

Using Mindfulness in the Classroom

Schools today have a unique opportunity to provide the means through which students can positively deal with the many stresses and challenges that they face daily in an increasingly complicated world. That powerful vehicle is mindfulness. Mindfulness is a form a mental training that asks individuals to direct their attention to each moment of their personal experience, free of judgment and fueled with curiosity, open-mindedness, and acceptance. The goal is to foster an ongoing awareness of one’s thoughts, feelings, and emotions. It is about paying attention in a particular way with a specific purpose. It encourages individuals to be “present”--rather than worry about what *might* happen, mindfulness asks them to pay close attention to what they are thinking and how they are feeling emotionally and physically. Sometimes mindfulness practice also encourages paying close attention to what *is* happening in the surrounding space.

Research has shown that students as young as seven who regularly practice mindfulness are gradually able to decrease impulsive and reactive behavior by considering their thoughts and emotions carefully and rationally. Mindfulness also helps students deal with difficult emotions or physical discomfort in a healthy and productive manner; it can decrease stress, anxiety and depression and increases well-being, happiness, compassion, kindness, etc. Likewise, mindfulness has proven to increase the working and visual-spatial memory and the sustained attention of students as well as reduce test anxiety, all of which has directly improved their cognition and performance in the classroom.

Guidelines for Using Mindfulness	Additional Strategies	Digital Tools and Resources
<p>In mindfulness, participants are led through a series of concentration and meditation exercises that help them focus on their present experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to practice mindfulness, participants pay careful attention to their breathing, the sounds they hear, what they are feeling, changing sensations in the different parts of their bodies. • It is important to note that mindfulness is not simply comprised of mood regulation or relaxation techniques but is rather mental training meant to hone our focus and reduce our impulsive or emotionally charged reactions to what happens around us. • Research has shown that with regular practice of mindfulness, students have reported an increase in sustained focus and the ability to stay calm, curious, and open. • Likewise, students bolster the skills to combat negative, worrisome, or even destructive thoughts by anchoring their focus to their breathing and to the physical sensations in their bodies. • Specifically, mindfulness practiced with students has reduced their anxiety, stress, and sleeplessness and has increased their focus, self-esteem and self-awareness as 	<p>Mindfulness: A Proposed Operational Definition</p> <p>Mindful Education</p> <p>Implementing a School-Wide Mindfulness Program</p> <p>Resources to Introduce Mindfulness</p>

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	<p>well as improved their behavior and overall well-being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is noteworthy that mindfulness as a practice is universally effective for all students and staff members, from those dealing with the normal range of stresses and anxieties to those who may be suffering with mental illness or other physical or emotional challenges. 	<p>What is MBCT? + 28 Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy Resources</p>
<p>Mindfulness is best taught by teachers who embrace the qualities it celebrates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The effectiveness of mindfulness training is directly related to those who teach it. Teachers of mindfulness must practice it themselves. In order to teach mindfulness, teachers may need to be trained in mindfulness and learn to model the qualities that mindfulness yields: curiosity, compassion, openness, patience, trust, acceptance, etc. Practicing and teaching mindfulness will likely help teachers themselves both personally and professionally in that they will be more able to create positive changes in their lives and especially their classrooms. Research indicates that teachers who regularly use mindfulness are better able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize their students’ individual and collective needs, Focus their attention on which key ideas matter most in their lessons and in their classrooms overall, Prepare more effectively their class materials, Implement what they hope to with minimal distractions, Create a calm, safe, and focused classroom to optimize students’ engagement. It is important for teachers to recognize that while meditation and other practices involved in mindfulness have their roots in many religions, the mindfulness practiced in schools is secular. It is not a place to advance or discourage any particular religion or set of religious or spiritual beliefs. The goal of mindfulness in schools is to promote the wellbeing of everyone involved in the practice and to encourage an exploration of the human mind and body and how we can utilize both to be our best selves. Note that because of its spiritual and religious roots, some parents may be uncomfortable with the idea of meditation in the classroom. As a result, it is important to communicate with parents about the benefits of implementing mindfulness in the classroom and invite their consent and even their participation. 	<p>Mindfulschools.org on Secularity</p> <p>Secular Mindfulness: Potential & Pitfalls</p> <p>Tips for Teaching Mindfulness to Kids</p> <p>Mindfulness Training for Elementary School Students</p>

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<p>There are a variety of mindfulness activities that research has shown to work well in the classroom.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As with any new pedagogical approach, it is best to implement strategies that are evidence-based. Specifically, mindfulness practices have been well researched and documented for adults. While there are some limitations in the current research on the effectiveness of mindfulness on young people, it has revealed promising conclusions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mindfulness is relatively easy and inexpensive to implement and fits into a wide range of courses and contexts. ○ Additionally, mindfulness has a wide range of benefits to students including improved overall well-being, mental and physical health and increased academic performance. ● Make certain to use activities that quiet the mind and ask students to be present in the moment using breathing techniques and guided mindful reflections. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, create a peaceful lighting experience in your classroom. Students generally sit in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. ○ Ask the students to close their eyes and take three slow deep breaths, in and out, allowing their bodies to rest without effort, to be silent and still for a few minutes. ● During a meditative practice it is important to help students understand that when their minds wander, they should acknowledge the wandering thought without judgment or rumination on the origin of the thought or its significance etc., and then focus their attention again on their breathing as their anchor, in and out, in and out. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Note that mindfulness is not a thought suppression activity. Although thoughts are distractions in mindfulness, they are to be expected, acknowledged and let go. That is a foundational part of the process. Students then redirect their focus to their breathing or the activity at hand. ○ As with the previous or any mindful activity, students focus their attention on internal or external events using specific senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell). ○ Mindfulness is more effective when practiced daily for shorter periods of time. The repeated practice of moving from every-day awareness to mindfulness is a critical skill, so frequent opportunities provide more 	<p><u>8 Principles of Teaching Mindfulness to Adolescents</u></p> <p><u>Mindfulness Activities for Children and Teens</u></p> <p><u>Human Camera Mindfulness Activity</u></p> <p><u>Marble Roll Cooperative Game for Mindfulness</u></p> <p><u>Best Noncompetitive Games for Teaching Mindfulness</u></p> <p><u>7 Fun Ways to Teach Your Kids Mindfulness</u></p> <p><u>Mindfulness Goes to School: Things Learned (So Far) from Research and Real-World Experiences</u></p>

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	<p>opportunities for the brain to respond to mindfulness. Five or ten minutes every day is much more effective than once a week for twenty minutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prerecorded mindfulness activities work well in some classrooms. It is often easier for youth to quiet their minds when soothing music or a calm voice provides guided imagery. ○ Mindful movement such as walking meditation, yoga or tai chi can augment benefits of mindfulness if a teacher desires. Teachers can lead the activity if they're comfortable and practiced in the activity, or can choose a simple but engaging yoga video for kids, or it can work when teachers model and then ask students to hold poses that make them feel strong and powerful. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ For example, ask students to stand like Superman with their feet shoulder width apart, their fists clenched and their arms reaching out in front, stretching as far as they can. ■ Or use the Wonder Woman pose where the feet are strong in a shoulder width stance and their fists are clenched at their hips. ■ Ask them to engage their muscles, to feel the strength in their arms radiating from their fists, to ground their feet so that nothing can knock them over. ■ Note that the mindfulness movement may require a bit of outside help if teachers are not qualified to provide this kind of instruction. ■ Having a knowledgeable staff member or a consultant of some kind to help will benefit everyone and empower teachers to lead their students successfully through these activities. ○ Remember to always communicate with parents about your intentions regarding mindfulness in your classroom and its benefits. ○ Invite parents to participate in or observe a mindfulness session and encourage them to use it at home as the benefits of mindfulness-based interventions at home, in relationships, in parenting, etc. are well researched and extensive. ● The one-minute bell is one of the most common mindfulness practices that has been utilized in a variety of forms in classrooms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In this activity, the teacher has the students clear their desks or tables, rest 	

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	<p>their hands on their desks, and close their eyes. Then the teacher rings a bell (or uses a rain stick or something else with a pleasant but sustained sound) and asks the students to listen to the ring of the bell and then raise a hand when they no longer hear the sound of the bell.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sometimes, this activity is followed by a one-minute focus on breathing where students still keep their eyes closed, but place one hand on their chest and the other on their abdomen and feel themselves breathing. The teacher reminds the students gently to focus on their breathing during the minute to help minimize distractions. <p>This activity (and its variations) is brief enough that it can be used daily, preferably at the same time every day. At first, teachers should lead the activity, but over time students could take turns leading it.</p>	
<p>Practicing mindfulness in schools requires thoughtful Implementation, reflection, and feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mindfulness and movement practice should not take the place of other activities (e.g., Students should not have to choose between a music or art class and mindfulness and movement practices). ● Note that if outside instructors are needed for any mindfulness activities, the teachers and instructors should <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agree on the goals and intentions of the program, ○ Establish a clear line of communication about the expectations and the processes involved in smooth transitions and in the practice itself, ○ Work together to address the needs of individual students. ● Surveying students using open-ended questions may be a sound practice in gathering their feedback regarding mindfulness. Ask students questions such as the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How has mindfulness been helpful to you? ○ What has been difficult about it? ○ Do you use it in other parts of your life outside of school? If so, how? ○ Would you prefer to use these sorts of activities regularly at the start of your classes? 	<p><u>Mindfulness Resources from ASCD</u></p> <p><u>Mindfulness in the Classroom from Vanderbilt University</u></p> <p><u>Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM) pdf</u></p> <p><u>Tools for Measuring Mindfulness</u></p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre- and post-questionnaires using a Likert scale may also be used. Consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How often do you feel stressed about a test? ○ How easily can you calm yourself down when you're upset? ○ How easily can you listen to someone else when you're upset? ○ How often do you feel anxious? ● It is important to note that not all students may find mindfulness practices helpful initially and teachers need to be sensitive to this, guiding and easing the students into the practice. The length of time for meditative practices, for example should be brief at first. The time could gradually be lengthened as the school year proceeds. 	

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