

## Introduction to Mindfulness

### Overview

**Mindfulness** is a state of awareness and a practice;<sup>1</sup> it involves attending to the present moment and cultivating an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance of one's experience.<sup>2</sup> It is a secular (non-religious) practice that is backed by a growing body of compelling scientific evidence that indicates a wide range of potential benefits, from improving physical and mental health to promoting pro-social behavior.<sup>2</sup> Mindfulness can play a vital role in helping students and teachers create a classroom environment conducive to learning and personal growth.

**Why This Matters:** Mindfulness may contribute to better mental and physical health, cognitive performance, and social behavior, enhancing students' ability to thrive in school and in life:

**Improvements in Health:** Research indicates that mindfulness can improve many aspects of students' overall health and wellbeing, including decreased stress and depressive symptoms, and improvements in cognitive performance. This enables students to more fully realize their academic potential.<sup>1,3,4</sup>

**Positive Social Behavior:** For both students and teachers, mindfulness can promote healthier responses to difficult social situations, reduce implicit bias, and increase compassionate responses to others in need.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

**Productive Classroom Climate:** Higher levels of student engagement, together with lower stress and emotional over-excitement, can be part of a self-reinforcing cycle of positive relationships between students and teachers. This has positive implications for teachers' wellbeing and satisfaction, and most importantly, can contribute to a classroom environment where students can succeed.<sup>4,9,10,11</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Jennings, P. (2016). *Teacher Mindfulness & Stress Reduction* [PowerPoint slides].

<sup>2</sup> Bishop, S. R., Lau, M. A., Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L., Anderson, N. D., Carmody, J., Devins, G. (2004). Mindfulness: A proposed operational definition. *Clinical Psychology*, 11, 230–241. doi:10.1093/clipsy.bph077

<sup>3</sup> Zenner C, Herrleben-Kurz S, Walach H. (2014). *Mindfulness-based interventions in schools-a systematic review and meta-analysis*. *Frontiers in psychology*. 603

<sup>4</sup> Chiesa, A., & Serretti, A. (2009). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for stress management in healthy people: a review and meta-analysis. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 15(5), 593–600.

<sup>5</sup> Raes, F., Griffith, J. W., Van der Gucht, K., & Williams, J. M. G. (2014). School-based prevention and reduction of depression in adolescents: A cluster-randomized controlled trial of a mindfulness group program. *Mindfulness*, 5(5), 477–486.

<sup>6</sup> Condon P, Desbordes G, Miller WB, DeSteno D. Meditation increases compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*. 2013;24

<sup>7</sup> Britton WB, Lepp NE, Niles HF, RochaT, Fisher NE, Gold JS. A randomized controlled pilot trial of classroom based mindfulness meditation compared to an active control condition in sixth-grade children. *J Sch Psychol*. 2014;52(3):263–278

<sup>8</sup> Hoge, E. A., Bui, E., Marques, L., Metcalf, C. A., Morris, L. K., Robinaugh, D. J., ... Simon, N. M. (2013). Randomized Controlled Trial of Mindfulness Meditation for Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Effects on Anxiety and Stress Reactivity. *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 74(8)

<sup>9</sup> Lueke A, Gibson B. Mindfulness meditation reduces implicit age and race bias. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. 2015;6(3):284-291.

<sup>10</sup> Zoogman S, Goldberg SB, Hoyt WT, Miller L. Mindfulness interventions with youth: A meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*. 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Roeser RW, Skinner E, Beers J, Jennings PA. Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice. *Child Development Perspectives*. 2012;6(2):167-173.

## Mindfulness: Supplemental Sample Strategies Handout

**Overview:** Mindfulness can be practiced and taught by using a variety of strategies at various grade levels. This guide is a supplement to the mindfulness presentation (in PowerPoint). The toolkit is available [here](#).

### Start with Yourself: A Quick Guide to Beginning Your Own Mindfulness Practice (from slide 21)

The best way to teach mindfulness is to be mindful. This is why nearly every mindfulness-in-education program or curriculum advises staff (teachers especially) to cultivate a personal practice.<sup>1,2</sup> Furthermore, teachers practicing mindfulness may lead to increased professional wellbeing, greater engagement, and lower stress levels. Below are some suggestions for getting started.

#### 1. Schedule five minutes of mindfulness into your day, ideally first thing upon waking:



5 minutes

- Find a quiet space to sit comfortably with an erect spine and relaxed body
- Focus on your breathing, putting your awareness in your chest and lungs
- Scan your body from head to toe, relaxing each part as you become aware of it
- When your thoughts bring you away, simply bring your awareness back to your breath; remember that the aim is not to stop or suppress thoughts, but rather to practice bringing awareness back once it has gone away

#### 2. Set tasks for yourself during the day; for example, choose one or more of the following:



- Take three deep breaths at the beginning of each class, before a meal, or to calm yourself when you notice that you are tense, stressed, frustrated or angry;
- Feel the sensation of your feet on the ground as you walk to lunch
- Make eye contact and be still while listening fully to another person

Here are a few helpful reminders as you develop your own practice:

- Integrate some or all of these exercises at your own pace; don't overwhelm yourself.
- Remember that as long as you make an effort, there is no such thing as failing or doing it wrong.
- The expectation of emptying your mind completely is probably not helpful. (Nearly everyone's mind is constantly wandering.) Instead, simply notice that thoughts have arisen and return to the object of your practice.

<sup>1</sup> Roeser RW, Skinner E, Beers J, Jennings PA. *Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice*. Child Development Perspectives. 2012;6(2):167-173.

<sup>2</sup> Jennings, P. A., Frank, J. L., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2013). *Improving Classroom Learning Environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE): Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial*. School Psychology Quarterly, 28(4)

<sup>3</sup> Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R. J. (2013). *Mindfulness for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout, and teaching efficacy*. Mind, Brain, and Education, 7(3), 182-195.

## Establishing A Mindful Body: Implementation steps (from slide 23)

Establishing a mindful body posture is a simple but powerful strategy.<sup>1</sup> Using a set of verbal directions, it can be integrated into the daily routine as a way to begin class or a new activity (e.g., to prepare for a group discussion), or as a way to return a group to focus and attention. It is also a good way to introduce students to mindfulness experientially.<sup>2</sup>

Follow these steps to implement this in your classroom:

1. Explain the purpose of the activity. This will depend on the teacher's intentions and the students' age and level of experience, but the purpose is to help students relax, focus, and prepare to learn; and possibly to serve as an introduction to mindfulness, which many older students will have heard of.
2. Prepare the environment. Ensure that students have their own physical space and are comfortable in the room. Younger students may choose to sit on the floor, against the wall, or at a desk.
3. Share the script below. It should be read in a calm, relaxed manner, pausing for a moment between lines to allow students to observe their experience with each instruction.

- 
- *"We're going to try a brief, 3-minute-practice that includes some basic elements of mindfulness, such as posture, body relaxation and awareness, and breathing. If you do not wish to participate, you are free to observe or simply relax for these few minutes. Also remember that there is really no such thing as being good or bad at mindfulness; the goal is just to be open to whatever experience you have."*
  - *"To begin, adjust your posture so that your back is straight if possible; not leaning forward and not putting too much weight on the back of the chair"*
  - *"See that your head is straight, facing directly forward"*
  - *"Have your feet squarely on the floor"*
  - *"At this point, if you feel comfortable doing so, you can close your eyes; if not, just relax your gaze onto the floor in front of you"*
  - *"Relax your hands onto your lap, folding your right hand inside the left, or relax them onto your thighs; whichever you prefer"*
  - *"Now, relax any tension in your shoulders; as if they were heavy"*
  - *"See if you're holding tension in your face: relax your forehead and brow; relax your jaw; tongue; see that you're not clenching your teeth"*
  - *"Now bring attention to your entire abdomen, letting your belly relax; and relax your legs"*
  - *"Check to see that your back is still straight"*
  - *"Now direct your attention to your chest; your breathing"*
  - *"Notice that when you breathe, your lungs expand... and contract"*
  - *"Don't try to change anything; just observe your breathing"*
  - *"For the next five or six breath cycles, try to deeply focus just on your breath, just as it is..."*
  - *"And if you find that you get distracted by your thoughts: no problem; simply bring your attention back to your breath (\*longer pause\*)"*
  - *"Gently open your eyes and come back to the room"*
  - *"Thank you"* [the group will now transition to the next activity]

<sup>1</sup> "Mindful Bodies" is a fixture in Mindful Schools' curricula; linked here are two videos of these activities in K-5 classrooms >> <http://www.mindfulschools.org/resources/explore-mindful-resources/>

<sup>2</sup> Nair, Shwetha; Sagar, Mark; Sollers III, John; Consedine, Nathan; Broadbent, Elizabeth. *Do slumped and upright postures affect stress responses? A randomized trial.* Health Psychology, Vol 34(6), Jun 2015, 632-641.