

# Mindfulness

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Hampton Township School District



## Defining Mindfulness: Overview

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**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 and is backed by compelling scientific evidence.<sup>3,4</sup>



## Defining Mindfulness: Overview

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Mindfulness generally describes a state of awareness and a set of practices and skills which center around four qualities: attention, intention, presence, and openness.<sup>5</sup>

What does mindfulness actually look and feel like?:

- **Attention**: listening, watching, or considering what naturally exists (e.g. directing and sustaining attention on a selected object, such as the sound of a chime or the sensation of the one's breathing)
- **Intention**: purposefully increasing awareness of experience
- **Presence**: being in the moment, here and now
- **Openness**: being curious, objective and non-judgmental about experience<sup>6</sup> (e.g. simply observing, with no explicit focus on particular objects; noticing thoughts, emotions and physical states).<sup>5</sup>

How does it actually *work*?:

- Different practices are thought to activate different mechanisms. For example sustained attention practices may enhance executive function, while sensory experiences of one's breathing may reduce stress.<sup>7</sup>

# Why Mindfulness Matters: Research Findings

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Attention to mindfulness has risen exponentially in recent years, largely thanks to encouraging research across a wide range of fields and institutions.<sup>3</sup> Below are some of the findings which are of particular interest for those in educational contexts. Mindfulness leads to:

## Academic

- Improvements in cognitive performance, school self-concept, and engagement<sup>4</sup>
- Greater attention<sup>8</sup>
- Reduction of anxiety in high-stakes testing<sup>9</sup>

## Mental & Behavioral Health

- Decreases in stress levels<sup>8</sup>, emotional over-excitement and depression symptoms<sup>10</sup>
- Increases in emotional well-being and self-compassion<sup>11</sup>
- Lower self-harm<sup>12</sup>

## Social Behavior

- Healthier responses to difficult social situations<sup>13</sup>
- Reduction of implicit bias<sup>14</sup>
- Increases in compassionate responses to others in need<sup>11</sup>

# Why Mindfulness Matters: Mindfulness and Specific Populations

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## Mindfulness and Specific Populations:

### Trauma and Stress

Mindfulness interventions may improve students' ability to cope with traumatic experiences. Furthermore, students with significant stress and/or trauma often experience greater overall benefits from mindfulness interventions compared to their peers. <sup>15,16,17</sup>

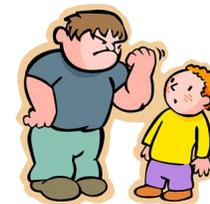


### Executive function difficulties

Studies indicate that students with executive control difficulties not only benefit from some mindfulness interventions, but actually tend to improve *more* than their peers who experience the same interventions. <sup>18</sup>

### Bullying

"[Thinking mindfully] allows children to consider other perspectives, recognize situation novelty ... and generate and consider appropriate reactions in physically or socially threatening situations." <sup>19, 20</sup>



# Mindful Connections for Educators

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-Cullen, M., & Pons, G. B. (2015). *The mindfulness-based emotional balance workbook: An eight-week program for improved emotion regulation and resilience*;

1. Dealing with unpleasant/difficult emotions
2. Anger
3. Awareness of Stress Response
4. Self-Care/Self Compassion
5. Mindfulness of Thoughts
6. Mindfulness in our relationships
  - Conflict Resolution
7. Forgiveness
8. Mindful Speaking and Listening
9. Kindness/Empathy vs Sympathy/Compassion

# Mindful Connections for Students

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*The 5 Dimensions of Engaged Teaching: A Practical Guide for Educators.*

1. Cultivating an Open Heart in the Classroom
  - Modeling behavior
  - Culturally Responsive Practices
2. Trauma Informed Practices
3. Engaging the Observer
  - Giving and receiving feedback
  - Practice guiding breath focused awareness

*The mindful education workbook: Lessons for teaching mindfulness to students.*

4. Mindful Literacies
  - Mindful Learning Objectives
  - Forgiveness
5. Being Present with Students
6. Establishing respectful boundaries
  - Developing Emotional Capacity
  - Nonviolent Communication
7. Using Self-reflection to assess progress

# HTSD Implementation

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## School Counselors

- Individual students
- Small Groups
  
- **Mindful Learning Objectives**
  - Executive Functioning- return students from distraction and dysregulation to a point of focus.
  - Emotional Self-Regulation- students can learn to witness their dysregulation, track their emotions, and bring themselves back to equilibrium.
  - Metacognition- ability to gain objectivity around thoughts and experiences without being flooded by them
  - Focused Attention- help train the mind not to wander and give in to distraction.
  - Empathy- teaching kindness, compassion, and empathy through mindfulness strengthens prosocial behavior.
  - Stress Reduction- reducing stress and bring students back into physiological balance.
  - Self-Compassion- increasing kindness, compassion, and esteem.
  - Open-Mindedness- stimulates the capacity to understand perspectives and value diversity.
  - Contentment- feeling more relaxed and secure.
  - Cognitive Flexibility- learning to manage awareness and impulse control can create capacity to shift between concepts.
  - Resilience: The capacity to face adversity and struggles.

- <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. Herrnleben-Kurz, S., Walach H. Mindfulness-based interventions in schools- a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*. 2014;5:603. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25071620>.
- <sup>4</sup> Zoogman S., Goldberg S.B., Hoyt W.T., Miller L. Mindfulness interventions with youth: A meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*. 2014. doi: 10.1007/s12671-013-0260-4
- <sup>5</sup> Guay, J. (2017), F. M. *Mindfulness with Compassion: Essential Tools for Inner Work*. Retrieved from <http://livingmorefully.com/mindfulness-with-compassion>
- <sup>6</sup> Brensilver, M. (2016, February 22). What's the Best Mindfulness Practice? Retrieved from [mindfulschools.org](http://mindfulschools.org)
- <sup>7</sup> Hölzel, B. K., Lazar S.R., Gard, T., Schuman-Olivier Z., Vago, D.R., Ott, U. How does mindfulness meditation work? Proposing mechanisms of action from a conceptual and neural perspective. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. 2011;6(6):537-559.
- <sup>8</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>9</sup> Bellinger, D. Mindfulness, anxiety, and high-stakes mathematics performance in the laboratory and classroom. *Consciousness and Cognition*. December 2015, 123–132.
- <sup>10</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>11</sup> Condon, P., Desbordes, G., Miller, W.B., DeSteno, D. Meditation increases compassionate responses to suffering. *Psychological Science*. 2013;24(10):2125-2127.
- <sup>12</sup> Britton, W.B., Lepp, N.E., Niles H.F., Rocha, T. [An RTC] 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.

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- <sup>14</sup> Lueke, A., Gibson, B. Mindfulness meditation reduces implicit age and race bias. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. 2015;6(3):284-291.
- <sup>15</sup> Creswell, J.D., Lindsay, E.K. How does mindfulness training affect health? A mindfulness stress buffering account. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 2014;23(6):401-407.
- <sup>16</sup> Gonzalez, A., Locicero, B., Mahaffey, B., Fleming, C, Harris J, Vujanovic, A.A. Internalized HIV stigma and mindfulness. *Behavior Modification*. 2016;40.
- <sup>17</sup> Mendelson, T, Tandon, S., O’Brennen. Brief report: Moving prevention into schools: The impact of a trauma-informed school-based intervention. *Journal of Adolescence*. 2015;43: 142-147
- <sup>18</sup> Flook, L., Smalley, S.L., Kitil, M.J., et al. Effects of mindful awareness practices on executive functions in elementary school children. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*. 2010;26(1):70-95
- <sup>19</sup> McCloy, A. A preliminary study of mindfulness in children as a conceptual framework for coping with bullying. University of South Carolina 2004
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\*Select slides adapted from transforming education.