

MINDFULNESS IN THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY

A VALUABLE TOOL FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

What is Mindfulness?

In recent years, discussions around mindfulness have been increasing, and not by chance. Numerous studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in managing anxiety, stress, and other psychological pressures, as it has been linked to high levels of psychosomatic health and well-being, mental resilience, emotional self-regulation, and balance.

We live in a world full of constant stimuli, largely due to the internet and social media. We continuously receive messages, emails, news, advertisements, videos, photos, etc. Excessive exposure to this information can lead us to a frantic lifestyle, making it essential to pause for calm and reorganization in the modern race against time. Here, mindfulness can help significantly. By stepping out of autopilot mode and making conscious choices, we can break the vicious cycle of harmful and unconscious automatic reactions.

If we were to define mindfulness in words, we would say it is the awareness that emerges when we cultivate the intention to connect with the present, maintaining an attitude of gentle curiosity towards our experience as it unfolds, without judgment or the need to change anything.

A Valuable Tool for a New School Life

An increasing number of today's students face challenges that affect their ability to focus, regulate difficult emotions, build inner resilience, and form healthy, supportive relationships. With academic pressure starting as early as kindergarten, leaving less time for play and the arts, students today face unprecedented levels of anxiety and stress. These early stress levels can negatively affect learning, memory, behavior, and both physical and mental health. This escalating anxiety and pressure continue into middle and high school. For example, a study of 22,000 high school students conducted by the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence found that, on average, students reported feeling negative emotions such as anxiety, fatigue, and boredom 75% of the time.

At the same time, educators are tasked with teaching the next generation, but current working conditions often lack the support needed to ensure their success. Increasing state demands lead to their overload. It is no coincidence that the teaching profession ranks among the three most stressful occupations globally. Unsustainable conditions can manifest as reduced productivity and creativity, escalating to more severe symptoms such as anxiety, detachment, frustration, and eventually burnout.

Drawing on evidence from numerous studies, we can summarize the benefits of mindfulness practices in the educational environment as follows:

Development of Resilience

Mindfulness equips educators and students with resources such as patience, flexibility, and calmness, helping them face adversity. By cultivating positive states—calmness, relaxation, and peace—we build our inner strength to handle daily school challenges.

Promotion of Empathy & Connection

The practice of mindfulness is a powerful way to develop a deeper sense of connection both with ourselves and others. Enhancing our capacity for empathy supports effective communication, collaboration, and healthy interpersonal relationships at all levels.

Stress & Anxiety Management

Mindfulness practice helps us observe the effects of toxic stress and anxiety and develop skills to respond more effectively to stressful situations (e.g., tests, competitions, conflicts). Awareness of "what is happening to me" at any given time is vital for understanding our emotions and controlling our impulses. This can reduce stress and anxiety levels, which could otherwise lead to exhaustion, sadness, dizziness, tension, nervousness, hyperactivity, shortness of breath, anxiety attacks, insomnia, etc.

Better Understanding of Our Inner World

Students are in a phase of physical and psychological development; therefore, mindfulness can help them understand and accept themselves, increasing their self-esteem and self-confidence. This can reduce conflicts and significantly improve relationships in school and the classroom.

Enhancement of Creativity, Focus, & Attention

Mindfulness contributes to decision-making and healthy cognitive functioning. It strengthens our "mental muscle" to refocus where and when we want, thus improving performance and boosting creativity.

In conclusion, modern findings from psychological science and neuroscience support that mindfulness practices can cultivate fundamental values and skills, contributing effectively and realistically to the well-being of everyone within school communities.

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1) *“The present moment is the only time over which we have dominion.” - Thích Nhất Hạnh*

IDEAS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE CLASSROOM for teachers

Concentration & Grounding:

Each time the bell rings bring your attention to 3 breaths. At the beginning of each lesson you can take some time to practice with the students.

Grounding the body (feet on the floor, pressure points on the chair, etc.) and practice conscious breathing (e.g. 3-5 breaths).

Bring frequent attention to your own pacing, adjusting your pace accordingly to your state of mind at that moment. Walking meditation can be done anywhere and can be taught to students.

Practice short body sensing practices with your students such as bringing attention to the feet. A few moments focusing on the body are enough for grounding ourselves in the here and now.

Stretch and move your body often, bringing awareness to the sensations that arise.

Start the class by setting meditation bells from e.g. a mobile app or from YouTube or music. You can ask students to close their eyes or lower their gently, focusing only on the sounds. Whenever the bell or music stops ringing completely, you can invite them to rise their hand. This is a simple exercise to practice mindful listening.

Tension & Self-Regulation:

At times of tension you can invite students to briefly progressively Tension n' Release (TnR). Instructions: clench your fists as hard as you can and then release the tension by slowly opening the fist, feeling the tension gradually "dissolve".

At the beginning of a class, if there is tension in the classroom, you can teach the students in a short tension release practice. You could call it Release n' Breathe (RnB). Instructions: Invite students to bounce out in small hops (perhaps music) at full volume for a few seconds and then say STOP and invite them to come still and tune into the music for a few seconds, just breathing.

Make a bottle of relaxation. Instructions: in a transparent hard plastic bottle, put hot water, glitter, glue and stars and shake. A useful relaxation tool for all ages.

Put your hands under cold running water and let yourself be aware of all senses.

All you need to do is practice presence, intention and self-compassion.

DAILY MINDFULNESS PRACTICES for teens

Recognize & Explore:

Take 3 breaths. You can practice bringing your attention to just 3 breaths each time you remember. It would be particularly useful to practice that before you start and finish an activity, when the bell rings, before a test, etc.

Scanning my body. At the beginning of each activity or class, you can take some time to bring your attention to your body (feet on the floor, pressure on the chair, weight of the arms, etc) and practice conscious breathing (e.g. for 3-5 breaths) - just notice the air as it comes in and out of the body, finding your anchor. A few moments is all it takes.

I feel the movements of my body. Each time you sit or stand up and stretch you could bring awareness to sensations of gravity and contact.

I walk all my steps. Often bring your attention to your pace wherever you are, adjusting your pace according to how you are feeling at the time, e.g. walking faster if you are feeling angry, tense and slower when you are more relaxed.

I explore my space: Take a walk in familiar surroundings and walk slowly. Can you notice 5 details in the space that you have never noticed before? What has changed that enabled you to notice those?

Sky: You can go outside and observe the sky, the trees, the buildings; what shapes do you see? what colours? our minds are the sky and our thoughts and feelings are the clouds that pass by and change shape.

Observing silence: Have you ever noticed to what silence is like after noise; have you ever noticed how it affects the body?

Inhale - Exhale: Whenever you feel tense you can put your hand low on your belly and take deep inhaling through your nose (counting to 4) and exhaling through your mouth (counting to 7).

The box of emotions : you can make your own of emotions. Each time you experience a pleasant or unpleasant emotion, you could write it on a piece of paper...how it feels on your body, what makes you think etc... Then, from time to time you could open the box and read what you have written. What are your thoughts now?

“You are the sky. Everything else is just the weather.” –

Pema Chödrön

<https://doiterasmusgreece.blogspot.com/2023/10/mindfulness-mindfulness-mindfulness.html>

<https://doiterasmusgreece.blogspot.com/2025/01/blog-post.html>