

Brief Mindfulness Activities



What is mindfulness?

The practice of mindfulness has been defined as “mental activities which share in common a focus on training the self-regulation of attention and awareness” (Lomas et al., 2017, p. 134). Mindfulness has been shown to improve student wellbeing in multiple ways. Britton and colleagues (2014) and Cresswell (2017) found that even 5-10 minutes of mindfulness daily can decrease negative emotions and impulse behavior in children and youth. Mindfulness has also been an effective tool in helping children and adolescents regulate difficult emotions, such as grief and anger (Wisner, 2014, p. 632; PBS NewsHour 2017 cited in Armstrong, 2019, p. 14). Among adolescents, mindfulness has been shown to improve positive emotions, reduce anxiety, improve sleep, and lead to more prosocial behaviors (Miners, 2008).

Interventions

Shankland and Rosset (2017) collected a series of brief mindfulness interventions that teachers can integrate into their classroom curriculum. First, teachers can introduce a mindful bell which, when rung, indicates to the students to direct their attention to the sound of the bell for as long as possible. Not only can this be used as an attention getting device, but it can help teach students how to pay purposeful attention. Teachers can introduce mindfulness to their students through a brief body scan. In a body scan, students are instructed to direct their attention to selected parts of their body, one at a time. For example, students sitting in a chair can focus on the feeling in their toes, then feet, ankles, knees, legs and back. The breath is crucial to many mindfulness practices. Teachers can lead breath centered meditations by inviting students to silently breath in on seven counts and breath out on eleven counts. Similarly, teachers can invite students to focus their attention on wishing themselves and fellow classmates happiness through a loving kindness meditation (Shankland & Rosset, 2017).

Considerations for Educators

There are some important considerations teachers and school leaders must take into account when planning a mindfulness activity. Mindfulness activities can be more effective for students when teachers model mindfulness and share their own experiences (Armstrong, 2019, p. 41-42; Etty-Leal, 2019). Mindfulness activities should also include good preparation (introduce students to the concept of mindfulness and how it can improve wellbeing) as well as good reflection (encourage students to write down or discuss experiences following mindful practices) (Armstrong, 2019; McGee, 2019). In order to keep students engaged, you may consider having students lead mindfulness activities, incorporating videos and other technological resources, as well as mixing up active movement mindfulness activities

with more sedentary practices (Armstrong, 2019; McGee, 2019). The links below will take you to a few different brief mindfulness practices you may consider implementing in your classroom.

[Mindful Bell](#)

[Body Scan Relaxation Technique](#)

[Mindful Breathing](#)

[Five Senses Mindfulness](#)

[Mindful Walking/Movement](#)

Does it work?

Felver and colleagues (2015) completed a review of existing research regarding the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions with children and adolescents in the classroom. Though research on mindfulness in schools is still somewhat limited, the results of existing studies are promising. For this review, 28 studies were analyzed, 10 being randomized-control trials. The total number of students who participated across all studies was a little over 3,000, with an average sample size of about 120 students per study ranging from ages 5 to 17. Many of the studies reported improvements in participant mental health, with 6 reporting significant reductions in behavioral concerns, 4 to 5 showing a reduction in depressive symptoms and anxiety, and one study even reporting a reduction in suicidal ideation. Most of the studies also reported improvements in prosocial behaviors, such as emotional regulation, social skills, positive affect and optimism with the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions in the classroom (Felver et al., 2015).

It is also important to consider students' perspectives regarding mindfulness practice in the classroom. One study found that youth who participated in an arts-based mindfulness program reported improvements in self-efficacy, empathy, compassion, and even a greater appreciation of "the beauty of [their] inner being" (Coholic, 2011, p.????). More recently, Researchers Ager, Albrecht and Cohen (2015) evaluated the mindfulness journals of 38 elementary students following their participation in an eight-week classroom mindfulness intervention to better understand their perceptions of mindfulness. All students shared that mindfulness helped them be more aware of happy thoughts and feelings, as well as a sense of inner calmness and peace (Ager et al., 2015). Among these elementary school-aged participants, many reported mindful breathing and mindful walking to be among their favorite activities. Mindfulness practice better enabled them to respond to stress, conflict and difficult emotions in themselves, as well as to help others experiencing these challenges (Ager et al., 2015).

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