



A GLIMPSE AT THE  
Holistic Approach to  
Wellness

By Arleen Barlow, RN, BSN, MA

# “There are a variety of techniques that I have utilized to assist students with anger management, stress, and even anxiety issues.”

It's Monday, and Mondays are usually challenging days. Today is no different. I hear them outside ready to come in. I have calmed myself, done my breathing exercise and put on my soothing music. Medications are poured and ready for the students who regularly take morning medications at school.

It is now 8:30 a.m. and the students are coming in. I hear a commotion in the hall. I don't even try to see what is happening. Sam and Kelly are in my room for their morning medications. They take them with some water and leave. The noise in the hall is continuing. I now get a visit from Mrs. B, the assistant principal, and she has José with her and asks if I could please keep him in my room while she attends to the altercation in the hall. Mr. C, a classroom teacher, brings Chris in; I don't even have time to ask why Chris is here, because several other students are in for morning medications. I tend to them and when they leave I ask José and Chris why they are in my room. I get different answers from each of them. José says he feels very agitated and wants to fight with someone, but Mrs. B stopped him, whereas Chris just doesn't want to be in school — he feels that some of the other students pick on him. I knew exactly what I would do to help each of these students. My room was free of other students, but for how long I was not sure, therefore I knew that I had to work quickly. I chose an appropriate CD for meditation, asked my students to close their eyes and focus on their breath. I guided them through body relaxation, and when I thought they were relaxed I then provided them with guided imagery.

I have utilized breath work and guided imagery with many students. Many of my students have asthma and do not have an inhaler in school. After my initial assessment I know that I need to help this child calm down and regain a normal breathing pattern. I have used many breathing techniques to help children calm down. The one that I use most with my asthmatic students is a concentration breath. I will place myself directly in front of the student, ask him or her to look at me and follow my breath. I take a deep, relaxed breath, allowing the abdominal muscles to rise, hold the breath for 5 to 6 seconds, and slowly release it. It may take a few minutes before my student has regained his or her regular breathing pattern. Breath work also works well for assessing a child who is complaining of pain in some part of the body.

My school population consists of students with a variety of special needs. Most students have social, emotional, learning, or behavioral issues. Most, if not all, of the students in the building have a very low tolerance for any type criticism, constructive or otherwise. Anger seems to abound and thus some of my students have sustained self-inflicted injuries or injuries from other students. Many have punched lockers, desks, walls, and even windows to vent their anger. On occasion there have been physical injuries. I have sent students out to the local hospital when needed, but for the most part I take care of the minor injuries.

When I need to assess an extremity, in particular fingers, for pain I use guided imagery. I begin with an invitation for the

student to engage in breath work, I then ask that he close his eyes, I next create an image of a calming scene; it may be a beach, the mountains, or a garden. I have also used a country path. I make the scene come alive, utilizing all of the senses. In the imagery I may have birds chirping, the aroma of food cooking on an open fire, the taste of a mouth-watering piece of food, the feel of a cool breeze or the warmth of the sun on the body. All of the imagery is taking place as I do my assessment. In most of my cases there is nothing seriously wrong with the student. I give the student an ice pack and he's on his way. I have gotten some very positive feedback from students.

In some of the guided imageries that I have done with my students I have used a *power animal*. This can be an extremely beneficial technique, especially if the student has self-esteem issues or performance anxiety. Students that I have worked with, allowing them to visualize their power animal, have stated that it was very helpful and they contact the power animal when they really need to.



During the last school year and into this school year Mr. S., the school guidance counselor, and I have been involved in working with students in groups to help them control their emotions. There are a variety of techniques that I have utilized to assist students with anger management, stress, and even anxiety issues. Aside from the guided imagery, I have also presented concentration meditation and a mindful meditation. The mindful meditation was an interesting and positive experience for Mr. S, myself, and our students. Each of our students was given a small piece of candy and I helped them to experience all of their senses and put their entire focus on the candy. It took several minutes to consume a small piece of candy. There are many meditation techniques that can be used with children in any setting. Meditation is a way of calming the mind. It helps the individual to focus away from the external to the internal. This is where all creativity lies and where the connection to the universe happens. I have engaged students in an activity that most have never experienced and I have seen some positive results. I encourage school nurses to try some of these techniques in their practice to enhance well-being of their students. 🕯

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Aleen Barlow, RN, BSN, MA** is a school nurse in the Hartford (Conn.) Public School District. She has facilitated stress reduction workshops in school for staff and has led meditation groups outside of school.

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## HOLISTIC SCHOOL NURSING PRACTICE:

How To Go From “There’s Nothing I Can Do”...To “Which Technique Shall I Try Today”

*Selected Authors*

A parent calls Beach Street Elementary School and tells Ms. B., the school nurse, that her 5-year-old daughter, Rachel, has a rash. She wants to talk about what it might be. In the course of the conversation she tells Ms. B. that she has been giving Rachel homeopathic remedies to treat the itching caused by the rash. They talk for a while, and the parent seems comfortable being open. She knows this school nurse is familiar with homeopathy. The discussion ends in a joint decision that it is time for a medical evaluation.

When 13-year-old Justin falls during recess he is reluctant to let Mrs. H., the school nurse, see him cry. Astute to his developmental stage, Mrs. H. decides to sit with him in a corner and talk. Since there are no private places available in the office, Mrs. H. sits herself in a chair facing outward, and drags a chair for Justin over to her, so that his back faces the room. This limits his vision to her and the brightly colored wall behind her. They can hear the calming music on the tape recorder that is also in that corner. She quietly urges Justin to explain how he got hurt and together they formulate a plan to help him feel better.

Preschooler Skyler, aged 3, is frustrated when the parent volunteer in his class escorts him to the health office because his cheeks are red. He feels fine and wants to continue to play in the sand table in

his classroom. Mr. J., the substitute school nurse, doesn't know Skyler, but sees right away that the adult with him needs to know if the child is ill. To figure it out, he sits on the floor and asks the child to join him. He puts out his hands, palms upward, and asks Skyler to do the same thing. He takes in a deep breath, holds it momentarily and then breathes out slowly. Skyler says he has seen this on a video his grandmother uses. It is called yoga. They do it again several times. The redness in his cheeks dissolves away. Mr. J. asks if he was angry when he was playing with the sand, and discovers there was a problem between Skyler and another child. Before this encounter is over, Mr. J asks if he can check Skyler's temperature, just to see what it is. The normal reading comes as no surprise, and Skyler returns to class for playtime.

The common threads here are the holistic nursing practices integrated into the school nurse plan of care for each student. They include a wide array of complementary healthcare techniques that can enhance the school nurse's repertoire of healing practices. If you are familiar with these techniques, you will have many of your own stories to tell. I encourage you to write and share them with me. If this all sounds very new, please read on with an open mind.

~Deb Ildardi~

## TOUCH HEALING

### Mary from New Jersey writes...

*Today's headline news story surprised me. "Learn more about how the touch of someone who loves you can actually help you heal." You've got to be kidding, I thought. Not only did I know that, I used to do that every day!*

*I studied the energy healing practice of Reiki late in my nursing career, but it seemed more like a homecoming than new knowledge. Each of us has a unique energy field that surrounds us. When we walk into a room with other people in it, our energy impacts theirs, and one has an effect on the other. The stronger field creates change in the weaker one. So the patient lying quietly in a hospital bed, full of silent fears and worries feels differently when the giving and caring nurse enters. Before words are exchanged or nursing care started, healing has begun.*

*Then the miracle happens. By touching the patient, with words, with hands, so much is communicated. Patients accept the touch of an unknown nurse because their experience has taught them that nurses are trustworthy. And once the actual touching occurs, every good thought that the nurse has is channeled right through his or her hands into the one who needs healed. I have witnessed this, again and again. How can I integrate this practice into my school nursing?*

### Editor Response...

*Thank you for writing, Mary. Your question has come up in discussion circles at our local and national school nurse conferences. Complementary and alternative modalities (also referred to as CAM) are intriguing more and more nurses, the trend gradually moving east from our West Coast movers and shakers. If you read about the practices of early RNs like Nightingale to the current Dossey and Keegan, you will find references to the very basics of nursing care through touch.*

*So is this new, or is it old? Is it nursing care or is it alternative care? These are questions you will have to answer for yourself after you read, listen and think about how to integrate energy healing into your school nurse practice.*

*A good source of professional material on this subject comes from the American Holistic Nurses Association, [www.ahna.org](http://www.ahna.org). Their mission is to explore wholeness in nursing practice, healthcare and the individual mind, body and spirit. You will also find a practitioner directory there, organized by state, with email addresses and specialties. Contacting a Certified Holistic Nurse can further help you define these practices. To start, look at your practice now and see if you don't already do some of the very basic things you did in the acute care setting, just in different ways. You connect with a student by making eye contact, speaking softly and clearly in a quiet and private space. You play relaxing music in the background of your busy office. You wash a wound, wrap an ankle, or offer an arm around the shoulder while touching in an acceptable manner. The way you treat all people demonstrates caring and healing.*

*Once you have a comfortable sense of what it is you already do, you'll find new ways to expand holistic approaches to caring for kids during your school day.*



## SUPPORTING HEALTH WITH ESSENTIAL OILS

There are many people, including school nurses, who have pre-conceived concerns about the use of essential oils because the smell they give off is confused with chemically created smells of the same names that often cause chemical sensitivities. There is much supporting evidence that essential oils will not trigger a physical response such as allergic people suffer when they contact other substances. There is little research done on the emotional connection and subsequent symptom trigger that might happen when someone who is fearful of all smells breathes in essential oil. Because of this, I went to an expert to share some of the basic information about the benefits of essential oils. Know that they can be infused into the air and will still benefit those who enter the room long after the initial scent has dispersed. If you are curious... read more.

~Deb Ilardi~

*Therapeutic grade essential oils are life-balancing substances. Essential oils are the lifeblood of plants. While in the plant they carry oxygen and nutrients to the cell, much in the way our circulatory system works. It was discovered through research that included the translation of hieroglyphics and papyrus, that oils were the first medicines of men in Egypt.*

*In our environment, we are often exposed to bacteria and viruses. Some microbes reproduce in as little as 20 minutes. Over the years, as pharmaceutical companies produce a drug and it is used to kill these germs, the bacteria and viruses mutate and develop their own immunity. In contrast, no one has found one virus that can become immune to an essential oil!*

*With increasing talk about MRSA, you can see why we need to increase our own immunity more than ever. There have been calls for public awareness about "super bugs" in Virginia and New York schools. Marilee Tolen, a Holistic Nurse, asks "Besides basic hand washing, what else can be done to face this challenge?" Researchers at the University of Manchester tested the efficacy of three essential oils against MRSA and E. coli. Within two minutes of contact it was determined that the oils combated these and many other bacteria and fungi. The oils tested were two forms of Melaleuca (commonly called tea tree oil) and Geranium.*

*Researcher Sue Chao studied the effects of Young Living Essential Oils on MRSA. She experimented with MRSA cultured and grown in petri dishes. Many oils were found to be highly effective against MRSA. The blend that had the best results was R.C. (Respiratory Congestion). It contains eucalyptus globules, eucalyptus radiata, eucalyptus citriodora,*

*myrtle, pine, spruce, marjoram, lavender, cypress and peppermint. The petri dish in which MRSA was grown and tested with R.C. had no growth. The MRSA was completely eradicated. R.C. can also be used to keep the immune system supported when healthy.*

*When people ask me if it matters where they purchase their oils I answer a resounding "Yes". There is currently no regulation on the use of the labeling "pure essential oil." A company can put 5% essential oil in a bottle, add synthetic diluents and still label it pure. So while a bottle of peppermint may smell minty to you, it could also contain less desirable ingredients that compromise its effectiveness. It could be pure but be processed at a high heat that destroys some of the healing properties. The Essential Oils Desk Reference says, for instance, "Cypress requires a minimum of 24 hours of distillation at 265 degrees F and five pounds of pressure to extract most of the therapeutically active constituents. If distillation time is cut by even 2 hours, 18-20 constituents will be missing from the resulting oil." Most commercial cypress oil is distilled for only 2 hours 15 minutes. This allows the producer to cut costs and produces a cheaper oil. Sadly, the resulting oil has basically no therapeutic value. There are other unsafe practices which include pumping chemicals into the distilling water to increase the oil production. This can fracture the resulting oil and alter both its fragrance and therapeutic value. These tainted oils may create that allergic response that allows people to think they cannot benefit from essential oils. Insist on the highest quality oils, Therapeutic Grade, and certified by outside laboratories.*

*In your school or office, consider diffusing essential oils with a cold air diffuser before the start of the day. Oils can be used to clean hard surfaces, placed on cotton balls inside pillow cases or tissue boxes, or even mixed with lotions or oil-based creams and applied to the skin. Different oils can induce specific responses, such as calming, awakening, or healing. Everyone who enters the space will benefit.*

*Many who use a diffuser use a blend called Young Living Thieves Oil. Thieves is a blend of clove, lemon, cinnamon bark, eucalyptus and rosemary. In 1997, Weber State University conducted a study of this blend to demonstrate the killing power it had against airborne microorganisms. Results showed that a 90% reduction in the number of gram-positive Micrococcus luteus organisms occurred after diffusing the oil for 12 minutes. The kill rate increased to 99.3% when diffusing lasted 20 minutes. Another study was conducted against gram-negative Pseudomonas aeruginosa and showed a kill rate of 99.96% after just 12 minutes of diffusing.*

*Please contact me if you have questions or want more information.*

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