

# BALANCE

WELLNESS MAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

APRIL/MAY 2019 | VOLUME 4 | NUMBER 3

LifeSpeak  
wellness  
platform

Access 24/7 Support

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Can Financial Coaching  
Help Reduce Stress?

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Shoulder Pain and  
the Thoracic Spine

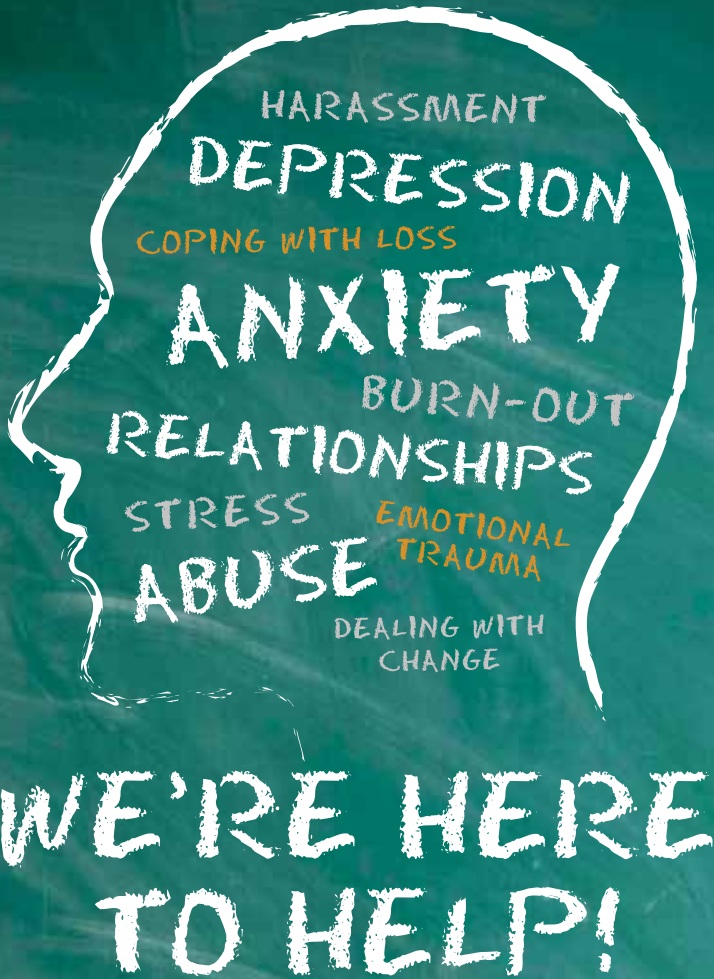
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Teacher Culture From  
the Outside Looking In

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The Huge Impact  
of Foot Problems

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## EDUCATOR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

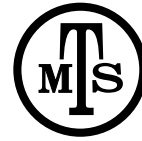
Teachers face an array of issues different than those faced by people in other occupations. We provide and promote Mental Health Education.

We are a confidential MTS service, independent of school divisions.



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**BALANCE**  
mind body spirit  
THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

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LIFESPEAK

*“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time.”*

– Thomas A. Edison

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# LIFESPEAK

A screenshot of a website interface. The main content area features a large image of three people sitting at a table. Below the image is a text block with the heading "What's Behind Dementia and Why Should We Care?" and the author "By A. J. Kelly". To the right of the main image is a "Modules" sidebar with several smaller article thumbnails, including one titled "The Impact of Mental Health on the Workplace" and another "Mental Health and 'Gig' Economy: What's Next?". The interface is dark-themed with white text and blue accents.

# Introducing LifeSpeak

## *The digital wellness platform*

### *Access the support you need 24/7 on your devices*

By Matea Tuhtar, The Manitoba Teachers' Society

Beginning on March 1 2019, MTS members will have the opportunity to access a unique, digital wellness platform called LifeSpeak.

LifeSpeak is a Canadian produced program, which offers vignettes written by leading experts in a particular field, on a host of wellness related topics. Subject areas include Preventative Health, Mental Health, Stress Management and Resilience, Relationships, Financial Health, Professional Development, Leadership and Management Skills, Children's Health and Parenting, and Caregiving. The vignettes are offered in both French and English.

"The intent of using LifeSpeak is to build your knowledge and understanding," explains MTS Disability Plan and Educator Assistance Program Department Head, Ralph Ramore. "So if you look at one topic, you'll get 5 other vignettes on that topic by experts in the field. These are senior professionals speaking on these subject areas."

Because LifeSpeak is available to members 24/7 on their devices, they are able to share the videos with family. Every video also includes a transcript, as well as a PDF tip sheet, both of which can be printed out.

"We really want to reach as much of our membership as we can. The intent of this is to have this information that you can come back and look at again and review, as opposed to just having a speaker come to present for one session."

MTS will also have the ability to change up to 10 percent of the videos every year and wants members' feedback. "Once we have a better understanding of what the needs of

the members are, and where they see the best product for their needs, then we can enhance that. They are always producing new vignettes.

Topics like "Healthy Eating in Remote Locations" and "How to Meld into a Smaller Community" can resonate all over Canada, and we hope to grow teacher related content."

Ramore says there's been a lot of positive reviews of LifeSpeak. "A lot of the large corporations across the country use the platform. They talk about having a 70 percent utilization rate and it would be great if we could get that number of people to use it.

Wellness is intended to empower individuals to take control of their own health and take steps that prevent them from going down a path they do not want to go down. The more we have people taking ownership of that and getting information about any issues they might be having, then it starts to really serve its purpose."

LifeSpeak easily complements and/or integrates with existing wellness programs, and the fact that it is Canadian based is important because it reflects our country's social safety network.

"Our hope is that members utilize this platform regularly. We want people to look at it as a tool, where's if they have issues that are concerning them, they can go there first because we know these are credible writers and speakers. These are already thoroughly vetted sources."

*To access LifeSpeak members should sign into MyProfile (<http://memberlink.mbteach.org>) and click on the LifeSpeak link. Access is completely anonymous and fully confidential.*



### LifeSpeak Features:

- Over 1000 Videos
- Leading Experts
- Personal Accounts
- Next Steps
- iQ
- Playlists
- Share
- Tip Sheets
- Transcripts
- Podcasts
- Ask the Expert
- Professional Development

### LifeSpeak Topics:

- Physical Conditions & Diseases
- Preventative Health
- Mental Health
- Stress Management & Resilience
- Relationships
- Financial Health
- Disability & Absence Management
- Professional Development
- Leadership & Management skills
- Children's Health
- Parenting & Caregiving

# Financial literacy: Can financial coaching help reduce stress?



By **Brian Denysuik, Creditaid** [www.creditaid.ca](http://www.creditaid.ca)

Our financial life takes a lot of stick handling and it seems that we get tripped up at times. It is hard to pick ourselves up after a trip on the ice and it is no different with our finances.

The fewer times you get tripped up, the more you reduce financial stress in your life. In previous articles I have talked about budgeting and tracking expenses. The key to a solid plan is to first of all take a snapshot of where you are at today financially so that you have a clear starting point.

Many of us don't think twice about paying for a gym membership, personal trainer, life coach, weight loss program or fitness classes. My question is, have you ever paid anyone to help you with your finances? I am not talking about having someone do your income tax or having a meeting with your financial institution to buy money, but someone who can help you summarize your financial life and tie it to your goals. We know that accountability is the key to success with our physical conditioning or weight loss plan; it is really no different with our finances. Having a financial coach might be exactly what's missing for your financial wellness.

A financial coach can help you summarize your financial life today. For some of us it's like getting on the bathroom scale, a little scary at first when you look at the number, however once you know where you are at, you can then make decisions, change some habits and work towards your goals. When you have to show up periodically to weigh in, we know that we will pay more attention to what we eat. When we meet with our personal trainer they will also know if we didn't do any of the program since our last training session. The accountability makes a huge difference with the results we want to

achieve. This is exactly what happens with financial coaching.

When you have to meet with your financial coach to review your actual spending versus your budget the odds are your results will be far better when you know you will be held accountable.

I really enjoy helping people understand what tools and little tricks can make a difference with their personal finances. One of the key changes that I help people understand is how to turn variable expenses into fixed expenses. It is all about being prepared. When we look at our financial life over a 12-month period we should be able to anticipate nearly every expense that is going to come our way. The problem is that we don't take the time to do that. We only think short term which is surviving payday to payday. This continued behavior can lead to increased financial stress.

If you want to get a solid handle on the year, make a list of all those costs that are going to happen. Write down the event and associated cost that you anticipate. Car repairs, birthdays, vacations, Christmas, emergencies, weddings and so forth. Once you write these down with the cost, then divide the cost by the number of months until you need the money. In January if you think your annual car repairs will be \$600 divide it by twelve and put aside \$50 per month.

This exercise is called turning variable expenses into fixed expenses. We have no problem accounting for and paying our rent / mortgage and car payments because they are fixed and we are prepared for them. If we do the same for all the variable expenses for the next twelve months including an emergency fund then we will nail off all anticipated costs for the year.



The key is to remove these amounts from your chequing account and putting them into a savings account every month.

This is the type of exercise that a financial coach will help you with. They will help extract all the costs and ideas of where you want to be financially over the next 12 months or five years. They help hold you accountable.

Just think of how exciting and stress free your life will be when you have saved to spend to meet all your financial expectations and anticipations

*Brian Denysuik is a local credit counsellor and registered insolvency counsellor at Creditaid who has been in the financial services industry for over 35 years.*

# Educator Assistance Program: Teacher culture From the outside looking in



By Angela Haig, Ph.D., C. Psych, The Manitoba Teachers' Society

Long ago, when I began my new position at the Educator Assistance Program, I thought I was well prepared for working with teachers. I thought I knew what teachers were all about. I was so wrong. I had no idea that teachers had their own subculture where the rules were often unspoken but firmly adhered to. Like an anthropologist, I have paid careful attention to the customs of this culture. I'd like to share what I have observed about teacher culture from the outside looking in.

## I have learned that teaching is not for the faint of heart

It takes consummate social skills, empathy, organization, and lots of energy, among other things. Teachers are "on", often without a break, for their entire workday. They have to teach curricula to an increasingly complex classroom. They sit on various committees and run extra-curricular activities for the kids. They are expected to be available to parents to discuss a child's learning challenges whenever a parent happens to drop by. They must cope with difficult issues of behaviour management. When the day in the classroom is over, teachers often have marking or lesson planning to do at home. Teachers work when they are sick because it is easier than planning for a sub. Teachers love their students. Teachers are consistently asked to do more with less. Teaching gets more difficult every year. To say that teaching is a challenging job would be an outrageous understatement, yet teachers continue to do it because having a positive impact on a child's life is phenomenally important and satisfying work.

## Teachers cope with these demands by being tough and no nonsense

People tend to think of firefighters or cowboys as the strong ones, but teachers

are every bit as tough as those guys, and are less recognized for it. When teachers feel overwhelmed, they typically hunker down and work more. They don't have the time to think about the most efficient way to get things done. They may realize that to do their jobs as they would like to, they would have to clone themselves. They may chuckle about this (with a hint of hysteria in the staff lounge). They never want to admit that sometimes it is too much, because in teacher culture that is seen as failure, and evidence of incompetence. They are loath to admit that they might need support from time to time. Instead, they blame themselves, put their heads down, and strive to do better. By June, many teachers are crawling to the finish line.

## In teacher culture, saying no is rude behaviour, and basic self-care is selfishness


Teachers care about kids. They want to make a difference in their lives. Often, that means teachers have difficulty saying "no". When there is always something more to do for kids, teachers have difficulty drawing the line and saying, "no, I need to look after myself". Instead, they keep plugging along despite various symptoms of stress, and strive to get it all done.

## In teacher culture, the needs of the children always come first

While I believe this is good and necessary much of the time, it cannot always be true, because it is unsustainable. Teachers that never put themselves first are teachers that crash and burn.

## In this extremely demanding work environment, you need to be an expert in looking after yourself

Not many people are experts in self-care. For teachers, being pretty good at looking after yourself simply isn't good enough. It



**The healthiest teachers, who have long and satisfying careers, know that:**

- Looking after yourself is not selfish
- It is impossible to do everything
- It is OK to ask for help
- Boundaries are healthy, and saying no does not make you a bad person
- Saying no to some things is necessary in order to say yes to other things
- Teachers (not just students) are allowed to have a learning curve
- Perfection is impossible, and is not a healthy pursuit
- Pushing yourself too hard for too long will result in physical or mental illness
- You can have a greater impact on children if you are healthy.

is a recipe for burnout. The pressures of teaching are too great.

So what have I learned? Teachers are tough, committed, caring, energetic, skilled people who work within a culture that discourages looking after oneself. They are often far better at looking after other people than themselves. But cultures can change, and teacher culture needs to shift to include the understanding that when we look after ourselves, we are better able to look after others.



# Happy feet

*Foot problems can have a huge impact on your overall quality of life*



By **Christine van der Hoek**, [thetrainingzone@shaw.ca](mailto:thetrainingzone@shaw.ca)

It is estimated that 8 out of 10 adults have suffered from foot pain! Everything from an ingrown toenail to chronic pain, foot problems can have a huge impact on your overall quality of life. Foot pain can affect your ability to enjoy your job and leisure activities. If you've got even minor foot pain, you're more likely to shirk exercise and that can also impact your health!

Essentially, if your feet fall behind... so do you. People unable to move can suffer numerous physical,

psychological and social afflictions as a direct or indirect result of foot pain and dysfunction.

Our feet are our connection to the earth. They are literally what ground us. For an adult, they can support anywhere from 100lbs and beyond. On average, each foot strikes the ground between 80-100 times per minute; more if you're physically active. For many teachers, it's also about how much time is spent standing during the workday.

Every time you land, your foot impacts the ground with a certain amount of force, which is counteracted by an equal and opposite amount of force applied by the ground to your foot. This equal and opposite force is known as the ground reaction force (GRF). The GRF comes in a number of components, typically broken into anterior-posterior (along the direction you're traveling), horizontal (side to side) and vertical (straight up and down). Of these, vertical force affects the feet the most.



## Here's a list of things you can do to improve and maintain healthy, happy feet:

- Don't wear too-tight shoes. Most of us have one foot slightly larger than the other. Be sure to try a new shoe on that foot first. Shoes should NEVER have to be broken-in. They should feel good right away. If they don't, then pass on buying them. Ensure they are snug enough to support the foot but with enough wiggle room that they can flex and breathe!
- Don't share shoes. Fungus and bacteria can be passed along.
- Don't share pedicure utensils with your pals. Sterile is best. Keeping toe nails trimmed will also help keep nailbeds clean and healthy.
- Don't hide discolored nails with polish. Let them breathe and treat the underlying issue.
- Don't shave calluses. Let a professional treat your feet.
- Don't perform "DIY surgery" on an ingrown nail.
- Do try the Legs-Up-the-Wall yoga pose after a long day or a hard workout.
- Do give yourself a foot massage or book a reflexology session.
- Do roll a tennis ball under your feet. (A rolling pin works great too!)
- Do check them daily for scrapes, blisters, dry spots or swelling.
- Do soothe irritation with a brief vinegar foot soak (1 part vinegar, 2 parts water) or Epsom salts. Dry feet thoroughly! Use moisturizer like lotion or cream daily at bed time and if your feet sweat frequently, dust your feet with baby powder or non-medicated foot powder before putting your socks and shoes on.
- Do wear high heels sparingly. We have 52 bones in our feet and ankles. When we wear high heels, even an inch in height, it tips us forward, changing the natural angle between the feet in relation to the ankle. A chain reaction up through the legs and lower spine could lead to chronic knee, hip and back pain. If you must wear high heels, find a shoe with a broad heel, and a toe box that doesn't crush

toes together. In high heels, limit the amount of standing time.

- Do wear thicker socks if you are prone to corns and calluses. Caused by consistent rubbing, these can be very painful and progress to debilitating pain.

Posture also has a huge impact on our foot health. A complex cycle of intricately timed movements of muscles and joints create our gait. If our posture is out of line, it is impossible for the gait to occur properly.

Many of us are forward flexed at the hips, rounded in the upper spine and internally rotated in the shoulders. All of this leads to a hunched position, even if just slightly hunched. Once forward leaning, our hips are in a mechanically disadvantaged position to allow our leg to properly pick up the foot. Because of this, we get a "sweeping" sound that indicates that the feet are dragging.

When the feet drag, the three arches (yes, we have three arches in each foot), don't contract and release in the proper order. Arches are our body's way of creating flex and shock absorption when we walk, run or even stand.

Just take a listen the next time you're in a mall or office building or in your own school.... many people drag their feet in a shuffle as they walk. This will have tragic effects on their feet in the future (not to mention breathing capacity, strength, stability, etc.).

Finally, we must exercise our feet. Muscles in the feet and ankles react to training just as all the other skeletal muscles do. If you want strong, healthy feet, then spending time working on muscle development, flexibility and mobility will go a long way in keeping your feet healthy.

### When exercising your feet here's another list to keep in mind:

- **Standing heel raises.** Lift yourself up on your toes then back down onto the ground. To increase the challenge, stand on one leg or hold weights. 2 sets of 15 repetitions.
- **Standing toe raises.** Slightly leaning back to standing on your heels (don't let your buttocks stick out backwards). Try to balance in this



Every time you land, your foot impacts the ground with a certain amount of force, which is counteracted by an equal and opposite amount of force applied by the ground to your foot. This equal and opposite force is known as the ground reaction force (GRF). The GRF comes in a number of components, typically broken into anterior-posterior (along the direction you're traveling), horizontal (side to side) and vertical (straight up and down). Of these, vertical force affects the feet the most.

position holding up to 30 seconds. Do this 3 or 4 times. If you feel confident, walk around on your heels.

- **Hand-Foot Tug of War!** Put your right hand against the outside of your right foot and then try to push your foot towards the hand. You can also do this with the hand on the inside of the foot. 20-30 seconds, twice in each direction for each foot.
- **Towel pulls.** With bare foot, place the sole on a towel while holding the ends of the towels in your hands. Try pushing your toes away as you hold the towel at a steady length. If you have a partner to assist you, you can have the partner hold the towel and you try to pull the towel away from them with your toes.

The feet are the foundation for the body. If your feet are unhealthy, the remainder of the body will also reflect the dysfunction. Every day, take time to take care of your feet and make your feet, happy feet!

Posture issues:

# The struggle is real

## Shoulder pain and the thoracic spine



By **Chelsea White, BSc (Kin), C.A.T (c)**

Close your eyes and imagine it's a beautiful summer day. You're outside enjoying the sun and your friend says 'quick catch this' you hesitate to catch the ball because you know that it will pain you. So there you are with the ball at your feet and the thought going through your head, what is going on with this shoulder.

Whether your shoulder pain has come from a traumatic injury or has snuck up over time, there is commonality amongst them; the position of your thoracic spine (mid back). Your thoracic spine starts at the base of your neck (just below that bump you may rub when your neck is tight) and ends at the bottom of your rib cage; that is quite the distance. When we look at the shoulder structurally it is made up of the arm (humerus) and shoulder blade (scapulae). From the functional standpoint, it is comprised of the arm, shoulder blade and thoracic spine.

For the shoulder to move through a smooth, unencumbered movement there must be coordination between the arm and shoulder blade. Any loss in this coordination leads to pain and dysfunction. That sounds easy enough to correct, right? It can be if addressed early. What often happens is our body will compensate to avoid pain. A change in movement patterns could include beginning to shrug when reaching for your seat belt or reaching overhead. This will often contribute to neck pain as the upper traps becoming overactive. We often won't feel pain until there is enough tissue damage to set off the alarm bell.

You may be wondering what the thoracic spine's role is in all this. Visualize your shoulder as a home: the thoracic spine as the ground, your shoulder blade as the foundation and the shoulder joint as the house. What if the ground you built a house on started to heave? Then the foundation would be less stable, and the house could shift resulting in damage. Now let us turn

to the back, that heaving ground is your mid back being in an excessive rounded position, often a result of poor posture. Over time the supports of your foundation, the muscles around the shoulder blade can no longer withstand the external pressures, they stop performing optimally and breaks in the foundation ensue. At first you may not notice these little cracks in the foundation, but over time you start noticing that the doors in your house don't close properly, get stuck and you have heat loss. In the body this would be analogous to a loss in range of motion, strength, function and increase in pain.

Now that I have painted you a picture of a house although beautiful, it may need some work. Let's discuss how to inspect your house. First, check the grade of your ground (the extension of your mid back). Seat yourself next to a mirror or window, with your arms straight overhead (note: if you have shoulder issues cross your arms across your chest) arch backwards and feel for where the movement is coming from.

If you felt the movement in your lower back then you are not alone, most people will drive more of their movement from the low back due to stiffness in the upper back, this demands more movement from the lumbar spine, where we have limited range of motion to begin with (20-25 degrees). For those of you that see a beautiful arch in the mirror/window through the upper back, high five. Now if you have good extension of the mid back, we should check the rotation. Most of the rotation in our back should come from the thoracic spine (45-50 degrees left and right). If we don't have adequate rotation then the body will have to steal it from somewhere, usually the lumbar spine. To check this, sit with your back to the mirror or window and flatten your low back. Cross your hands across your body so that your hands are on the opposite shoulder, inhale



**"Most people have no idea how good their body is designed to feel."**

**- Kevin Trudeau**

and as you exhale turn as far as you can to the right. Now if you have adequate range then you should be able to see your left shoulder in your reflection. While you are at it, stay there for a moment and feel for where the most restriction is. You may feel it in your rib cage or central in the spine. If you feel pain, not discomfort or tightness, stop and turn forward. But if you feel just a tight restriction, hold that position, inhale then exhale and try to extend a little into the movement, hold for 5 seconds (try to exhale for 5 seconds nice and slow), repeat 3-5 times per side.

After that little mobility exercise, you should have a better idea of what your thoracic mobility is. To get a clear picture of the relationship between your thoracic spine position and how it affects the shoulder mobility try this. Sitting or standing, slouch through your upper back, now with your arms straight raise them overhead as far as you can. Try this again with back straight. You should be able to see and feel the difference in your shoulder range of motion.

There you have it, a short lesson on the amazing relationship between your thoracic spine position (posture) and your shoulder mobility. Who would have thought that your mid back could be a culprit for your shoulder issues. You may have heard this before, mind your posture and your posture won't undermine you.



# Yoga practice: Twisting it up

By Tally Young



Some days we meet the end of our workday and our bodies have a feeling of being bound tight, much like the springs of a clock. It feels like we are spring loaded to agitated.

Our daily grind has a way of shortening our connective tissues, muscles, tendons and ligaments, increasing the tension within the joint spaces which decreases joint mobility and increases the pressure felt in our lower back, legs, chest and abdomen which controls our ability to circulate nutrients, digest food, expel waste. It also affects our ability to think clearly and in general move on with our day.

When we practice a twist, we not only improve the spine's flexibility, we improve the movement of the lower back, abdomen and hips by increasing the amount of space in the tissue reversing the tension of the day and allowing nutrients

to flow which has a healing effect through joint spaces and tissues.

We need about 10 minutes and a quiet spot to create our energetic oasis. Other pieces of equipment would be your mat to lay on and a block or book that you can place under the outer knee or between them if necessary.

The twist I am sharing with you is a simple laying twist. You can hold this twist between 2 to 5 min for each side. The longer the hold the more benefits your body will receive.

## The supine twist

1. Create a quiet spot, lay your mat or blanket down. Have a timer if you need. Lay on your back and take 5 big full breaths.
2. Bring your knees to the ceiling, then draw them into the chest. Hold for 3 breaths.

3. Bring your arms to the floor having them in a T-shape across your shoulders.


4. Allow your knees to softly float to the right. Your legs might not touch the floor, this is normal. A block would be great to place under your right knee or between your knees. You get to play and find out what works best here.

5. Breathe in for 5 out for 5. If needed, start your timer.

6. Release, bring the knees back to the chest and give them a squeeze then repeat on the opposite side.

7. End by taking 20 full breaths.

Just the act of taking a quiet moment decreases the tension felt by the body. This mini practice can be repeated as many times as you need throughout your day.



# A world-class expert right when you need one.

At The Manitoba Teachers' Society, we realize there are times we could all use extra advice, support, information or inspiration. We are excited to be bringing you LifeSpeak – a digital wellness platform that can provide MTS members and their families with instant access to expert advice and confidential information when and where they need it.

**There are over 480 expert-led video modules on topics such as:**

- Mindfulness
- Eating for Optimal Health
- Better Sleep for Better Health
- Mental Health Stigma
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- Shifting Your Mindset to Wealth
- Stress Mastery
- Couples Relationships
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- Digital Addiction

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