

## Frequently Asked Questions to Consider when Implementing Mindfulness Based Interventions in Schools

### **What is the definition of mindfulness?**

Mindfulness is most often defined as “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4) or as the process of noticing new things and drawing novel distinctions which keeps us situated in the present (Langer, 1989). Both definitions include two key features: **self-regulation of attention** and an **attitude of acceptance** to the current experience (Felver et. al, 2013). Self-regulation of attention refers to the ability to purposefully attend to elements of one’s thoughts, sensations, and emotions while ignoring others. The second component, acceptance, implies an attitude of curiosity and flexibility to these experiences. Mindfulness practices are built on the idea that one can distance themselves from experiences in a way that is characterized as inquisitive and non-judgmental. The outcome is the cultivation of an attitude of acceptance and curiosity to one’s present experience.

### **What is the difference between Socio emotional Learning and Mindfulness?**

According to CASEL (Collaborate for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), SEL focuses on the teaching of skills needed to build student competencies and beliefs necessary to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. In SEL the focus is on learning skills. In mindfulness the focus is on student awareness of thoughts and emotions. The two work together. Mindfulness helps students to regulate their emotions in all types of situations in order to apply SEL skills when needed.

### **What are the elements of a typical mindfulness program/intervention?**

Based on a recent meta-analytic review of Mindfulness Based Interventions in Schools, Zenner, Hermleben-Kurz & Walach (2014) identified the following most often used components in programs to facilitate mindfulness: Breath awareness, working with thoughts and emotions, psycho-education, awareness of the senses and practices of daily life, group discussion, body-scan, kindness practices, home practice, body-practices (like yoga) and additional materials. Most programs use multiple components, with **observation of breath, psycho-education and group exercises** as the primary practices to facilitate mindfulness (Zenner, Hermleben-Kurz & Walach, 2014).

### **What does the research say about the effects of mindfulness based interventions with youth?**

To date, two meta-analytic reviews have been completed to assess the effects of mindfulness based interventions (MBI) with youth. In general, there are small to moderate effect sizes. Zenner, Hermleben-Kurz & Walach (2014) grouped the outcome measures used to determine effect into five domains: cognitive performance, emotional problems, stress/coping, resilience and third party ratings (e.g. parent and teacher questionnaires related to aggression, social skills, wellbeing, or attention).

**Results were strongest in relation to cognitive performance and resilience to stress.**

**What does the research say about who benefits most from mindfulness based interventions?**

A second recent review of MBIs with youth completed by Zoogman et. al., (2014) revealed small to moderate effect sizes on psychological symptoms compared to other active alternative treatments and more so for studies drawn from clinical samples compared to non-clinical samples. ***Research suggest that mindfulness interventions seem to have the greatest effect in reducing emotional problems (anxiety levels and post-traumatic symptoms) and increasing coping of the neediest kids such as those coping with chronic stress (Ortiz & Sibinga, 2017).***

**Are there any identified risks in using mindfulness based interventions with students?**

According to Resnick (2017) researchers generally agree that mindfulness based interventions are harmless. However, schools should consider the small number of studies that identified potential negative effects of mindfulness when developing a program. Students suffering from a ***recent trauma*** may not benefit as avoiding thoughts and feelings associated with an event may be part of an individual’s ability to cope. Educators should be sensitive to student readiness to face trauma. Other students may not enjoy mindfulness exercises, especially those that bring up negative emotions. Unpleasant reactions such as agitation, anxiety, discomfort, or confusion are commonly reported during formal mindfulness exercises. Although, working with difficult emotions is central to mindfulness, some students might not be willing or able to engage in the activities.

**What resources can a district/school use to select a mindfulness based intervention?**

When considering the implementation of a mindfulness based intervention in a school, it is recommended that teams refer to the critical questions outlined in the Hexagon Tool found here: <http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/sites/implementation.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/NIRN-Education-TheHexagonTool.pdf>. Conversations about student needs, fit with current initiatives, resource availability, evidence, readiness for replication and capacity to implement are necessary during the early stages of implementation.

## Mindfulness Research:

- Biegel, G.M., Brown, K.W., Shapiro, S.L., & Schubert, C.M. (2009). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for the treatment of adolescent psychiatric outpatients: A randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 77*(5), 855-866.
- Edwards, M., Adams, E.M., Waldo, M., Hadfield, O.D., & Biegel, G.M. Effects of a mindfulness group on Latino adolescent students: Examining levels of perceived stress, mindfulness, self-compassion, and psychological symptoms. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 39*(2), 145-163.
- Felver, J.C., Doerner, E., Jones, J., Kaye, N.C., & Merrell, K.W. (2013). Mindfulness in school psychology: Applications for intervention and professional practice. *Psychology in the Schools, 50*(6), 531-547.
- Flook, L., Goldberg, S.B., Pinger, L., & Davidson, R.J. (2015). Promoting prosocial behavior and self-regulatory skills in children through a mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum. *Journal of Developmental Psychology, 51*(1), 44-51.
- Holland & Sisson (n.d.). *Advanced mindfulness and acceptance practice in the schools*. [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://nasp.inreachce.com/>
- Kuyken, W., Weare, K., Ukoumunne, O.C., Vicary, R., Motton, N., ... Huppert, F. (2013). Effectiveness of the Mindfulness in Schools Programme: Non-randomised controlled feasibility study. *British Journal of Psychiatry, 203*, 126-131.
- Metz, S.M., Frank, J.L., Reibel, D., Cantrell, T., Sanders, R., & Broderick, P.C. (2013). The effectiveness of the Learning to BREATHE program on adolescent emotion regulation. *Research in Human Development, 10*(3), 252-272.
- Rempel, K.D. (2012). Mindfulness for children and youth: A review of the literature with an argument for school-based implementation. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 46*(3), 201-220.
- Schonert-Reichi, K.A., Oberle, E., Lawlor, M.S., Abbott, D., Thomson, K., ... Diamond, A. (2015). Enhancing cognitive and social-emotional development through a simple-to-administer mindfulness-based school program for elementary school children: A randomized controlled trial. *Developmental Psychology, 51*(1), 52-66.
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- Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*, 603.
- Zoogman, S., Goldberg, S.B., & Hoyt, W.T. (2014). Mindfulness interventions with youth: A meta-analysis. *Mindfulness, 6*(2), 290-302.

## **Books on Mindfulness for Adults:**

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (1994). *Mindfulness meditation for everyday life*. London: Piatkus Books.
- Langer, E.J. (1989). *Mindfulness*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley/Addison Wesley Longman.
- Langer, E. J. (1997). *The power of mindful learning*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Rechtschaffen, D. (2014). *The way of mindful education: Cultivating well-being in teachers and students*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

## **Mindfulness Programs, Books and Materials for Youth:**

- Guber, T. L., Kalish, L. (2005). *Yoga pretzels: 50 fun yoga activities for kids and grownups*. Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books.
- Kindness Curriculum (2013). *Published manual*. Center for Investigating Health Minds, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Singh, N.N., Wahler, R.G., Adkins, A.D., Myers, R.E. (2003). Soles of the Feet: A mindfulness-based self-control intervention for aggression by an individual with mild mental retardation and mental illness. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 24*(3), 158-169.
- Snel, E. (2013). *Sitting still like a frog: Mindfulness exercises for kids (and their parents)*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications.
- The Hawn Foundation. (2011). *The MindUP curriculum: Brain-focused strategies for learning and living*. New York: Scholastic.
- Biegel, G. (2009). *The stress reduction workbook for teens: mindfulness skills to help you deal with stress*. Oakland, CA: New Harbor Publications, Inc.
- VO, Dzung. (2015). *The mindful teen: powerful skills to help you handle the stress one moment at a time*. Oakland, CA: New Harbor Publications, Inc.

## **Websites:**

- Mindful schools (K-12) [www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org)
- Learning to Breathe: <http://learningtobreathe.org>
- Mindfulness in Schools Project: <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/>
- MindUP: (preK-8) [www.thehawnfoundation.org](http://www.thehawnfoundation.org)
- Still Quiet Place (K-12) [www.stillquietplace.com](http://www.stillquietplace.com)
- Stressed Teens (13-18yo) [www.stressteens.com](http://www.stressteens.com)