



# Suggested Activities for Working With Students and Adults

National School Psychology Week (NSPW) is a fun, easy way to highlight the vital work that school psychologists and other educators do to help all students thrive!

## Suggested Activities for Working With Students and Adults

The NASP annual NSPW is November 7-11, 2022. The 2022 theme is "Together We Shine."

After several challenging years, we have all (students, educators, families, and school psychologists) faced some difficulties created by the pandemic, social injustice and inequity, economic stress, and challenges to mental and physical health. For some, it has been a time of real darkness, and finding light is critical to building resilience and hope. This year's NSPW theme highlights the importance of the collective nature of recovering after adversity. Together we shine brightly, and each of our lights is only more brightly illuminating when put together with the lights of those around us. Though each student and adult in school has their individual ways of shining their strengths and skills of resilience, school psychologists are uniquely trained to support the systems and structures that make it more possible for all stakeholders to shine more brilliantly together. This year's theme and activities move us beyond thinking of recovering and healing as singular or individual acts and instead help us to think about what kinds of activities and acts could support a community to thrive. There is much that school psychology can offer to promote connection and health within communities under stress, because together we shine.

Practitioners can choose their focus and adapt example materials to work with students and adults of all ages, ability levels, and interests. But remember, these are just ideas. Get creative and let your imagination run wild to find the best way for you to help students and staff thrive. Be sure to share your efforts through the NSPW Feedback form and on social media using the **#SchoolPsychWeek**.

## Counseling Activities

**Build social skills.** The poster can provide inspiration for brainstorming some positive behaviors that can help students envision how to grow social skills, engage with community and peers, advocate for others, and rise to be their best selves, all to develop and maintain deep friendships. Ask students how they see their strengths, how they like to contribute to shared goals, and how they add their light to different parts of their community circles. Discuss and consider why they might be good suggestions for the students in your group. Help them brainstorm other activities that will help build their self-confidence and connect with others in order to build resilience and hope. Consider giving each student a homework assignment to work together with a peer to reach a common goal. \*Virtual Activity: Use the chat feature of your platform to ask students to share ideas.

**Build active listening skills.** Discuss the importance of listening and the power of being listened to as they relate to developing connections and building community. Have students engage in an activity to practice active listening and learning about how others' individual qualities make them stand out! Active listening

builds a foundation for engaging with others, and it builds trust that is essential for collaboration and advocacy. Break students into pairs and have them interview one another, with the goal of learning about three skills or strengths of the other. After the interviews, have each group present the information about one another to the rest of the group. Next, ask an audience member to summarize what was presented. Pose the following questions to students: How did the audience members show that they were listening to the information (e.g., discuss nonverbal cues)? Why was it important to listen to the person presenting?

**The "Three Good Things" writing exercise.** Teach students about the power of finding their light and working as a community to build resilience and hope. Instruct the students to write down three good things that happened each day for a week. The three things students list can be relatively small in importance (e.g., "I answered a really hard question in Language Arts today.") or relatively large in importance (e.g., "I helped a friend speak up about something that was difficult for her."). Next to each positive event listed, they write a reflection on one of the following questions: Why did this good thing happen? What does this mean to you? How can you increase the likelihood of having more good things in the future? Reference: "Positive Education: Positive Psychology and Classroom Interventions". Sas.upenn.edu. N.p., 2017. Web. 5 May 2017.

**Supportive adults.** Growing involves recognizing our support systems and knowing when to ask for assistance. Discuss the importance of being able to identify a positive adult who students trust to offer support and promote hope during challenging times. Ask students to think of their role model/leader/advocate and write or draw what qualities this person may have that makes them a positive influence.

**Create personal growth steps.** Work with the art/computer tech teacher or work individually with students to have them create personal posters depicting how they can work with others to shine a positive light on the community. These may feature action words from the poster, a key theme, or steps they have taken to model hope and build resilience.

**Build self-esteem and confidence.** Lead a discussion about previous experiences in which students have worked through a difficulty or supported someone else (e.g., social injustice and inequity, mental or physical health). Ask them to identify a personal characteristic or quality that helped them move forward or empower another person. Then discuss the feelings associated with their achievement, such as pride, happiness, self-confidence, and self-esteem.

**Link to the Gratitude Works program** ([https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/advocacy/national-school-psychology-week-\(nspw\)/gratitude-works-program](https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/advocacy/national-school-psychology-week-(nspw)/gratitude-works-program)). Identify one of the actions that embodies gratitude, and select one of the Gratitude Works activities to do.

**Building social connections.** To help improve social engagement and connectedness, and to learn more about others, play icebreaker Jenga. Write a number on each Jenga block that corresponds to an icebreaker question. When a student pulls a block, have them answer the icebreaker question. Ask how many other students have an answer in common and ask if students have a unique answer. Discuss how having similarities and differences in a group can help the group shine even brighter.

**Build interests and make connections.** Encourage students to join a club or spend time with others who have a similar interest, goal, or social cause. Spend time exploring school clubs or community service opportunities. Discuss what activities may help support positive change in the community. Show students how to find information about these activities (i.e., looking at the school website, looking at a list in the main office) and when the clubs meet. Debrief after the first meeting or event.

**Acknowledge others.** Engage students in a discussion or activity about noticing when a peer has moved towards a goal or promoted positive growth in the community. Encourage positive shout outs as a way to create a supportive school climate.

**Use a compliment calendar.** Print a calendar template for the month. Model specific compliments for students. Encourage students to compliment a peer or adult each day and color in the day on the calendar brightly when they have achieved this. Discuss how giving a compliment each day made them feel.

### Classroom Activities

**Start the day in a positive light.** During morning class meetings, the teacher can discuss how students can work together that day (noting specific activities that will happen throughout the day) to create the connections necessary for learning. The teacher can lead a discussion on how students can use their own unique qualities to contribute positively to the classroom community.

**Classroom discussion.** Advocacy requires allowing space for respectful disagreement. Have students research a topic and work in pairs to develop a cohesive position to present regarding the topic. Encourage students to focus on using active listening and supporting evidence to advocate for their side in a discussion. As a class, discuss how allowing respectable space for an argument helped increase engagement. As a class, discuss how it takes different opinions and differing points of view to create a dialogue that can enlighten people.

**Hold a scavenger hunt.** Have students work as a class-wide team to find someone throughout the day who is contributing positively to the school or classroom community by shining their own light. Provide an opportunity to share at the end of the day.

**Create a foundation for advocacy.** Help students create leadership groups that focus on areas they are interested in. Topics could include issues portrayed in the media or on the news (e.g., civil unrest, crime, violence, social justice, politics, racism, sexuality, bullying). Work with students on developing strategies for expression of their thoughts and ideas. Areas to consider include working with others with opposing views, strengthening public speaking skills, and attendance to events (community, social, or civil events). These groups can also be used to teach problem solving and conflict resolution skills.

**Use the Student POWER Award.** This award was created to honor students who support others and recognize students for progress toward personal goals, optimism, problem solving, eagerness, resiliency, and dedication. This would be a great way to honor students at an award ceremony that parents can attend.

### School-Wide Activities

**Connect with school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports.** Help students see how empowering others to let their individual qualities shine in a collaborative environment will help improve the school community. Encourage teachers to provide intermittent positive reinforcement in the form of specific verbal praise, thumbs up, or even school-wide tokens for working together. Consider featuring the poster as a kick-off to a year-long focus on "Together We Shine" behaviors. For example, create a bulletin board that changes weekly or monthly to highlight different behaviors that relate to working together to build resilience and hope.

**Celebrate NSPW during morning announcements.** On the first day of NSPW, explain that it is National School Psychology Week and this week is all about shining together. Explain that throughout the week, you will share what "Together We Shine" means.

- Monday, 11/7/2022 - Connect with others: Reach out to a staff member or peer who you don't speak with regularly and learn something new about them.
- Tuesday, 11/8/2022 - Reflect on resiliency: Think of a time when you had to overcome a challenge. What did you learn from that experience, and how did it help you accomplish something today?
- Wednesday, 11/9/2022 - Hope and healing through wellness: Identify one thing you can do for yourself or another that supports personal well-being and prepares you to be a positive contributor to the community.
- Thursday, 11/10/2022 - Time to thrive: Think about a goal or habit that you have wanted to create. Take one step (no matter how large or small) towards your goal. Identify one community support and one personal quality or "glow" you can engage to propel towards your goal.
- Friday, 11/11/2022 - (Read on Thursday if school is closed today.) "As National School Psychology Week comes to a close, we invite you to reflect on how you shined your light and made connections with others to have a positive influence on the community."

**Connect with kids.** Provide the faculty with a list of students in the building. Have each faculty member put their initials next to a student with whom they have a connection. Compile the lists and determine if there are students who do not have an initial next to their name. Have a staff member make contact with that student to check in and help ensure the student feels connected to the school community.

**Invite an advocate to speak.** Research individuals in the community who have advocated for an important cause (something related to education or kids would be ideal). Invite the advocate to speak to students about their path to becoming an advocate, how they identified supportive individuals to collaborate with, and tools they use to convey their message.

**Use a bulletin board activity.** Post the theme "Together We Shine" on the bulletin board. Each time a student uses their personal quality or trait to contribute to the community or demonstrate hope and/or resiliency, have them write or draw their action on a "prism" template and add it to the bulletin board. In a pocket on the corner of the bulletin board, keep a list of sample activities the students can do to symbolize shining together.

### **Suggested Activities for Working With High School Students**

**Standing between the sunshine of past success and the shadow of what is yet possible.** This activity is used to review and reflect on personal and group accomplishments. Individually, participants are asked to consider their roles in their groups' success. One by one, participants are asked to physically "stand in the shadow" (the place in the room) where they felt they contributed most in helping the group grow and rise to challenges. For example, someone who helped facilitate a large group discussion that might go stand by the board. Participants are invited to say one or two sentences about their contribution. Following that, students are asked to brainstorm what more is possible in the coming weeks and months.

**Index cards.** Participants are given two cards with the NSPW image on them. On one card, they are asked to write one skill, strength, or way they contribute to shine in their school community. On the other card they are asked to identify a peer's strength or contribution. Put the cards up on a shout out board.

## **Adults Matter, Too**

**Recognize colleagues.** School psychologists are natural collaborators who work closely with many caring adults to help children achieve what is possible. The "Possibilities in Action" Partner program is a great way to recognize colleagues who, either through their own efforts or by encouraging the efforts of others, make an exceptional difference in the lives of students and families by supporting the possibilities within each student. This could be a teacher, administrator, coach, community provider, parent mentor, or any other individual who stands out in your mind as going above and beyond the call of duty to help students achieve their best. Recognize and honor others with the Possibilities in Action Partner Program. The program description, suggested selection guidelines, press release, and Possibilities in Action Partner certificates are available online.

**Encourage professional growth.** Choose a professional topic that you would like to learn more about and find one activity that will help you grow more in this area (e.g., searching for information on the NASP website, reading a book, participating in a webinar, speaking with a colleague). Discuss what you learned with a colleague or reflect personally on how learning about this topic has helped contribute to the school or professional community.

**Express gratitude.** School administrators, teachers, and other school professionals can promote gratitude in students by modeling it. For example, schools could have periodic gratitude days, during which staff members announce what they are grateful for and ask students to do the same. In particular, it is beneficial for staff members to focus their thoughts and feelings of gratitude to specific people or students in the school and to directly express their gratitude in person. Use the downloadable and adaptable Gratitude Works note card to send gratitude letters.

**Treat yourself and others.** Write on the downloadable template (available on the NASP website) a key thematic word you notice colleagues exhibiting that has helped students grow, engage, and bounce back. Tape it to small candy bars, tea bags, or other treats and put them in staff mailboxes, on their desks, or in a basket in the staff lounge. Be sure to keep one for yourself!

**Guide leadership.** Identify parents and guardians who demonstrate an interest in leading a group or organizing family-friendly events. Assist them in organizing meetings for the families and community leaders to attend. Events can vary from cultural nights, homework help/tutors, award ceremonies, book clubs, fundraisers, and more.

**Involve your community.** Work with school leaders to identify community agencies that work to create positive school climates. Many agencies are often looking for ways to get involved with schools and reach families. Consider contacting food banks, law enforcement agencies, recreation centers, and religious organizations. These organizations often work with families prior to students enrolling in school, so new or ongoing partnerships can create a connected and positive environment where all stakeholders are working towards one goal.

**Embrace culture.** Encourage your school to embrace and honor the variety of cultures that exist in your building. Work with school leaders to infuse cultural lessons throughout the school year. Get your families involved. Reach out and ask about ways they would be interested in sharing the variety of cultural experiences that exist amongst the school community. Create "Show and Tell" opportunities within the classroom that will allow students to highlight strengths and areas of interest and aspects of their culture.

**Engage families.** Offer families/guardians increased opportunities to access the school building, in person or virtually. Offer homework information sessions, positive parenting classes, trainings on alternatives in discipline, computer training courses, accounting courses, award ceremonies, and more. These events allow for the school environment to become a welcoming and warm environment that not only offers educational support to its students but also to parents and guardians.

**Create critical connections.** Identify at-risk students and assign a staff member or older student (mentor) to check in with them at the beginning of each day and again before school ends. This system will be beneficial not only for the student who is being checked on, but also for the older student as well. This helps ensure that our at-risk students are connected to support. Connect through social networking. Participate in a social media campaign through NASP with #SchoolPsychWeek. Engage on social media to share your NSPW ideas, highlight creative activities, and connect with colleagues. Read inspiring posts for additional unique activity ideas. Furthermore, you can stay connected to your colleagues to see what is happening around the country by visiting the NASP website for daily recaps posted throughout NSPW.

So be creative, have fun, and remember to share your efforts through the NSPW Feedback form and on social media using #SchoolPsychWeek and @nasponline.

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