

Introduction

A crucial component to successful implementation of any social and emotional learning approach is seamless integration into everyday practices. Students will benefit most fully from RULER when emotional intelligence is woven into the fabric of how schools and classrooms function. Every interaction with and between students is a chance to demonstrate, model, practice, and nurture the skills of emotional intelligence.

To assist you in embedding RULER into the infrastructure of your school's climate, we have designed the following Core Routines. These are simple and adaptable practices that require minimal preparation or planning. These are not lessons or units, but repeatable, customizable activities. Once these routines have been learned and internalized, teachers, administrators, and service providers will have these in their toolboxes to use regularly. Students will begin to feel familiarity and ownership of these routines. When implemented regularly, these practices will enhance a schoolwide culture of emotional safety.

These routines were designed to reinforce the principles of emotional intelligence and provide opportunities to practice, develop, and sustain the RULER skills. The routines address different emotional intelligence concepts and tenets, and each one, in addition to contributing to your overall emotional climate, aims to achieve different goals. For example, the [Charter Check-In](#) is an opportunity for the school and classroom community to sustain the agreements they made on the Charter and to revisit and revise as necessary. The [Mood Meter Check-In](#) will help students build self and social awareness as well as recognize emotional patterns in themselves and others to predict and respond to emotions more effectively. The [Best Self Reflection](#) can help students in making decisions aligned to their goals and values. [Community Circles](#) can be used with RULER's Blueprint to resolve conflict, but it is a versatile routine that can be used for both a Charter and Mood Meter check-in and for socratic seminars related to academic content. They have the potential to build a sense of safety and camaraderie within your classroom while priming students to develop skills of active listening and perspective-taking. Like the versatility of community circles, the [Focused Breathing](#) routine can be used to support students to manage their emotions and grow compassion for themselves and others. Consistent use of these routines in your community will encourage a healthy emotional climate, which will contribute to improved student relationships, higher levels of engagement, enhanced student performance, and greater overall wellbeing.

The RULER Core Routines share many of the principles of restorative practices and can aid in creating a respectful, supportive, restorative atmosphere at your school. Restorative practices fall on a continuum from informal to formal. The routines outlined are designed to integrate the informal restorative practices of affective statements and questions, as well as using circles to build community. Additionally, emotionally intelligent practice goes hand-in-hand with building culturally responsive classrooms as they validate each child, the social identities they carry, their lived experiences, and the family structures in which they live. The RULER Core Routines provide students and educators with a shared language, context, and practice while building the RULER skills, which can be used both within and outside the school.

These routines will repeatedly appear in all the RULER unit and lesson plans provided by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. You may need to refer to these guides as reminders of the procedural guidelines. We encourage you to integrate these routines throughout your day to ensure that emotional intelligence becomes a part of your school or classroom culture. With slight adjustments, these routines can also be used to improve the climate among adults in your building. You can utilize any of these as an opening activity at a meeting or common planning time. The amount of time to complete these tasks is also customizable, and these routines can be snuck in to quick transitions or expanded into complex lessons. We provide examples and suggestions

RULER Middle School Core Routines

for how to use and vary each routine; however, we encourage educators to adapt and to customize these routines to meet their settings and needs.

The below table outlines the routines that correspond with each Anchor tool.

Tool	Routine(s)
Charter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charter Check-In• Revisiting and Revising the Charter
Mood Meter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mood Meter Check-In
Meta-Moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflecting on the Best Self• Examining Triggers and Strategies• Focused Breathing
Blueprint	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Circle

Charter Check-In

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

Charter check-ins serve as a formalized way to engage students in active consideration of the charter, whether through in-depth focus on a single word or a more general assessment of whether the Charter is serving its purpose in a given setting. During a check-in, students and teachers typically consider how consistently they feel the words and/or exhibit the behaviors presented on the Charter.

The purpose of the Charter is to build a positive and safe emotional climate; the purpose of the check-in is for participants to gauge whether and how the Charter is serving its purpose. Patterns discovered in charter check-ins (such as students not consistently feeling one of the stated feelings) can be helpful when revisiting and revising a Charter. A Charter Check-in also serves as a reminder of our commitments to our community and helps keep up accountable.

HOW TO

Charter check-ins consist of bringing students' and teachers' awareness to the Charter as a living, aspirational document that can provide structure in maintaining a desired emotional climate. Charter check-ins can happen in a number of ways. In the secondary setting, charter check-ins can happen with an entire grade, during advisory of other class periods, or within an academic lesson. Schools that have advisory periods (where students travel in cohorts to their classes) may opt for an advisory charters for each group of students. Schools without this structure or with a large student population may opt for a grade-level charter that all teachers can implement without the need to reference a different charter for each group of students they teach.

Grade-Level Charters

A Charter Check-in is the primary way to engage students in revisiting the commitments they made when building the Charter. These commitments do not only include the behaviors in the Charter but also the words that students chose. A check-in encourages students to examine their and others' emotional experiences since the Charter's creation (or the last check-in). Just as a teacher may revisit classroom rules and norms, this routine can and should be used consistently to re-center the class and ground them in commitments they made to contribute to a healthy and safe emotional climate.

Class Level or Advisory Charters

Students should be given the opportunity to assess which words they have consistently felt the most and which they have consistently felt the least. After students have the space to reflect privately, create space to share openly. It is okay if it takes time for students to become comfortable sharing aloud. Advisories may also assign a weekly "Charter Guide" or "Vision Guide" to lead the discussion at the beginning or end of each week, as well as provide commentary on areas of growth, successes, and ideas to keep the charter alive. Each student who opts to serve as the Charter Guide should reflect on the following questions throughout the week:

1. Who is consistently demonstrating actions in the Charter? Shout them out!
2. Where are opportunities for growth for the class as a whole?
3. What specific instances did you see the Charter being lived out?
4. What can we do differently next week to better live the Charter?

The quarterly check-in can look a number of different ways.

RULER Middle School Core Routines

Charter Check-In

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One way to engage an entire grade is to design a “Charter Challenge.” A charter challenge may involve choosing one word to focus on and designing an initiative or activity to get students to consider the word more deeply. For example, an initiative may focus on the word “supported” and may involve providing students resources to write encouraging notes to one another.• If such student leadership structures do not exist, the RULER implementation team themselves may consider creating Charter “words of the month” or other campaigns designed at bringing awareness to the grade-level charter.
WHEN TO USE	<p>Grade-Level Charters Just as educators in the school check in on their Charter throughout the course of the year, for grade level Charters, implementation team members, teachers, or student leaders may consider implementing quarterly check-ins with students.</p> <p>Class-Level or Advisory Charters For advisory charters, check-ins are encouraged to both take place more frequently and become part of class structure and routine. They may be done once per week (at the beginning or end) or a handful of times per month.</p>
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES (FOR CHARTER)	<p>Academic The Charter provides the opportunity for teachers to facilitate deeper understanding of the words a group of students chose. Teachers should look for opportunities for students to identify Charter words in character studies, literature units, and historical events.</p> <p>Social Justice In community-based learning or service-learning units, consider creating a Charter with the outside groups, people, or organizations with whom your students are engaging. Provide students the opportunity to listen to and to reflect on the emotional needs of others, particularly those who are different from themselves.</p>

Revisiting and Revising the Charter

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

The Charter is a living document. As such, it should be revisited for potential edits throughout the year during times that make sense for the given community.

The purpose of revisiting and revising the Charter is to ensure its use as a tool to maintain the desired emotional climate. Over time, students and teachers may find that certain words do not need to be explicitly stated while other words or behaviors should be added. This routine provides the opportunity to determine so.

HOW TO

Grade-Level Charters

Teachers should consider ways to get input from each student on the following questions in order to capture potential revisions for the Charter. Considering the sensitivity of the questions, students should not be required to share publicly or in such a way that their names are attached to their answers. Students can reflect privately in journals or share during a community circle (see “Community Circle” routine).

1. How often do you feel the words on the Charter?
2. To what extent do you engage in the Charter behaviors?
3. Do you think these words are still relevant to our needs? Why or why not?
4. Do you think these behaviors capture the feelings we chose, or are there better behaviors we could suggest?
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the Charter?

From there, student leadership (student government, RULER committees) or implementation teams should create a structure to formally revise the Charter if necessary.

Advisory Charters

Teachers and students may engage in revisiting the Charter in a number of ways. In discussion, teachers may ask question such as: “Which words have we been feeling the most? Which have we been feeling the least? Which words do we need to work more on?” Teachers can also leverage virtual platforms such as Google Forms or existing classroom structures such as a “Do Now” to collect this information from students. Teachers may create a survey using the below questions:

1. How often do you feel the words on the Charter?
2. To what extent do you engage in the Charter behaviors?
3. Do you think these words are still relevant to our needs? Why or why not?
4. Do you think these behaviors capture the feelings we chose, or are there better behaviors we could suggest?
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the Charter?

After collecting the answers, the class should then engage in discussion around the results and whether the Charter needs to be changed to address the class’s needs.

WHEN TO USE	<p>Grade-Level Charters</p> <p>Before and/or after major transitions such as holiday breaks or breaks in the academic calendar (semester, trimester)</p> <p>Advisory Charters</p> <p>Like grade-level charters, advisory-level charters can be revisited at major transitions during the school year. Since advisory charters are generally revisited more frequently than grade-level charters, both teachers and students are encouraged to propose revisiting the charter organically at points during the year where some words or feelings become more salient than those on the Charter or a word on the Charter becomes irrelevant.</p>
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Mood Meter Check-In

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE	<p>The Mood Meter check-in is the simplest and most common way to incorporate the tool into daily practice. The check-in involves a person identifying, on the Mood Meter and either privately or publicly, what they are feeling based on the criteria of energy and pleasantness.</p> <p>After the person determines what they are feeling, they then consider whether they want to shift or maintain that feeling. After deciding whether they want to shift or stay in their current feeling, the person decides which regulation strategy to use. This routine is aligned with the first and second major restorative practices of affective statements and affective questions and equips students with the language to engage in both.</p> <p>The purpose of checking in on the Mood Meter is to build self and social awareness. Students do this by using the tool to identify what they are feeling, and further, whether that feeling is conducive to the goal or task at hand. That emotion is subsequently considered within the context of that person's setting: is this feeling desired or does the person checking in want to shift? This consideration should lead the person checking in to consider which strategies may be employed to regulate their feelings.</p>
HOW TO	<p>Mood Meter check-ins, for middle school students, should provide the opportunity to both check in/journal privately and regularly as well as occasional opportunities to share out with classmates. The Community Circle routine (see below) can be used for this type of public sharing. Teachers may display a class-wide Mood Meter for all students to use as reference, or they may consider print and/or laminating personal Mood Meters for each student for display on their desks or as a cover sheet/worksheet in a binder. Having the option of a "smaller" Mood Meter provides the benefit of added visual support for students who require it while also providing privacy for students who prefer to check in individually. Teachers may ask students to place a sticker or token on the quadrant they are feeling, so as to visually "check" while walking by, or teachers may ask students to submit paper check-ins for participation and practice purposes.</p> <p>To check in, the teacher should ask the students to consider their pleasantness and energy levels from -5 to +5. Once they do so, students will know which quadrant they are in. After they figure out their quadrant, students should then attempt to choose a feeling word that captures what they are feeling. Last, students should consider whether they want to stay in this emotional space or shift. Depending on their goal, students should then consider an emotion regulation strategy to shift or maintain emotional states.</p>
WHEN TO USE	<p>This is entirely up to the discretion of the teacher. In homeroom or advisory, the check-in may be a way to anchor the day by starting or ending the class period. Before tests and quizzes in academic classes or during other higher-stress scenarios, it may be a way for students to build awareness of their emotional states and strategize for personal success.</p>
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Academic</p> <p>The Mood Meter is a versatile tool that can be used for a "RULER analysis" of characters. The RULER analysis asks students to use the Mood Meter as the primary tool to answer the following questions about fictional or historical characters they may encounter in academic content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R: Where is the character on the Mood Meter? How do you know? • U: What caused the character's feelings? How is this feeling affecting how the character interacts with others? • L: What feeling word best describes what the character is feeling?

- **E: How is the character expressing their feelings?**
- **R: Does the character need to shift from where they are to achieve their goals?**

Social Justice

We most typically associate productive “red” feelings with feelings of perceived injustice (anger) or passion towards a cause; ask students which societal issues put them in the red to better understand how they can engage with their local communities to make change. Further, employ strategies to nudge your students towards feeling red when you are preparing to discuss topics such as injustice. To shift your students into the red, consider showing them controversial photographs or news headlines, or consider prompting them with a thought-provoking topic where they are required to choose a side.

Other

Some students with individualized education plans (IEPs) may have a plan that mandate a “check in/check out” system with a trusted adult. A Mood Meter check-in could be incorporated as part this reflection with the social worker, mentor, or other adult.

Reflecting on the Best Self

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE	<p>Reflecting on the best self may involve deciding which characteristics compose a person's best self, considering how that best self changes across contexts, or considering which actions will allow that person to "live out" their best self. It is an opportunity to refine and conceptualize the characteristics of who we aspire to be.</p> <p>The third step of the Meta-Moment is "seeing your best self" and is intended to motivate the person who is triggered to act in a way consistent with the best version of who they believe they are. It allows the person to think about which characteristics they hope to emulate before becoming triggered. Reflecting on the best self can also, for students engaging in restorative practices, bring to mind how they may have responded differently or ideally during a conflict.</p>
HOW TO	<p>To initiate discussion around the best self, consider asking students to reflect upon the following questions, either in a journal prompt, short assignment, or class discussion:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are five adjectives that describe your best self as a person? When you are at your best, which words would you use to describe yourself? 2. Think about the different roles you play in your life: sibling, friend, student, performer, writer, athlete, etc. Choose three different roles and reflect on 3-5 adjectives that describe your best self in that role. For example, is your best self as a student reflective or outspoken? An independent leader or a team player? 3. Think about the different roles that you chose and the adjectives that describe your best self in those roles. Which adjectives were chosen for more than one role? Why do you think those words are consistent? <p>The routine of reflecting on the best self is largely contingent upon where the teacher sees it fitting in with existing classroom structures, routines, and academics. Students' "best selves" can be reflected upon to guide classroom interactions during group work, more deeply analyze an academic topic, or explore facets of identity.</p> <p>Examples can be found in the "Academic and Social Justice Opportunities" area below.</p>
WHEN TO USE	<p>At the beginning of the school year, ask students to reflect on who their Best Self is across different contexts: as a student, friend, athlete, or citizen, for example. It is important to introduce the concept in the beginning of the year to ensure its use as a routine throughout the year. Additionally, the Best Self is ripe for integration into other academics and other classroom routines.</p>
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Academic</p> <p>At the beginning of the school year, have students reflect on who their best self is as a groupmate for projects. Before starting group projects in classes, provide the opportunity for students to reflect on their "group best self." Think about the various ways you ask your students to engage in work during a typical school year: group work, independent work, partner work, etc. During the first few weeks of school, when still going over classroom routines, consider breaking students off into stations where they reflect on the qualities of their "best selves" when engaging in different types of work. For example:</p> <p><i>My best self while doing group work...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is a good listener - Shares my opinions - Asks others for their input

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Reflecting on the Best Self

My best self while working independently...

- Asks for help when I need it
- Decides which tasks are most important to complete first
- Helps others if they are struggling

Social Justice

For service-learning or community-based learning projects, engage students in a discussion about who their best self is as an engaged citizen: in their local, statewide, and national communities.

Other

Consider “bonus questions” on assignments that encourage students to reflect on how they engaged their best self in completing the assignment.

Examining Triggers and Strategies

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE	<p>This routine provides students and adults the opportunity to examine and understand their triggers while learning to develop a new relationship with them. To ensure we can be our best selves while emotionally activated, consistent reflection on our strategies allows us to be flexible and be our best selves across roles.</p> <p>The Meta-Moment is designed to be used when a person is so emotionally activated that they must down-regulate before acting or responding to the triggering situation. Part of successfully taking a Meta-Moment is having a firm idea of two concepts: what your triggers are and what strategies you can employ that are consistent with your best self.</p>
HOW TO	<p>As with initial and regular Mood Meter check-ins, asking students to examine their personal triggers should be done in a way to allow students adequate privacy. Examining triggers and strategies can be accomplished through journal entries, creative writing, or community circles or discussion. Please see below for further ideas:</p> <p>Journal Prompt: What are some situations or actions that cause you to be unpleasantly and emotionally charged? Which strategies do you usually use during these moments? Do they work all the time? When might they not work?</p> <p>Creative Writing: Write a short story or scene where the character becomes emotionally triggered. Make sure to describe what caused the character's feelings, where they were, who they were with, and how they strategized to be their best self.</p> <p>Classroom Circle Questions: Do you usually use thought strategies or action strategies when you are taking a Meta-Moment? What are some short-term strategies that align with your best self? What about long-term strategies?</p> <p>Consider providing students with a journal prompt that asks them to reflect on their personal triggers: the situations or actions that cause them to be unpleasantly emotionally charged and what strategies they typically use to down-regulate. Revisit the prompt at various times during the year to update or edit the list.</p>
WHEN TO USE	<p>It will be necessary for students to engage in an initial examination of their triggers and strategies at the beginning of the school year to refine them in later routines during the school year.</p>
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Academic Examining historical figures through the lens of triggers and strategies is one way to better humanize these people and understand the emotional factors involved in social change and/or progress. When examining prominent figures, consider asking students to brainstorm what potential triggers for these figures may have been, based on what students know about the figure's life, surroundings, time period, and type of work.</p> <p>Social Justice Conversations around triggers and Meta-Moments are an excellent way to discuss power and privilege in who, in our society, is required to regulate more strictly in public spaces. Consider examining stereotypes in the context of emotion regulation as they relate to race, gender, sexuality, religion, and other forms of difference.</p>

Focused Breathing

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE

In moments of high emotional activation, such as feeling distressed or aggravated, pausing to engage in centered breathing can help us soothe our overactive nervous system. Once the body is back in balance, our mind is in a more stable place to reflect on the inner or outer causes of our emotions.

This routine, while useful as a standalone practice, additionally prepares students for Step 2 of the Meta-Moment: Pause.

Practicing centered, focused breathing has been shown to help alleviate stress, anxiety, and other unpleasant emotions. The breath is the only unconscious body function we can regulate with our minds. Considering emotions are grounded in bodily experience, focused breathing is a powerful emotion regulation technique. Breathing is a strategy that is always available to us, regardless of context or situation, and developing a regular practice of focused breathing can empower both students and adults.

Creating a focused breathing routine during quiet times can prepare students and adults more effectively use this practice in moments of activation as well as more effectively handle unpleasant everyday emotions with greater resilience. This practice can live anywhere in a classroom: before and after breaks and transitions, before or after exams or quizzes, and at the start and end of a class. The situations themselves do not need to be stress-inducing to merit focused breathing; developing this as regular practice at various points will help reinforce its use as a master emotion regulation strategy.

HOW TO

An essential piece of focused breathing is turning one's attention to inhaling and exhaling, and students should focus on their stomachs or chests while breathing. To help you guide your students and colleagues, who may be new to focused breathing, we have outlined some steps below:

- Please sit comfortably with a tall, straight back
- Close your eyes or cast your gaze downward.
- When I begin counting, inhale deeply through your nose until I reach the number five.
- Then, hold your breath as I hold mine for three seconds.
- When I begin counting down from five, slowly exhale until I reach one again.

For it to work most effectively, during this practice, please make sure that your inhalation is at least as long as your exhalation.

This practice should be repeated five times (or more) to center and calm yourself and/or your students.

ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES

Academic

You can ask students to take a few focused breaths as they reflect on a piece of academic content. Encourage them to pause, think, and breath in between learning a new lesson or reading a text and responding and discussing. This pause will help students have more developed responses when they do share.

You can also integrate focused breathing into a lesson by asking your students to reflect deeply on what they notice. For example, in a history lesson, you may ask your students to close their eyes and pay attention to what they hear as you play audio of a primary source, such as a famous speech or recordings from a protest or news coverage.

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Focused Breathing

Encourage your students to sit tall and still and try to quiet their thoughts so they can be immersed in what they hear. After the recording is finished, allow students to discuss what they noticed.

Social Justice

Incorporate the Best Self Reflection: As you or others take focused breaths, participate in a visualization of your Best Selves. This practice may be particularly helpful when considering events or interactions that are triggering, such as witnessing or being subject to a microaggression or prejudice. Imagine what your best self would do as an ally, advocate, or upstanding person. Notice any thoughts or sensations that come up.

Community Circle

DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE	<p>The Blueprint is often used once a conflict has already arisen, but it can be used for past, present, and future conflict. This routine helps build skills necessary for Blueprinting each type of conflict. It involves convening a class or group of students together in a circle for discussion or teambuilding to practice speaking to/in front of and listening to others within the classroom or group community. The Restorative Practice of circles is a responsive tool designed to repair and restore communities, much like the Blueprint. Community Circles could be used with other anchor tools and can be easily integrated into academics and other curricular activities.</p> <p>The purpose of the community circle is to create space for students to both speak and listen to one another while problem-solving, team-building, or addressing conflict. The community circle calls for student participation in a safe and predictable way and should be introduced using topics and conversations that are initially low-stakes. Once students become comfortable with the structure and routines of the circle, the teacher may consider introducing more significant or complex topics.</p>
HOW TO	<p>Arrange students in a circle, preferably in chairs facing the center of the circle so that there are no desks or other materials blocking students' positioning towards one another. Select a "talking piece" and explain that whoever is holding the talking piece can speak, and that each person will get a chance to contribute to the circle discussion if they choose. The talking piece is a meaningful and symbolic object that the facilitator brings to the circle. It is important to provide students the opportunity to "pass" if necessary. In order to sustain the circle as a safe space, students should not feel forced to share if they do not desire. This routine has many iterations, but it is always an opportunity to hear from each member of the classroom or community. In a community circle, every student contributes to the conversation equally. If student participation is lacking, the teacher may model how to share or consider more low-stakes, "either/or" and fun "would you rather" questions to both break the ice and provide students with options.</p>
WHEN TO USE	<p>Circles are versatile in that they can be used both for team/community-building as well as academic purposes. In the beginning of the year, if you have not already engaged your students in community circles, consider starting off community-building by asking students questions about themselves.</p>
ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE OPPORTUNITIES	<p>Academic Circles can be leveraged for academic discussion such as Socratic seminars or round-table discussion; be sure to provide students with prompts or questions ahead of time so that students are prepared to participate.</p> <p>Social Justice Circles provide an opportunity to create a safe space to discuss local (at school and in the larger community) and national events with one another as well as provide the opportunity to give voice to community members and share perspectives. Consider inviting outside participants into your circles, but be sure to share with them the purpose and routine of the Community Circle.</p>