Implement Mindfulness in Your School

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My Journey

3 Year Process

- Personal practice and research
- School presentations and implementation in counseling practice
- Advocating for Training
- Mindfulness Research Project
Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this webinar, attendees should be able to:

1) Discuss mindfulness meditation and its benefits for children, adolescents, and adults.

2) Link mindfulness practices to student and teacher well-being initiatives.

3) Advocate for the adoption of mindfulness practices in and outside of the classroom.

What is Mindfulness?

• **Mindfulness** means maintaining a present-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, or surrounding environment.

• It also includes the intentional nurturing of positive states of mind such as kindness and compassion.
The Stimulus and Reaction

Mindfulness creates a SPACE between the stimulus and reaction

A taste of mindfulness

Mindful body

Attention to breath

Attention to wandering thoughts
What Mindfulness is **NOT**

- Isn’t about being still and quiet – that can often be a by-product, but that isn’t the goal
- Isn’t about getting rid of your thoughts or silencing/controlling your thinking
- Isn’t about *doing* something
- Isn’t a discipline tool (time out)
- Isn’t about *always* being happy & positive
- Isn’t religious
Educator Stress

Student Stressors
“We do not know what specific knowledge our children are going to need ten or twenty years from now, because the world, and their work when they come to it, will be so different from ours. What we do know, is that they will need to know how to pay attention, how to focus and concentrate, how to listen and learn, and how to be in wise relationship with themselves - including their thoughts and emotions - and with others.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

How many have formally taught children how to:

- Calm Down
- Pay Attention
- Be Grateful
- Breathe
**Mindfulness Benefits**

- Lowers stress
- Improves focus and concentration
- Develops empathy
- Improves sleep
- Improves impulse control
- Increases self-awareness
- Improves ability to manage emotions and behaviors

**Benefits for Adults**

“Huge impact in my own life in terms of recognizing stress, anger, negative feelings. Really helped my sleep and general anxiety levels. I have used mindfulness as part of every observation this year in school. It has helped to calm my mind and prepare the children well.”

“I try to use it to manage my emotions and body language, especially in meetings when I am feeling particularly annoyed, frustrated, stressed or distracted.”
Benefits for Students

“...having done mindfulness with other classes, my children are able to compose themselves and sit with focus and openly participate in mindfulness sessions. They remain focused despite interruptions, coughing, others needing a pee, class door opening and closing etc. It has been so amazing for me as their teacher. I have found when my patience is low and I am feeling negative towards the children, we stop and do mindfulness and it is so powerful in helping us connect again in a positive way and reengage. I am so grateful for the whole experience.”

Mindfulness and the Brain

Amygdala
Aroused when detecting and reacting to emotions, especially difficult or strong emotions such as fear. Following mindfulness training, this part of the brain is less activated and has less gray matter density.

Hippocampus
Critical to learning and memory, and helps regulate the amygdala. Following mindfulness training, this part of the brain is more active and has more gray matter density.

Prefrontal Cortex
Associated with maturity, including regulating emotions and behaviors, and making wise decisions. Following Mindfulness training, this part of the brain is more activated.

http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/
Bringing Mindfulness into the School Community

Where do I begin?
Creating and establishing sustainability

- Start with yourself
  - Personal practice is vital
- Become trained in delivering mindfulness
- Bring mindfulness into sessions with students
- Find passionate and supportive team of teachers (and admin)
- Adopt a classroom and deliver mindfulness curriculum
Implementation

- **Time** - make the time
- **Confidence** - get the training
- **Age group** - make it relevant
- **Support** - form a passionate team

Key Considerations
Teaching Elementary

“the younger the child, the more they are imitating you: responding to your soothing voice, mimicking your physical posture and non-verbally attuning to your emotional and physiological state.”

- Lessons should be short, simple, and concise
- Incorporate and allow movement
- Remember the goal is not to command stillness
Key Considerations
Teaching Adolescents

Establish relevance
- What’s in for me? How will this help what I’m currently going through?
- Integrate current events, interests, stories, multi-media
  - https://youtu.be/up3MzuYBF-g

Creating Connection
- Create a space for students to feel safe and seen.
- Relationships are important—be genuine and help them feel comfortable opening up in the classroom environment
- Meet them where they’re at
- Be aware of your own presence
- Be flexible—closing eyes and a particular position of the body isn’t necessary.

Staff Buy-in and Sustainability

- “Adoption, not roll out”
  - A mandated, top-down approach creates resistance
- Present to leadership team and teachers on mindfulness and its benefits for both teacher and student wellbeing
- Create a pilot program with a few passionate teachers. Measure and evaluate impact. Share results with school community
- Design plan to extend to whole school community
Barriers: Buy-in

“I don’t do meditation. I’m the active type and can’t just sit around doing nothing for 30 minutes”

“Meditation is too ‘airy-fairy’ for me”

“We should not be teaching Buddhist practices in the school setting.”

*Note: Mindfulness in schools is a completely secular practice

“*sigh* I don’t have time for yet another initiative”

Training: Budget Available

✓ Mindful Schools:
  • Online training; 2 courses, 12 weeks total
  • Step 1: Mindfulness Fundamentals, an introductory 6-week online course: provides the basics to develop a personal mindfulness practice.
  • Step 2: Mindful Educator Essentials, a 6-week online course: provides K-12 curriculum and practical skills to introduce mindfulness into your work with youth

✓ Mindful Life Project
  • In-person training and consultancy

✓ Local mindfulness instructor
Training: Little or No Budget

Personal Practice

- Mindful Schools-personal investment
- Palouse Mindfulness-Free 8-week Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program

Teaching Mindfulness to Youth

- Pilot program with few teachers-“each one, reach one”
- Smiling Mind
  - free curriculum with teacher’s manual and guided meditations
- Center for Adolescent Studies: free online mindfulness course
- Easy mindfulness activities-see handout
- Online videos and guided meditations: i.e. Cosmic Kids, Calm

“I am completely convinced that a fifteen minute meditation with a 45 minute English lesson is far more productive and beneficial than an hour lesson, when the children NEED a time out. Children need to develop their awareness of how important a healthy mind is - happy children learn best as they are more open, flexible and adaptable.”
Mindfulness Apps/Websites

**Adolescents & Adults**
- Try mindfulness out yourself! The Headspace and Calm apps have free 7 and 10-day practices

**Children**
- Free apps for kids include Smiling Mind, and Stop, Breathe, Think.

Additional Resources
- https://www.symbaloo.com/mix/wsomindfulnessresources
Mindfulness Books for Young Children

Mindfulness Books for Teens
Action Plan
*See handout

- Why would this benefit your school community?
- What is the current level of mindfulness awareness in your school?
- Is there a training budget?
- Who would you already have buy-in from?
- What will some of the barriers be?
- What is your final vision?

References


Questions?

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