roles and guidelines in the classroom. Finding your way to assert **authority** in the classroom is something that may take some experimenting and practice. Your authority needs to come from a deep belief that you are, in this specific situation, the teacher, and they, the students. Doing this in a way that is not bull-headed or presumptuous is a balance. The intention is to assume the position of authority with grace and tact. Some teenagers have enough authority figures in their life, often a source of stress and feelings of low self-worth. Clear boundaries, on the other hand, are key to effective teaching and an important skill to demonstrate. Request and demonstrate respectful words and actions.

Your Role: We are asking young people to learn to live from the heart. This means the teacher, most importantly, must teach from there. Sometimes, the intention of helping kids just isn't enough. You need to find something that really provokes you, that really pushes you outside your comfort zone. In your access to something deep in the heart, you give permission to the students to do the same. This something, you can keep to yourself. It's a personal tool to create dynamic character to bring to the class.

Compassionate Communication: The language you choose in the classroom is very important. We are modeling compassionate,

strength-based and empowerment-focused ways of relating to people, and also how to relate and talk to your self. Teaching young people how to find the positive angle in situations is paramount. You are a model of ‘its cool to be kind.’ **Always display respect and kindness above all else.**

Boundaries: Most likely, you are passionate about what you are teaching and believe in its potential to change someone’s life. Your role in the classroom is limited, as is your time and scope. Falling into the role of savior or rescuer is ineffective, because you are not going to be able to save or change anyone with your limited relationship. These would be false promises, and you could end up letting kids down. Accepting the nature of UK’s program is more effective. **You are planting seeds and teaching skills. You are a resource, not a rescuer.**

Physical touch may/may not be appropriate in this environment. We want our students to feel absolutely comfortable, so they can learn. If there is an exercise that involves touching, make sure you create an equal alternative that doesn’t involve any physical contact. Giving permission to make the choice if they want to be touched, or not, is a valuable lesson in itself. And honoring that choice is important.

Disclosing personal information or experiences often seems like a good way to earn respect or likeness with your students. Unfortunately, it’s not so black and white. Its common to put experiences on a scale compared to your own. We don’t know the stories of the students in our class, and don’t know how ours relate. We risk disconnecting with our students by disclosing our experiences specifically. Stick to the emotions and feelings involved in situations that may be relevant, but stay away from specifics that would allow students to size you up compared to their realities.

The Ripple Effect: Our main goal is to offer support and encouragement to the health and well being of each student, assisting them in finding their own voice and feeling confident in expressing that. **We teach the tools for self care, self reflection and heart centered mindfulness in the hope that these seeds will grow into confidence, courage and compassion.**

Our students learn to recognize the profound impact of their own thoughts and actions on their lives and in the lives of others. We offer students the concept of “rippling it out” into their community. We ask them,

now that you have these skills, or now that you have found this place of peace inside yourself, or now that you can speak your truth, **How can you ripple that out into your community?** We will never know the full impact of our work with the youth of our community. **It is our duty and honor to share our knowledge and wisdom, as an act of rippling out love, kindness and compassion to the future mothers, fathers and leaders of tomorrow's world.**

LOGISTICS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Shadowing:

You can ask our Compassionist Coordinator (CC) for days/times of appropriate classes to observe as a way of learning how to engage, interact and present material in a classroom environment. It is also a good way to see how we share the idea of rippling kindness into the community. You will not be paid for time spent in observations. We allow one observer per class, so as not to disturb the students.

Working with the Compassionist Coordinator:

You will work with the Compassionist Coordinator to Set Up Classes/ Workshops/ Presentations. The CC organizes the schedules, keeps track of all class/student/teacher information. She is the liaison between the Compassionists and the teachers. It is imperative to maintain our relationship with the administration of the schools, that we keep our communications clear and consistent, and to that end, we use ONE avenue for connecting.

If you speak to a teacher in passing and they are excited to have you come into their classroom, or they want to know more, please, direct them to the Compassionist Coordinator. They can call or email directly or you can gather the information: teacher name, number, email and pass this on to the CC. Only classes that are set up through the Compassionist

Coordinator will be able to be billed to Underground Kindness. Also, if you know of someone who is interested in becoming a Compassionist, please, forward his or her information to our CC.

Class Scheduling: The Compassionist Coordinator will communicate with you and the teacher to find the best day/time for a class. Once confirmed, you will be scheduled.

Packets: You will be provided a packet before your presentation to take with you into the classroom. This packet, with your name on it, can be found at the SHS Teacher's Lounge in a mailbox marked – Underground Kindness. It contains: A One Look Sheet, Student Surveys, Teacher Comment Card and Ripple Cards. When you are finished with your class, please return your packet to the UK Mailbox. Any unfinished survey forms can be dropped off at the front desk by the teacher.

Introducing yourself: Typically, the teacher will introduce you to the class as a partner with Underground Kindness. If he/she does not, please, let them know your name and that you work with UK and tell them what you are going to share with them. This is a great time to jump right in with questions, such as, "Have any of you had any classes with UK?" "Have I seen any of you before?" "Does any one know what --- your topic---is?" Or, more simply, raise your hand if....type questions. This gets the kids to engage and participate immediately.

Teaching: Engaging the students through questions and encouraging them to share their (relevant) stories, allows them to build empathy and compassion and understanding of one another and to find examples and share ideas about your subject. **Remember, kids will pay attention when it is fun and personal to them.** Keep your information and teaching active, interactive and more of a conversation than a lecture. **Practice the tools, demonstrate, and ask** what other ideas they may have about your suggestions.

Closing Class, Surveys & The Ripple Effect: When you have about 10 minutes left, you will need to wrap up your presentation. **We are creating awareness and offering suggestions of things they might try.** Remind the students that Underground Kindness comes into the classroom to share information with them to help with the stress/ pressures of life and to teach

them healthy ways to address these issues. Once the student is able to find their own peace and happiness, health and wellbeing, (through implementing these tools/techniques) it is our hope that they will be able to “ripple that out” into their community. There are lots of ways to “ripple it out.” Give them examples and ask them for ideas. Use the cards. Tell them they are already doing it: by holding the door for someone, or telling the teacher, ‘thank you,’ or spending time talking to their friends...the difference is: When you are rippling kindness and compassion into the world, you are doing it **consciously**. That means, when you say, “Hi, how’s it going?”, you look the person in the eye and you wait for their reply. Or, you smile and tell the person behind you to go ahead when you hold the door. Or, when you’re talking to your friends, you give them ALL of your attention and really listen to what they are saying. **Being fully present is your greatest gift.**

Pass out the surveys. Briefly explain and remind them of the name of your Class and direct them to the area where it says, “How can I ripple this out into the community?” The One Look Sheet, and this manual, will remind you of how to introduce the concept of The Ripple. The teacher will be given their own, unique survey to complete. If the teacher has had you teach this class before, they will not need to repeat the survey.

Gather all surveys and **thank the students and teacher for their time, their attention and their participation and wish them well with their new awareness and tools.**

Keeping Records & Invoicing:

The Compassionist Coordinator will schedule and track classes. Compassionists are compensated once per month on the last day of the month and are paid an ‘honorarium’ of \$25/class for a High School Class and \$20/class for a Middle School Class. The difference is based on time. HS Classes are at least an hour. MS Classes are about 45 minutes. We recognize that your time, as a professional, is worth much more! We want to honor you and your time, by gifting you an honorarium for every class you teach. Please, keep accurate records of your classes. The Compassionist Coordinator WILL NOT do any billing for you. Keep track of the class, number of students, day, and teacher where you presented and send an itemized email bill to our Compassionist Coordinator two days before the end of each month.