

What is Mindfulness?

An intentional, moment to moment noticing with curiosity and kindness.

***The best way to have a mindful home or classroom is through your presence. Any shifts you see will start with you.*

Best Practices for Mindfulness in Early Childhood

- Develop your own personal practice
- Model it for your students - verbally and non verbally
- Use a separate bell just for mindfulness.
- Mindfulness is never a disciplinary tool
- Always extend an invitation
- Practice consistently with children so it is more accessible when it is needed
- Make it part of what you are already doing
- Never use it as a disciplinary tool

Classroom Activities

Walk/Stop

- 1 Tell people they will be following simple commands. The first two: When you say “walk” they will start walking around the space. When you say “stop,” they will stop where they are.
- 2 Call out “Walk.” Then “stop.” And repeat as desired.
- 3 Next, tell everyone you are going to switch those two commands. Now when you say “stop” they should start walking and when you say “walk” they should stop walking.
- 4 Call out “Stop.” Then “Walk.” And repeat as desired.
- 5 Next, let them know you’re adding two more commands. When you say “Name” they say their name out loud, when you say “Clap” they clap once. The other two commands stay the same, so “Walk” means stop, “Stop” means walk, “Name” means say your name, and “Clap” means clap.
- 6 Call out a combination of “Walk,” “Stop,” “Name,” and “Clap.” Repeat as desired.
- 7 Let them know you’re switching the last two commands. So “Walk” means stop, “Stop” means walk, “Name” means clap, and “Clap” means say your name. Repeat as desired.
8. Next, let them know you’re adding two more commands. When you say “Jump” they jump, when you say “wiggle” they wiggle.. The other two commands stay the same, so “Walk” means stop, “Stop” means walk, “Name” means clap, and “Clap” means name.
- 6 Call out a combination of “Walk,” “Stop,” “Name,” “Clap.” “Wiggle,” “Jump” Repeat as desired.

- 7 Let them know you're switching the last two commands. So "Walk" means stop, "Stop" means walk, "Name" means clap, and "Clap" means say your name. Jump means wiggle and wiggle means jump. Repeat as desired.

Check in

First we will be sitting up nice and tall but not too stiff or too floppy (demonstrate)

How many of you can find your thumb?

Has anyone ever done this to you? Thumbs up – usually means it's pleasant, down is usually unpleasant sideways is neutral or so so.

So we are going to use our thumbs to describe how we are feeling. Pleasant, unpleasant or neutral each person will go around and give a thumbs up, thumbs down or sideways – feel free to share or not share why

Variations: happy, sad, neutral faces

Wood eggs or popsicle sticks (weather – sunny, cloudy, rainy, stormy)

Range of 1 through 10 for older students (and make it fun too by using what is relevant- 1 is Facebook - 10 is SnapChat)

You will find in the beginning children may just copy each other – good time to talk about unique ideas and individuality

BREATH

Cotton balls – stand arms length apart and blow cotton ball to partner, then stand feet apart to blow through legs, then place on palm and blow to tip of finger without blowing it off your hand

Variation: with straws at a desk and blow back and forth to each other

Flower/Candle – inhale flower, exhale candle

Elevator – elevator up inhale, elevator down exhale or do our version with people

Bunny Breathing – 3 quick inhales, wiggle nose too and one longer exhale

Bubbles – blowing bubbles as a visual for inhale and slow exhale

Pinwheels

Great introduction to the breath. Have them blow the pinwheel and play with their breath (fast, slow, long, short)

Breathing Buddies

Use a beanie baby (book, rock, weighted stuffed animal) to place on the adults belly or a child's belly during the presentation of activity. Ask children what is happening (many respond "It goes up and down.") Explain to them that is what happens when you breathe in and out. Have some extra beanie babies in class so they can access them on their own for when they need to find their breathing.

Hoberman Sphere

This is a nice visual to teach children about the breath. Open it when you inhale and close it when you exhale.

5 finger Breathing

Have them place one hand out as if they were going to trace their hand. Take the pointer finger of the opposite hand and have them trace the outside of their hand pretending their finger is a pencil. As your finger goes up, inhale and as it goes over and down, exhale. Great one for adults too.

SIGHT

Quick questions

Have them stand in a circle and ask questions that are in plain site and that they see everyday at school. Make them random and fairly quick like

What color is Greta's shirt?

Who is sitting next to Graham?

Who is taller Ariel or Oliver?

What color is the calendar pocket?

(Adults: check in with your self each day and do this practice)

I spy

Choose something in the room and say "I spy with my little eye something..." and then choose to describe by first letter or color, etc

I spy variation

Randomly ask children to close their eyes. Ask questions like:

What color is the rug or room?

What color is so and so's shoes?

Switcheroo

Change something up in the room and see if anyone notices or add something to the room

Eyes - "I see your eyes are (color)" game

From Susan Kaiser Greenland's book

During circle time or greeting, as they turn to shake hands instead of saying good morning they say "I see your eyes are _____"

Mystery Mayhem

Cloth bag with a mystery item that is familiar to them

Reveal a little piece of a time until they guess what it is

OR

Have them pass the bag around to feel it in the bag and guess what it is (Touch too)

I See

Describe objects without naming them

Something red, that you can eat, has a stem and is smooth

Use what is in the room or make cards they can pass around with pictures on them

Sit spot

Best outdoors

Larger rubber bands and journals - choose the same spot every day or week and place the rubber band down in the same spot. Children draw/write about what they see inside the rubber band. This shows change or impermanence.

LISTEN

Rain stick

Just have them listen to the sound of the rain stick. Find other sounds you can use.

Yes, Let's

We are going to throw a party (describe what kind) and ask them – indoor/outdoor, calm/energetic, etc

Have each child say what they want to do at the party and then they get up and do it until the whole class is doing something

CD Sounds - find different sounds like rain, ocean, owl, door closing and see if they can guess what it is

Sound counting – jar and drop things in it – children count how many times they hear something drop in it

Musical instruments – put instruments behind a screen and have them guess what instrument it is

Listening to the Bell

Ring a singing bowl or Vibratone and have children listen to the sound of the ring until they no longer hear it anymore. They can practice with eyes open, eyes closed and then raise their hand when they no longer hear it anymore.

TASTE

Also do it at snack time or lunch

Mindful Eating – raisins, clementine

Preface that we are going to do this differently than we may be used to eating. We are going to pay attention, go slow and follow my guidance

Sit in our mindful body – sitting up tall, relaxed

Leave raising on red circle and Take raisin on green circle and eat it

Look at the raisin with your eyes only...notice its shape, notice its size, notice its color. Do you think it has a smell? Notice if you notice anything happening in your mouth as you look at the raisin. Notice if you have a feeling in your belly.

Pick up the raisin slowly between 2 fingers and now look at it.

Notice how it feels in your hand – the texture, temperature

Pause before you put it in your mouth and think about how the raisin get to school- think of the people that made the raisin and put it in the packages and got it to the store and put it on the shelves and checked the person out that bought it and how it got to the school.

Now before putting it in our mouth I want to make sure it just goes in your mouth without biting or chewing it. First we will roll it around in our mouth and really see if we can taste anything and feel anything. Ready?

Slowly open your mouth and place raisin on your tongue remember without biting or chewing.

Notice what the raisin feels like in your mouth, its texture, is there a taste?

Now bite into it and notice the taste and what it feels like. Do you notice anything else happening in your body?

Try not to swallow right away

Does the taste and texture change?

When we are ready to swallow see if you can really feel the food going down and then notice what your tummy may be feeling and what you are feeling? Maybe you want more, maybe you don't like it.

Sweet, Sour, Salty, Bitter

Connect what they notice when they eat it in other parts of the body

Unsweetened Chocolate - BITTER

Sugar - SWEET

Salt - SALTY

Lemon – SOUR

What do the rest taste most like?

Plain yogurt

Pickle

Honey

Potato chip

Parmesan cheese

Mint candy

TOUCH

Pass the Pulse - hold hands and start on one end and squeeze the child's hand on your left and that child squeezes the child's hand on their left and continue around the circle. Discuss what that feels like and if anyone had their hands squeezed at the same time.

Texture blocks - blocks with different sandpaper grits for texture

Fabric Textures - match fabric textures or just have them explore different fabric textures

Feely bags – cotton ball, golf ball, pine cone, silk square

Nature – textures outside. Get children outside as much as possible.

Finger Paint- what does it feel like, how do you feel when you first touch it and then when you move it around

SMELL

Smelling jars – 2 of 3 each 3-6 jars of different scents (Extracts or essential oils) and have them match the scents

Smelling jars match– match smell to photo – coconut, banana, vanilla, vinegar, etc

Scented playdough – vanilla, cinnamon, lemon – “Does it remind you of anything?”

Nature walk - Take a neighborhood walk or walk in the woods and see what smells you can find

BODY SCAN

****From Head to Toe**

Great intro to do a body scan with preschoolers - connect the moves to what they feel in their body

There are to their body books are out there too

Walk the Line

Use masking or painters tape to make a circle on the floor. Children place one foot in front of the other slowly and try to stay on the line. Play around with pace.

Challenge: add a bell so they walk without the bell ringing

The Listening Walk to transition to walking activities

Lead them on a walk in the room the way I would children and listen to the sounds

Freeze Dance – connect to sensations in the body

Nature walks – walking, smelling, seeing, touch, hearing

TUNE: Wheels on the Bus

By Betsy Rose

When I feel mad I can stomp my feet (all stomp feet)

Stomp my feet (stomp)

Stomp my feet (stomp)

When I feel mad I can stomp my feet (stomp)

(All raise arms gently in front of body, take a deep breath –lower and sing)

I'll be alright

Variation:

When I feel mad I can take a breath (all deep breath)

Take a breath (Breathe), Take a breath (breathe)

When I feel mad I can take a breath

(All raise arms gently in front of body, take a deep breath –lower and sing)

I'll be alright

Children can brainstorm emotions and ways of releasing

Sad, happy, scared, wiggly, excited

Appreciations

Start with “My favorite” at the beginning of the year – usually material things and move to deeper and connected things like my friend for making me feel better

Core Practice

Teach them to Pause (body gets really still and silent), Listen (to the sounds in the room) and Breathe (3 conscious breaths). You can use this to transition from activity to activity or room to room. If you can use it at least 3 times a day with them it starts a good foundation for their daily practice.

Resources

This is just a small sampling of what is available to start bringing mindfulness into your teaching. The best way to teach mindfulness to children is through your presence. This list is just to get you started.

Books for Establishing Your Practice

The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer
The Mindful Brain by Daniel Siegel
Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn
Where Ever You Go There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Books for Children

Charlotte and the Quiet Place by Deborah Sosin
Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda by Lauren Alderfer and Kerry Lee MacLean
Moody Cow Meditates by Kerry Lee MacLean
Moody Cow Learns Compassion by Kerry Lee MacLean
Silence by Lemniscates
Take the Time by Maude Roegiers
Visiting Feelings by Lauren Rubinstein
What Does It Mean to Be Present? by Rana DiOrio
Zen Shorts and Zen Ties by Jon Auth

Books on Sharing Mindfulness with Youth

A Still Quiet Place by Amy Saltzman
Child's Mind by Christopher Willard
Little Flower Yoga for Kids by Jennifer Cohen Harper
Mindful Teaching and Teach Mindfulness: A Guide for Anyone Who Teaches Anything by Deborah Schoeberlein
Planting Seeds by Thich Nhat Hanh
Sitting Still Like a Frog by Eline Snel
The Mindful Child by Susan Kaiser Greenland
The Whole Brained Child by Daniel Siegel

Curriculum

Mindful Schools
Still Quiet Place
.B

Apps

Insight Timer
Headspace
Whil

Videos

Healthy Habits of Mind: <http://www.mindfulschools.org/resources/healthy-habits-of-mind/>
Just Breathe: <https://youtu.be/RVA2N6tX2cg>
Aliza and the Mind Jar: <https://vimeo.com/119439978>
60 Minutes - Anderson Cooper's report on Mindfulness: <http://www.cbsnews.com/videos/mindfulness>

Organizations

Association for Mindfulness in Education: <http://www.mindfuleducation.org>
Mindfulness in Education Network: <http://www.mindfuled.org>
Mindful Schools: www.mindfulschools.org

Research

Research Site: <https://goamra.org>

Research round up from Greater Good: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/mindfulness_in_education_research_highlights?utm_source=GG%20Ed%20Newsletter%20September%202014&utm_campaign=GG%20Education%20-%20September%202014&utm_medium=email

Preschool research by Zelazo: <http://research.familylife.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/the-potential-benefits-of-mindfulness-training-in-early-childhood.pdf>

Disabilities Research: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22989576>