
Mindful Schools

Engaging Children. Supporting Educators. Transforming Schools.

Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents

Copyright © 2010-2015 by Mindful Schools

All rights reserved.

No part of this curriculum may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, without either the prior written permission of Mindful Schools, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to Mindful Schools. Requests should be addressed to Copyright Permission, Mindful Schools, 1260 45th St, Suite B, Emeryville, CA 94608 or email info@mindfulschools.org.

If you have received this curriculum from Mindful Schools, you are permitted to use it in your own classroom, family, psychology practice, or other private practice. You are permitted to use the curriculum in the above situations in its entirety, as individual lessons, or some adaptation of the lessons. Licensing must be given to use this curriculum in any other capacity. Please note that the effectiveness of this training is greatly dependent on the presenter's understanding and training in mindfulness. For this reason, we require participation in and completion of our training to ensure the quality of this curriculum when working with children. Please see our website mindfulschools.org or contact us to inquire about additional training and certifications.

Acknowledgments

This curriculum is the result of many talented, creative, and dedicated people. Grateful acknowledgment is made to Richard Shankman, Megan Cowan, Laurie Grossman, Kate Janke, Daniel Rechtschaffen, Oren Sofer, Martina Schnieder, Kevin Griffin, Gary Buck and Diana Winston. Not least, thanks go to the countless classroom teachers, students, and administrative staff of all the schools we have been fortunate to teach mindfulness in.

Introduction	5
Class One: Emotions/Punching Bag. Mindfulness of Sound	7
Class Two: Response vs. Reaction. Breath 1 - Anchor	10
Class Three: It's Not Just About Me - It's About Us. Heartfulness	13
Class Four: Thoughts	16
Class Five: Fairy Tale Ogre. Breath 2 - Counting	18
Class Six: Pleasant/Unpleasant	20
Class Seven: Mindful Eating	22
Class Eight: Trees in a Forest. Connection to Others	24
Class Nine: Past/Present/Future	26
Class Ten: Breath 3 - and more	28
Class Eleven: Guest House Poem. Body Scan	30
Class Twelve: Soaking in the Good. Loving Things	33
Class Thirteen: Judgment. Body Awareness	36
Class Fourteen: Mindful Walking	38
Class Fifteen: Help Yourself First. Heartfulness for Oneself	40
Class Sixteen: Letting Be. Mindfulness of Emotions	42
Class Seventeen: Mindfulness in Conversation	44
Class Eighteen: Gratitude and Appreciation	46
Extras	48
Test Taking	48
Chaos in the Classroom	49
Being Mindful of Boredom	50

Whip-Around	51
Notice how you are Feeling	51
Marshmallow	52
Brain Science	54

Introduction

Why Mindfulness?

We spend a lot of time developing our intelligence in school, and strengthening our bodies through sports or exercise. But we give our mind very little attention. In fact, where do you think your mind even is? Most of us aren't exactly sure. When we develop and strengthen our mind we are increasing our ability to focus, recognize and manage our emotions, make better decisions, and empathize in our relationships.

Definition of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is paying attention to our experience in a way that allows us to respond rather than react. It is a quality of inner-stillness that is always available, even when our life or circumstances feel out of our control and chaotic. It is possible to be mindful/aware/pay attention to everything in our experience including anything we experience through our five sense doors, as well as our thoughts and emotions.

Relevance

For mindfulness to work, we have to really try it. And in the beginning, it might seem weird or pointless. But, keep in mind that this is new for everyone and we are all doing the same thing, so you are not alone in this mindfulness experiment. If we don't try it, we can't determine if it is useful for ourselves or not. So, let's list some ways that you might find mindfulness to be useful and relevant in your own life.

Raise your hand if you have ever:

- said something you wish you could take back?
- done something that you later regretted?
- felt angry and out of control?
- felt nervous or anxious about an exam or performance?
- been in a bad mood but not sure why?
- been in a bad mood but not even sure what emotion it is?
- felt like you need a break and want everyone to just leave you alone?

- had trouble falling asleep because your mind won't be quiet or your body feels restless?
- been accidentally spacing out in class when the teacher calls on you?
- noticed that you do much better at sports or music when you are really focused?

Our emotions are continually changing. Difficult emotions like anger, fear, worry, and stress actually release chemicals in our brain that prevent us from learning, and can make us react and say and do things we didn't want to. Mindfulness stops these chemicals.

Hopefully, these examples encourage you to try mindfulness to discover for yourself if it helpful.

Technique

Although mindfulness can help in all these ways, the techniques we will be practicing are actually quite simple. So, in practice there is a leap from the big picture we just discussed to very simple techniques. We will be mindful of sound, breath, movement, thoughts, emotions, and other things. They will be short periods of paying attention on purpose. These simple techniques will be gently strengthening and developing your mind.

Posture

Every time we practice mindfulness, we will start by getting in a mindful posture. A mindful posture has five guidelines:

1. Facing forward
2. Back is upright
3. Stillness
4. Quiet
5. Mind and body are relaxed yet alert
6. Letting your eyes close

Let's try one minute in this mindful posture.

Class One: Emotions/Punching Bag. Mindfulness of Sound

Punching Bag

Let your eyes close. I am going to say a series of words describing different feelings or emotions that you may have had. As I say each word, simply silently acknowledge to yourself whether or not you have experienced it.

Happy	Sad	Joyful	Frightened
Excited	Anxious	Peaceful	Bored
Restless	Eager	Doubtful	Strong
Weak	Depressed	Curious	Serious
Worried	Lonely	Alone	Special
Envious	Jealous	Mischievous	Disappointed
Angry	Hateful	Grateful	Loving

Mindfulness teaches us how to notice when we are experiencing these emotions and feelings, to stop and watch how they feel in our mind and our body, and to react differently than we may have in the past.

Did you ever play with those blow-up punching bags that have sand in the bottom and sit on the ground? When you punch them they fall all the way down to the ground and then pop back up and wobble back and forth for a long time until finally they become still again. Well, the mind is like this when we are hit with a very strong emotion.

Can you think of a time when you have felt an emotion very strongly and you felt “knocked to the ground”. It may have taken you days before you finally didn’t feel that anymore and that you felt “balanced and still” again.

When we develop mindfulness, that punching bag gets hit, but it no longer gets hit to the ground. It is stronger and it only gets pushed a little off to the left or right. And, because it hasn’t fallen so far, it comes back to the center more quickly.

When we practice awareness, or mindfulness, we are teaching ourselves to have better balance and to not fall down so far from a strong emotion or feeling.

Mindfulness of Sound

So, if we want to be pushed around less by our difficult thoughts and emotions, one thing we can do is practice mindfulness. Remember that, in short, mindfulness is paying attention to whatever is happening in our experience. Each day we will practice being mindful of one thing. Today we are going to pay attention to sound.

We'll start by getting in a mindful posture. I am going to ring a bell. With your eyes closed, please let your attention go to the sound and simply listen to the sound from the moment it starts until it ends. Listen as closely as you can to see if you can actually hear the moment it ends. (*ring bell*)

Notice how you feel. Notice if that was challenging or easy. We will try again. This time notice if thoughts arise while you are trying to listen to the bell. This is not right or wrong, it is simply to notice what is happening. Ok. Close your eyes. (*ring bell*)

Now, we will listen to other sounds. Let your eyes close and let your attention open up to sound. Just gently listen to the sounds around you. (*about 30 seconds*)

Notice how you feel, if that was challenging, if you noticed thoughts or not, if you were able to just listen to sound for 30 seconds.

What you are beginning to develop is observing a single thing for an extended period of time. Our minds will naturally wander away because they are very happy to jump and run around. Actually, most of what we are doing each day is training our minds *not* to stay on one thing. Cell phones, texting, facebook, twitter, video games, all train the mind to move quickly. Because of that, this might feel uncomfortable in the beginning.

We will try a new object to pay attention to next time.

Journals

1. List any emotions you remember having in the past 24 hours. They do not have to be strong and they do not have to be negative. Just anything you remember about the past 24 hours. Also write if you cannot

remember. This is an exercise in paying attention to how we are feeling. Then pay attention until the next class to any emotions that arise. Right them down over the next two days.

Class Two: Response vs. Reaction. Breath 1 - Anchor

Quote

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom" -Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning

Lesson

Imagine for a moment someone does something that makes you very angry... an argument with a friend, someone hitting you, someone yelling at you, someone disagreeing with you. And imagine your typical reaction - your automatic pilot reaction. What do you say, how do you act, do you yell, swear, say things you later regret? Imagine yourself having any of those reactions.

Now back up and imagine the situation again but from the point before you respond. First consider where you feel anger in your body. See if you can identify where it is. Also notice the thoughts associated with this anger. Are they thoughts of revenge, hatred, hurt, disappointment?

Can you watch all this as if you were simply observing... "hmm, that's interesting, I'm really angry, I'm really upset, my chest is tight and my body is tense..." etc.

With the time it takes to notice all those things, you have created space between the situation and your typical reaction. Normally, the situation and the reaction happen so quickly we don't have any space in between. It's like they are glued together. But when you bring awareness to a situation, you can often create enough space between the situation and the reaction that the reaction becomes a response, a thoughtful choice, a calmer choice, a choice with a better outcome.

So, when we practice mindfulness we are cultivating this ability to observe a situation, or emotion - anger, fear, jealousy, sadness. When you can observe these things, you begin to know them and respond to them differently.

Poem

This poem demonstrates how it takes time to learn how to create space, but it is possible.

Autobiography in Five Short Chapters
by, Portia Nelson

Act I

I walk, down the street,
there is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in... I am helpless... It isn't my fault...
It takes forever to find a way out.

Act II

I walk, down the street,
there is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend that don't see it. I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place,
but it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Act III

I walk, down the street,
there is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there. I still fall. It's a habit.
My eyes are open. I know where I am.
It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Act IV

I walk, down the street,
there is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Act V

I walk down another street.

Breath 1 – Anchor

Today, in order to practice this mindfulness, we are going to focus on something that is happening in us all the time – breath. Breath is neutral. It's not a strong emotion, it's not something really hate or really love. It's just there, continually, all day, everyday, breathing in, breathing out. We can find it any time we remember.

Start by taking one breath.

Now, close your eyes and take one deep breath.

Now take three breaths, but just normal breaths, don't deliberately change it.

Now, take three breaths, this time noticing where in your body you feel your breath. Follow the breath in this place for the entire three breaths. *(wait. give some explanation of the different places the breath can be felt - belly, chest, nostrils.)*

We will call the place that you feel you breath most obviously your anchor. It is the place to anchor your attention. Let's try this for one minute.

You have learned mindfulness of sound and mindfulness of breathing. Both of those things are always happening. You can practice paying attention to sound or your breath whenever you think of it.

Your challenge over the next two days will be to notice a few breaths whenever you remember. See if you can remember even one time.

Journal

1. What is the difference between response and reaction? Can you identify any situations in your life that would benefit from response rather than reactions?
2. How did you feel today while paying attention to your breath?
3. Where do you find it easiest to follow your breath?
4. Did you remember to pay attention to sound over the past two days?
5. Do you think you could practice mindfulness for a few minutes everyday? What time of day would work best for you?

Class Three: It's Not Just About Me - It's About Us. Heartfulness

Happiness – It's Not Just About "Me" – It's About "Us"

So, let's start off today with a question. What kinds of subjects do scientists usually study?

Let them answer. Many answers will be in the vein of familiar scientific subjects like chemistry and physics.

Interestingly, scientists have also done a lot of research to understand the causes of human happiness. They've looked at many of the "big questions." For instance, does money make us happier? What do you all think?

Let them answer.

The answer is yes, but not beyond a certain point. That "certain point" is somewhere around having our basic human needs comfortably met. Beyond that, there is no correlation between wealth and happiness. What we're specifically going to look at today is whether happiness is contagious. What does contagious mean? What do you associate with that word?

Let them answer. Many will associate the word with some kind of illness.

The dictionary definition is "to spread from one person or organism to another by direct or indirect contact." Do you believe that happiness operates this way?

Let them answer. Answers will usually be mixed on this one.

Researchers from Harvard and University of California were interested in just this question. They were interested in the possibility that the happiness of those in our social network might impact our own happiness – and that our own happiness might impact the happiness of those around us. They looked at an enormous amount of data, examining the happiness level of almost 5,000 people over the course of 20 years. What they found was striking. Not only did the happiness level impact those with whom

you have direct contact, the researchers could trace the effect of happiness not merely on one's friend, but on their friend's friend's friend! 'Ripples' of happiness were evident up to three degrees removed.

Here is how the researchers described their findings: "Human happiness is not merely the province of isolated individuals... The happiness of an individual is associated with the happiness of people up to three degrees removed in the social network. Happiness, in other words, is not merely a function of individual experience or individual choice but is also a property of groups of people. Indeed, changes in individual happiness can ripple through social networks giving rise to clusters of happy and unhappy individuals."

This data highlights the fact that we are deeply connected to the human beings around us. As we continue doing mindfulness, our motivation can be supported knowing that our own work has impacts far beyond ourselves. Indeed, our efforts here will have benefits about which we'll never know.

Heartfulness

Today we are going to experiment with heartfulness, purposefully having kind thoughts, or wishing happiness for yourself or others. In some sense, this exercise makes us into happiness generators. Whether we are wishing happiness for ourselves or for a complete stranger, it is our own internal experience of happiness and kindness that ripples out to effect those around us. The basic instructions for this exercise are simple but powerful.

Bring someone to mind whom you see everyday and whom you like, care about or really love. It may be someone you live with, or someone at school, or a teacher, or maybe even a pet.

Bring this person or animal to mind. See if you can imagine or feel the person or animal doing the things that make them smile. Simply take the first image that comes to your mind. We're not going for perfection. Maybe it's petting your neighbor's dog on the way to the bus this morning. It's fine!

As you imagine this person or animal, pay attention to what you are feeling in your heart. Sometimes this can be challenging, and if it is, my first suggestion is to relax. Let your eyes close if that's comfortable. Keep your gaze soft if it's not.

Imagine your person or animal doing something that makes them very happy. We are going to send kind wishes to our person. I will say each wish out loud, and you can repeat the wishes silently in your mind.

When your saying these wishes, you can practice using a really calm internal voice. Continue each wish until you hear the next one.

Let's begin.

Pause for several moments between each wish.

I wish for you to be healthy.

I wish for you to be happy.

I wish for you to be peaceful.

I wish for you to have joy in your life.

Imagine the person can feel your wishes. Imagine your wishes are like texts able to reach your person instantly. They begin to get happier and happier. Also, notice your own heart and what you are feeling.

Give 15 seconds or more of silence.

Gently let the image of the person drop away. Bring your attention to one complete breath. Listen to the sound of the bell, and when you cannot hear the sound of the bell anymore let your eyes open. This is basic heartfulness.

Journal

1. Who did you send good wishes to?
2. Does it feel awkward or uncomfortable to have kind and caring thoughts? If so, why do you think it does?
3. How do you feel now?

Class Four: Thoughts

First Thought

During this minute of mindful breathing, pay attention to every breath as much as possible, and notice the first time you have a thought.

Practice 1 minute.

Raise your hand if you were able to keep your attention on your breathing that whole minute. Raise your hand if your attention wandered away. Can anyone tell me what their first thought was?

Everybody thinks. We can be mindful of thinking.

Let's try this again. Start with your breath. When you notice you have started thinking, say to yourself, "thinking, thinking". Then gently come back to your breathing. When you notice thinking, it means you've left your anchor, but when you notice the thought you have regained mindfulness and you can continue to be mindful of your breath.

2 minutes

Raise your hand if you were able to just pay attention to your breath and you didn't notice any thoughts.

Raise your hand if you noticed you were thinking at some point.

Raise your hand if you were able to note "thinking, thinking".

Raise your hand if you were able to come back to your breath.

You might also notice that you have a feeling like excited, nervous, angry, happy, bored, scared. If you notice any of these things, you can identify them in the same way "excited, excited", or "nervous, nervous", etc.

Wrap Up

Sometimes we have thoughts we don't want to have. By noticing them we can more easily let go.

Sometimes we are thinking when we are supposed to be listening to the teacher, so if we notice that, we can be mindful and come back to listening to the teacher.

Sometimes, we have the same thoughts over and over, even though we don't need to. When we are mindful of them and we notice them, we don't believe them as much.

Now, you have a very useful mindful tool. For the next few days, try to notice your thoughts.

Journal

1. How many thoughts do you think a person has each day?
2. Is it easy or challenging for you to stay focused on your breathing during mindfulness?
3. How do you feel when you are focused on your breathing? How do you feel when you are lost in thinking?

Class Five: Fairy Tale Ogre. Breath 2 - Counting

Fairy Tale Ogre

Do you remember a fairy tale from when you were a kid where there is some big, scary, hairy, mean, ugly monster that the kids or the people in the story are afraid of? Do you remember that once someone in the story gets the courage to face that scary monster, he becomes small and harmless and even frightened himself?

The big, scary, hairy, mean ugly feelings or emotions that we experience are the same. If we actually face them, feel them, acknowledge and know them, then they can no longer stay so big and scary. They can even diminish right as we look at them.

By practicing mindfulness, we develop the skill of noticing and observing our emotions, sometimes reducing their impact on us.

Breath 2 - Counting

Today we will count our breaths as a way to help us stay focused on breathing. Breath has two parts. It has an inhale and an exhale. Everyone take an inhale through your nose and now an exhale through your nose.. So one breath is both of those parts together.

To count your breath, when you take one breath in and out, say gently in your mind “one.” The next breath is “two,” and so on. See how high you can count before before you notice you have forgotten or become lost in thought. When you realize it, simply acknowledge it and start again with one.

Get in a mindful posture and let your eyes close. Place your attention on your anchor, the place where you feel your breath most obviously. It keeps us safe, grounded, and still. So please find your anchor. If you weren't sure last time, just try either your belly, chest, or nose for this time.

Ring bell and give one minute for counting.

You might have noticed that your mind is very busy. It is thinking about many things and it may not be easy to pay attention. Our minds are jumping up and down and chattering, never stopping. When you are trying to notice breathing, at times you might find yourself lost in thinking. That's perfectly normal. When you find your mind is very busy and you have lost your breath, then simply notice and then return to your anchor.

Let's try one more time. See what number you can go up to this time.

One minute

When you hear the bell, listen to the whole sound of the bell, and when you cannot hear the sound of the bell anymore, open your eyes. *Ring bell.*

Journal

1. Since your last mindfulness session did you notice sounds more than usual?
2. Did you notice your breath?
3. Did you think of Heartfulness?
4. Can you identify a time that if you had known about mindfulness it could have helped you?

Class Six: Pleasant/Unpleasant

Liking/Not Liking

I am going to list different situations, feelings or emotions. Each time, imagine how you would feel. Do you like it, hate it, fear it, look forward to it, wish for it, hope it happens again, hope it never happens again, etc. Get involved in that. Imagine as much detail as you can.

You fail a class.

Someone wakes you up early on the weekend.

Someone criticizes you.

Someone gives you a gift when you weren't expecting it.

Being tickled.

You get caught in a lie.

You are praised for good work in your favorite class.

Soft clothes.

Someone gives you money for a special occasion.

You get new shoes.

A friend is angry with you for something you did.

Seeing a really bad movie.

You're starving after school. You get home and there is not one good thing to eat.

Pleasant/Unpleasant

This time listen and consider each one carefully. But only identify each thing as either pleasant or unpleasant. Those are your only two choices to apply to the experience. Try not to add the same thoughts or imaginings that you added to it a moment ago and don't go beyond the point of pleasant or unpleasant.

You fail a class.

Someone wakes you up early on the weekend.

Someone criticizes you.

Someone gives you a gift when you weren't expecting it.

Being tickled.

You get caught in a lie.

You are praised for good work in your favorite class.

Soft clothes.

Someone gives you money for a special occasion.

You get new shoes.

A friend is angry with you for something you did.

Seeing a really bad movie.

You're starving after school. You get home and there is not one good thing to eat.

If we can really stop at identifying pleasant or unpleasant, we have lessened our reaction to it. It can't get a hold of us in the same way.

See how many things you can identify between now and the next class as pleasant or unpleasant.

Journal

1. How do you usually react when you don't like something?
2. How do you usually react when you do like something?
3. How will using mindfulness change those reactions?

Class Seven: Mindful Eating

Mindful Eating

I am going to say three sentences. Please just be mindful of your inner reaction to each sentence. Notice any thoughts, responses, feelings that occur.

I brought you something today. *wait a moment for them to notice.*

What I brought is something you can eat. *wait a moment for them to notice.*

I brought raisins. *wait a moment for them to notice.*

Ask for a couple to share their reaction to each sentence.

I am going to come around to each person and hand out a couple raisins. When you get your raisins just hold them in your hand but don't eat them just yet! Just keep your raisins until I give the to everyone and then I'll tell you what to do next.

While I'm giving out the raisins, notice if you like raisins and you are getting hungry. Notice if you do not like raisins and how that makes you feel. Maybe you wish I was giving out chocolate chips.

Today we are going to practice mindfulness of eating. For the first part we will have our eyes open, but it is very important that we are silent, not talking to each other, and also that we are not looking at each other during this time.

Look at the raisin in your hand. Let's use our imagination to guess the story of the raisin. That means, how did the raisin get to you? Think about the farmer who grew the grapes, the pickers, the packagers, the transporters, the grocery store, etc.

Now look more closely at your raisin. What do you notice about what they look like? Feel like? Smell like? Sound like? Now slowly put it in your mouth. Close your eyes and take one minute to slowly chew, taste and swallow the raisin.

What did you notice?

The movement of your tongue? Your teeth? Moving the raisin? Smell? Changing shape or flavor?

Now take one minute to eat the other raisins noticing ways that it is different than the first.

Now I am going to ring the bell to end. Listen to the whole sound of the bell, and when you cannot hear the sound of the bell anymore, open your eyes.

Answer the following questions silently to yourself...

Did the raisin taste good?

Did you chew on the right or left side of your mouth?

Did you swallow on the right or left side?

How did it taste compared to how your food normally tastes?

How do you eat at home?

Journal

1. Why do you think this mindfulness class is being offered to students?
2. How could mindfulness help in your life?
3. How could mindfulness help society?

Class Eight: Trees in a Forest. Connection to Others

Trees in a Forest

Close your eyes. Imagine a forest full of trees. You see all the trunks, branches, and leaves of all the trees. Some are tall, some short, some old, some new. Each tree is an individual, separate from all the other trees. Now imagine that you can see underground, and what you see is the roots of each tree reaching into the ground and spreading far away from the base of the tree. Some trees have roots that spread more than 30 feet out. Notice that the roots overlap with many other roots of neighboring trees. The roots cross each other, intertwine, and reach out to many other roots, creating an intricate connection underground.

Our thoughts are like roots. They are not what people see on the outside, they are not our physical appearance. However, they are the things that touch, connect with, support, and effect the people around us. When you have positive, loving, kind thoughts, you impact the people around you.

Connection to Others

Today we are going to practice Heartfulness, this time for a difficult person. Remember that Heartfulness is wishing happiness for yourself or others. If you have heartfulness, you can feel loving, kind, and caring towards yourself or another. But we don't feel the same about every person we encounter. Sometimes we even feel angry at people we love.

Raise your hand if you ever have disagreements, arguments, or conflict with someone you care about - a best friend, a parent or guardian, a sibling or other family member, etc. All of us have had that experience, and no one likes that experience. Today we are going to experiment with sending heartfulness to someone we care about but might sometimes feel angry at. Do your best and know that this can be challenging.

Close your eyes and listen to the sound of the bell. Let your body be still and quiet and get comfortable. Take three breaths and notice them at your anchor.

Bring to mind a person who you care about but maybe you feel mad, irritated, or disappointed with right now. See if you can sense or imagine or feel this person in your mind. Imagine this person doing something that makes them very happy. As you imagine this person, pay attention to what you are feeling in your heart.

We will send this person the same wishes we sent to the easy person last time we did heartfulness. I will say each wish out loud, and you will repeat the wishes silently in your mind while imagining these thoughts reaching each of those people.

Let's begin. *pause for several moments between each wish*

I wish for you to be healthy.

I wish for you to be happy.

I wish for you to be peaceful.

I wish for you to have joy in your life.

repeat one more time

You might notice that you still feel upset with this person and that right now you can't wish these things for them. But, you might notice that your feelings toward them softened a little or a lot by doing that. Either way is okay. This is meant to be an experiment to help you see your thoughts and feelings, and have more choice about how to respond.

Now I am going to ring the bell to end the mindfulness. Listen to the whole sound of the bell, and when you cannot hear the sound of the bell anymore open your eyes.

Journal

1. Were you able to identify and pleasant or unpleasant experiences since the last class?
2. What were they?
3. How does practicing mindfulness make your body feel? Your mind feel?
4. Can you give one situation where mindfulness has helped you in the past two weeks?

Class Nine: Past/Present/Future

Past/Present/Future

Raise your hand if you find mindful breathing easy. Challenging? Have you noticed that although you want to focus on your breath, often your thoughts start and even take you away completely? Today we are going to notice where our thoughts are going.

When we can pay attention to our breath mindfully, we are in the present moment. But our mind has a habit of wandering to the past and the future.

For example, let's say that where I am standing right now is the present, and I'm trying to pay attention to my breathing, but then my mind starts to think about what I am going to do after school today. *Move your body to the right.* My mind has gone into the... *let them answer.* Yes. And I notice that and then bring my mind back to my anchor, my breath.

And I am paying attention again... *pause a moment as you are paying attention...* and then my mind starts to remember what happened yesterday when I was talking with my friends. My mind has wandered into the... *move your body to the left and leave a pause to let them answer.* Yes, I have gone into the past. I notice that and then I bring my attention back to my breath, the... *let them answer – present.*

To practice this yourself, today we will notice if our thoughts are going to the past or the future, or back and forth. When you notice your mind escape to the past or the future, say, “thinking, thinking”, and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing, “breathing in, breathing out”.

Practice 1-2 minutes

Raise your hand if you were able to just pay attention to your breath and no thoughts interfered.

Raise your hand if you noticed a thought.

Raise your hand if you noticed your mind wandering away to the past or the future.

Raise your hand if you were able to come back to the present.

Let them tell you where their thoughts went if they want.

Raise your hand if you were able to note “thinking, thinking”. You can also note, “planning, planning” if that is what you were doing, or “worrying, worrying”, or “imagining, imagining”. These are all called anchor words and by using them we can be mindful of whatever is happening.

Journal

1. Do you spend more time thinking about the past or the future?
2. What do you think is the value of focusing more on the present moment?

Class Ten: Breath 3 - and more

Breath 3 – and more

Many things are happening in our experience all the time. We have used our breath to learn to focus the mind. Today we are going to expand our awareness by identifying what else happens in our mind and body. We are going to attempt to identify one thing in each moment. You can assist yourself by actually making a silent label (anchor word) in your mind. In a mindful posture, let your eyes close.

Notice one in breath and one out breath.

Notice your hands touching.

Notice where your body touches the chair.

Notice one in breath and one out breath.

Notice how your mind feels right now.

Remember something that happened yesterday.

Bring your mind back to right now.

Notice one in breath and one out breath.

Imagine something that might happen tomorrow.

Bring your mind back to right now.

Notice one in breath and one out breath.

Bring your attention to your left foot.

Your right shoulder.

Your entire left arm.

Behind your eyes.

Notice one in breath and one out breath.

Notice how your mind feels right now.

Add more, time permitting

Bring your attention to sound.

Finish with bell

Journal

1. What are you enjoying most about mindfulness? Least?

2. How does mindfulness affect the way you think about yourself? About others?
3. Is it hard for you to focus when you are trying to be mindful?
4. If you were to choose one place that you would enjoy practicing mindfulness outside the classroom where would it be? Can you try one time before the next class?

Class Eleven: Guest House Poem. Body Scan

The Guest House poem

This poem by a poet named Rumi can be used as an example of how to treat our emotions that come and go.

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
he may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.

-Rumi

Any time you have an emotion you can notice what “guest” or emotion has come into your mind and what room it’s gone to in your body (how is it manifesting in your body).

Body Scan

Ring bell, take three mindful breaths.

Read slowly.

Let your eyes close, and your body be still and quiet and get comfortable in your chair. Now bring your attention to the top of your head. See if you can feel any little feelings or sensations. Maybe there are prickly or vibrating feelings, maybe it feel tingly or soft. Don't talk about anything yet, just pay attention.

Now, we are going to try scanning our whole body for sensations. A sensation is anything you can feel in your body. You may feel very strong sensations in your body or you might feel weak ones. Don't worry, anything you feel is fine. Also, you may not feel anything at all. Just be curious no matter what you feel.

So from the top of our head, move to your face, pay attention to your forehead.

Pay attention to your eyes - relax your eyes.

Pay attention to your cheeks.

Your nose.

Your mouth- relax your jaw.

Pay attention to your chin.

The back of your head.

Notice your neck and throat.

Then bring your attention to your left shoulder, resting your attention there.

Notice your upper left arm, your elbow, and now your lower arm and hand.

Then all five fingers.

Then move your attention to your right shoulder, feel your right upper arm, right elbow, lower arm, hands and fingers.

Come back to your back and feel your upper back for any sensations.

You may not feel anything, or maybe you feel some discomfort or some pressure or tingles or itches.

Scan your attention across your back and down your spine and to your lower back.

Now come up to your chest and feel sensations in your chest.

Feel your belly. Take your time, we don't have to rush.

Notice where your body is touching the chair.

Now feel your left leg from the hip to the knee.

Feel the knee and the calf. Feel the ankle. Feel the foot and all five toes.

Place your attention in your right hip and feel the right thigh, your knee, your calf, and feel your foot including the toes.

Now notice your entire body at once. Keep your attention on your entire body, letting your attention notice everything at once.

Silently consider the following questions to yourself...

Could you feel anything in your face?

What part of your face could you feel? – eyes, eyelids, chin, jaw, lips, etc.

What did it feel like? – soft, tense, cool, warm, etc.

Could you relax your jaw or eyes? What did that feel like?

What part of your body was the easiest to feel?

What part was the hardest to feel?

How do you feel now?

Journal

1. Is being able to focus important? Why?
2. When you are in the present moment, not the past or future, how do you feel?
3. What is the most difficult emotion for you to deal with? How do you normally deal with it? How could mindfulness help you when you experience that emotion?

Class Twelve: Soaking in the Good. Loving Things

Soaking in the Good

Today's starter question is about taking a look at our own history as a species. These bodies and nervous systems we have – can anybody tell me *under what conditions they evolved?* What was life like for our earliest ancestors?

Let them answer.

To make a very long story short, the way we experience stress and emotions is deeply connected to the lifestyle that has dominated the vast majority of human history – hunting & gathering in small groups. Basically, our systems are finely tuned to detect and avoid danger because our survival depended on this ability for so much of our history.

Here's a simple example to illustrate this. Tell me what you see in these photos.



Obviously we're looking at trees here, but several of you blurted out "person" or "monster" as your first response. This is not an accident. Your mind is highly conditioned to recognize patterns – particularly patterns that suggest something around you might be alive.

If you think about it, this is a pretty good strategy. If I'm walking through the forest and I assume a lot of the dead branches I see are snakes, are my chances of survival going to increase or decrease?

Let them answer.

Yes, they are definitely going to increase. In

fact, on a very real level, we can say that all of us sitting in this classroom right now are the descendants of humans who had this bias. The one's that didn't have this bias sufficiently engrained simply did not survive.

Scientists call this the Negativity Bias. And while it's fantastic for avoiding snakes and tigers, it's not always so great for being a high school student in the 21st century. What do you all think some of the problems might be with the brain's negativity bias in the context of modern life?

Let them answer.

It basically comes down to overemphasizing the negative or problematic aspects of our experience. Who in the room has had the experience of a problem literally taking over their life? Right. That's the bias at work. To counteract the bias in our minds, it can be helpful to remember this simple saying from Psychologist Rick Hanson:

“Your brain is like velcro for negative experiences and teflon for positive ones.”

Everybody say that three times! Yes.

If needed, explain Teflon is what they make non-stick frying pans out of. Have them imagine putting butter in a super hot skillet and they'll get the idea.

Loving Things & Savoring Things for Short Moments

Today's exercise is an answer to the question, “what can we do to make the positive stick rather than slide away?” How can we incline our mind, brain and nervous system to the positive?

The answer is that we need to soak up the positive in much the same way a sponge soaks up water. Soaking up simply means really savoring the positive – really being mindful of what goes well, what we are grateful for, the people we love. To help us “train up” this ability, we are going to imagine going through one complete day with Heartfulness.

Let your eyes close and relax. Imagine waking up. Take a moment to send Heartfulness to yourself when you wake up. Take that feeling with you while you get out of bed and get ready for school.

Imagine the first person you see at home. Take a moment to send them Heartfulness. Keep that feeling as you interact with them.

Imagine the first friend you see at school. Take a moment to send them Heartfulness. Keep that feeling as you interact with them.

Imagine walking into class and seeing your morning teacher. Take a moment to send them Heartfulness. Keep that feeling as you participate in class.

Do 2-4 more of these instructions. You can include after-school activities, meals and going to bed.

Do you want to guess what your assignment is this week? Soak up the positive. Small things like a good meal. Big things like people you love. Take an extra minute when you feel positive to really be with it. We'll report out on it next class

Journal

1. Has practicing mindfulness in the classroom carried over into other parts of your life? How? When?
2. Do you think mindfulness effects your class? Your teacher? In what way?

Class Thirteen: Judgment. Body Awareness

Judgment

Chinese Proverb - “Good Luck, Bad Luck - Who Knows”, Author unknown.

There is a story of a farmer who used an old horse to till his fields. One day, the horse escaped into the hills and when the farmer’s neighbors sympathized with the old man over his bad luck, the farmer replied, “Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?”

A week later, the horse returned with a herd of horses from the hills and this time the neighbors congratulated the farmer on his good luck. His reply was, “Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?”

Then, when the farmer’s son was attempting to tame one of the wild horses, he fell off its back and broke his leg. Everyone thought this very bad luck. Not the farmer, whose only reaction was, “Bad luck? Good luck? Who knows?”

Some weeks later, the army marched into the village and conscripted every able-bodied youth they found there. When they saw the farmer’s son with his broken leg, they let him off. Now was that good luck or bad luck? Who knows?

Thinking that our experience is not quite right in some way – that it is not what should be happening, not good enough, or not what we expected or wanted – is just judgment. These judgments can lead to thoughts about blame, what needs to be changed or how things could be different. When this happens, we have lost awareness of the present moment and the chance to *choose*. If we can simply acknowledge the situation without needing to judge, fix or analyze, then we have a sense of acceptance and freedom. We can apply this to our mindfulness practice today.

Body Awareness

Ring bell. Take three mindful breaths.

Remember when we scanned our body from top to bottom? Today we are going continue to notice our sensations. Who remembers what sensations are? Yes, they are anything you can feel in your body. So it doesn't mean we think about our body or imagine our body, it means we notice our body with our attention.

Please let your eyes close and your body be still and quiet. Take three breaths at your anchor.

Now feel your entire body with all the sensations. Do you notice pressure or heaviness or itching? If you notice a strong sensation in your body, pay close attention. A strong sensation is a sensation that calls your attention - you naturally pay attention to a strong sensation. What happens to the strong sensation? Maybe it gets stronger. Maybe it gets weaker, maybe it goes away. Really notice the strong sensation. Maybe one sensation is made up of lots of little sensations. So use the power of your attention to notice everything you can possibly notice. For example, you might have an itch on your leg, but DONT scratch it yet, just be curious about the sensations. As you notice it, it gets bigger and stronger and feels painful, but then you notice vibrating feeling in your fingers, so pay attention there. See if you can NOT scratch that itch. Follow the sensations. There's no need to make up a story. You don't need to think, "Oh no, my leg itches, what if it itches forever?" Just feel the sensations as best you can. You can also give words to your sensations. Like "tingling" or "burning" or "itching" or "vibrating" or "pain" or "good feeling." See if you can break down one sensation into many parts in your mind- like "itching" is made of "tingling, moving" ... Ok, try it on your own. [Give 20 seconds and ring bell at end.]

Silently consider the following...

What area of your body did you felt a sensation?

Where was the strongest sensation you felt?

How many different sensations did you feel?

Did anything stay the same for the whole time?

Journal

1. What is something that you have judged to be bad that you can change to simple acknowledgment and realize that you might not yet know the ultimate outcome?
2. What is something that you have judged to be good?
3. How does your relationship change to these things if you have less judgment about it?

Class Fourteen: Mindful Walking

Mindful Walking

Ring bell, take three mindful breaths.

Please stand up, push your chairs in and stand behind your chairs.

Let your eyes close and let your body be still and quiet. Bring your attention to your body. Notice your posture, your balance, how you are standing. Notice how it feels different than sitting down.

Allow 30 seconds of silence

Is it possible to not move at all? *Take answers* No, of course not - our bodies are always in motion. It's just that we usually don't notice it because we haven't learned to pay much attention to our bodies.

Gently shift your weight into your left foot. Notice your foot as your weight moves into the left foot. Then shift your weight very slowly into your right foot. Notice how the sensations in your foot change as the balance moves one direction. Remember, "sensation" just means anything you can feel in your body. Now shift back and forth at your own speed, in a way that does not cause you to lose your balance. See what you can notice as you shift your weight. *Allow 20 seconds.*

Then shift again so the balance is on both feet, noticing what your feet feel like.

Arrange the class so there is room for each person to walk a few steps.

As you breath in lift one foot. As you breath out, take one step forward. As you breath in, lift the other foot. Breathing out, take one step. Coordinating your breath in this way, slowly take a few more steps. You may feel kind of silly, but everyone is doing it, so give it a try.

Variations may be needed to adjust for space and time.

Silently consider the following questions...

What did you feel in your feet, in your ankles, in your legs? – heaviness, lightness, tension, nothing, etc.?

What happens when we walk? What parts of our body move when we walk? How do they move?
Did you feel your feet better when you were faster or slower?

Journal

1. What do you think about during practice?
2. How do distractions effect you?
3. Does practicing effect the rest of your day?

Class Fifteen: Help Yourself First. Heartfulness for Oneself

Help Yourself First

Whenever you find yourself thinking twice about making and taking time for yourself, keep in mind that the heart pumps blood to it self first.

You can think of the pumping of the heart in two parts:

First the heart relaxes and fills – this is called diastole.

Then the heart contracts and sends a powerful stream of life blood out – this is called systole.

For the heart to work and provide sustenance to the whole body, it must relax and fill. And so must we.

Consider when you do this for yourself. Imagine a heart that did not relax and fill itself up. It just keeps pumping away, away, away. It quickly has nothing left to give. Or imagine a heart that relaxes and fills, but only once an hour. It becomes quite tired. Imagine yourself taking time everyday. What would that look like? And how would it effect the rest of your day?

Heartfulness for Self

Close your eyes and listen to the sound of the bell. Let your body be still and quiet and get comfortable.

One minute of mindful breathing.

Today we are going to practice Heartfulness just for ourselves.

Bring an image or a sense of yourself to mind. Imagine yourself with a smile on your face, doing something that makes you feel happy, surrounded by things that make you feel peaceful. As you imagine yourself, pay attention to what you are feeling in your heart.

I will say each wish out loud, and you will repeat the wishes silently to yourself.

pause for several moments between each wish

I wish to be healthy.

I wish to be happy.

I wish to be peaceful.

I wish to have joy in my life.

You may add additional wishes if you want.

repeat one more time

Notice how your heart and mind feel right now. Notice if this was easy or challenging. It is natural for this to feel awkward - it is new and different. It might be challenging because we are not use to being kind to ourselves. There is nothing wrong if it is challenging - if you keep practicing heartfulness you will learn more about how you feel about yourself.

We will close with listening to the bell. Listen to the whole sound of the bell, and when you cannot hear the sound of the bell anymore open your eyes.

Journal

1. Since the last class, have you remembered mindfulness while walking? Sitting? Standing?
2. Have you noticed your breath? Sound? Body? Emotions?
3. Has there been a circumstance where you remembered mindfulness and it helped? What was it?

Class Sixteen: Letting Be. Mindfulness of Emotions

Letting Be

Letting each moment “be” is key to staying present in the current moment. Often when we have a difficult emotion, we don’t like it. But instead of letting it just be what it is, our resistance to it actually causes it to stick around. It is like holding something in your hand. If you don’t want it, but you keep your fist clenched, then how can you let go.

When you find yourself in a difficult emotion, try to relax into it, let it be, acknowledge it and allow it to pass through in it’s own nature. We want to acknowledge whatever is arising and just let it be there. We are attempting to simply see things as they are (whether we like them or not). This will lessen the resistance and lead to less pain and more ease.

Mindfulness of Emotions

Ring bell.

Today, see if you can count ten breaths or more in a row during this minute. Whenever you notice you have become lost in thought, gently come back and start at one again.

One minute of mindful breathing.

Today we are going to explore how emotions take place in our body and our mind. I am going to say a list of emotions. Notice if that feeling is in your body or mind. What does your body feel like when I say the word, what does your heart feel like when I say the word?

Pause briefly between each emotion.

Happy.

Sad.

Excited.

Mad.

Stressed.

Bored.

Loving.
Anxious.
Worried.
Scared.
Jealous.
Quiet.
Silly.
Peaceful.

Now we will have some silence and you can count your breath at your anchor. When you hear the bell, listen to the whole sound of the bell and then open your eyes.

Discussion:

How did you feel when I said the word “Happy...Sad...Excited...?”

Journal

1. Have you learned anything new about the emotions that occur in you over the past month? What?
2. Do you notice your emotions more often now?
3. Has how you deal with your emotions changed? How?

Class Seventeen: Mindfulness in Conversation

Mindfulness in Conversation

Ring bell. One minute of mindful breathing.

Today might be challenging. It is difficult enough to try and focus on our breath or on sound. When there are distractions, our attention easily gets taken away.

Today we are going to practice mindfulness in conversation.

When we are mindful of talking we can still be aware of our body and we can still be aware of our mind.

When you practice this today, notice what thoughts might be going on in your mind as you are talking. See if you can notice the urge to talk, or maybe that you are not in the mood to talk. Notice if silence is awkward. Notice that you are seeing the person and hearing their voice. Notice if you can maintain your mindfulness, your awareness, your presence, or do you get so involved you just talk without remembering mindfulness.

Please choose one neighbor. Notice how you feel if it is your friend or not. Are you comfortable or uncomfortable with this person? We will start with just one minute.

One minute of conversation.

Turn toward the center of the room and close your eyes. Notice the feelings that you are having right now. What does your body feel like? Your mind?

Open your eyes. Now pick a different neighbor. Notice if this causes different responses in your mind. Continue to pay attention to your body and to your mind as much as possible while you talk. You will have one minute with this person.

One minute of conversation.

Turn toward the center of the room and close your eyes. Again, notice the feelings that you are having right now. What does your body feel like? Your mind?

Continue to notice your mind and body in this way, or if you feel calm, turn your attention to your breath and see if you can focus on your breath for one minute.

End with bell.

Journal

1. Was it difficult to be mindful while talking?
2. Did you notice things in yourself that you hadn't noticed before?
3. How could being mindful in conversation be helpful?

Class Eighteen: Gratitude and Appreciation

Gratitude & Appreciation

Ring bell. One-two minutes of mindful breathing.

When things are difficult, one of the best ways to uplift our minds is to find sources of gratitude and appreciation. This is another form of heartfulness. There might be sad things in our life or things that make us angry. If we focus on those things, we will only notice those things. Practicing gratitude can make our heart feel happy.

Let your eyes close and think of three things you are grateful for. *Get some examples.*

Now let your eyes close and imagine all of those things surrounding you. *Pause.* Notice how that makes you feel?

If we can think of those things to make us happy, imagine all the small things in our day that might make us happy if we give them some attention. There are many things in our life that might make us feel happy if we focus on them. Sometimes they are hard to remember because they are small or because we are used to them. Can you think of some simple, small, or natural things that make you happy?

Some examples: the sun on your face, a favorite color, a special food, someone's smile, a hug from a friend, playing a sport, art, laughing, etc.

Let them share.

The most challenging thing when we are feeling depressed or angry is to remember these things that can uplift our mind. Try finding three things each day that you feel grateful for.

Finish with bell and three mindful breaths.

Journal

1. Did you gain anything from the mindfulness classes? What kinds of things?
2. Can you use what you learned after this course is finished?

3. Would you recommend this course to other students?
4. Do you feel that mindfulness benefited your class/school? How?

Extras

Test Taking

Tell me some of the feelings you have when you are taking a test, or when you know you are going to have a test, or while studying for a test.

Take answers. Often, they will identify nervous, afraid, wanting to do well, etc.

Yes, and do you think mindfulness could help with those feelings? Today, we're going to learn how to be mindful for tests.

Testing Scenario

In your mindful posture and with your eyes closed, imagine you are taking a test. You are answering questions easily. Then you come to a question that is really hard. You know you learned it, but you can't remember now. Notice how you start to feel. It's a really hard question and you don't think you will be able to answer it. Without mindfulness, you might feel discouraged for the rest of the test. But imagine that when you reach that hard problem, instead of getting discouraged or frustrated, you remember to be mindful. Imagine yourself putting down your pencil and closing your eyes. You take a few deep breaths. (Actually take those breaths right now.) Notice how your body is feeling as you keep breathing. Keep breathing mindfully until you feel more calm. Then imagine that you open your eyes, you look at the problem again and your mind feels clear again. You continue your test and finish. Imagine putting your pencil down and feeling calm and satisfied.

Pretest Calming

Your class can also practice mindfulness before any tests or quizzes.

Let your eyes close and sit comfortably. Place your hands on your lap.

Ring bell.

Take three slow, deep breaths...normal, natural, calming breaths.

Notice how your body feels.

If you feel anxious, nervous or tense notice where you feel that in your body.

If you feel anxious, breathe in one deep breath and as you breathe out, breathe out the anxiety.

If you feel nervous, breathe in one deep breath and as you breathe out, breathe out the nervousness.

If you feel tension in your body, breathe in one deep breath. As you breathe out, breathe out the tension.

Take your next breath imagining ease coming into your body.

Breathe calm into your body.

Imagine yourself taking your test with ease.

Imagine ease in your body and in your mind through the entire test.

Imagine putting your pencil down at the end of your test feeling relieved and confident.

Ring bell

Wrap-up

Mindfulness actually effects our brain. When we are nervous or anxious, chemicals are released in our brain that actually prevent us from thinking clearly. By doing a little mindfulness before or during a test can calm you down and help your brain. The next time you are going to take a test, you can ask your teacher to read you the pretest calming.

Close with bell & three mindful breaths.

Chaos in the Classroom

This is a great lesson to use when things are getting out of hand or you can use it as a follow up lesson when you would like to address some unacceptable behavior that has already happened. Often when there is a substitute teacher classes tend to forget the rules or see how far they can stretch the rules. This lesson can also be used on days when there is a lot of disruption going on within the class. This is a great lesson to have them reflect on why they speak out or why they break the rules at school.

Does anyone remember the last time I was here? What happened? *They will most likely respond “We were acting out” or “we were speaking out and being loud”.*

Why do you think that was happening?

I’ve noticed in other classes that when there is a sub or if a group of students are having a rough day that it can really affect how it feels to be in a class room. How did it feel to you when people were being loud?

Often they will respond with things like “I didn’t like the noise”, “I had a really hard time paying attention”, “I was frustrated”. Other times they might say “I didn’t really care, or “it didn’t really bother me”. It’s important to acknowledge that people may have been affected by the chaos in different ways.

If you’re having a hard time getting responses you may ask them to raise their hands if they experienced the following:

Did anyone feel annoyed by all of the noise and side talking?

Did anyone feel distracted by everything going on?

Did anyone feel uneasy because things seem a little out of control or you worried that people would start getting in trouble?

Was anyone not bothered by it at all?

Then make a statement about how it made you feel during the chaos or hearing about the chaos if you weren’t there. It’s important to be honest.

I think this classroom could do it differently if this happens again. What are some mindfulness tools that we know about that could help us next time this happens.

Let them list as many as they can come up with.

Now that we know how this can affect people in the class and how it feels for ourselves, I hope it won’t happen again. If it does, let’s help each other as a class to remember these ideas we came up with today so we can make new choices.

Being Mindful of Boredom

Do any of you get bored?

What does it feel like when we’re bored?

Does it feel good?

Let them identify that it doesn’t feel good when they’re bored.

Did you know that boredom is a choice? I know it might be hard to believe but I recently found out that if we know what boredom is, then we can decide to be bored or not. How many of you believe that this could be true?

I wasn't so sure about it either until I talked to my brother about it. My brother is a scientist. He looks at cells and DNA strands all day almost every day. I think that if I did it I would be bored out of my mind. So I asked him one day, "How are you able to do this every day and still find it interesting?" He said that he is always looking for something new when he's looking at stuff through his microscope. He said that by turning up his own curiosity, he starts to find things interesting, and if he finds things interesting, he isn't bored.

Is there anything that you find interesting that you think others might find boring?

Let them share with you.

Is there anything boring to you that you might be able to turn up your curiosity and look for or listen for to make it more interesting?

Next time you are bored, see if you can notice first how it feels in your body and mind. Then see if you can turn up your curiosity as if you were a little baby learning things for the first time or an alien from another planet or even a friend that you know would be interested in that subject. See if you can see it from another perspective to help you be more interested.

Whip-Around

A whip-around is a great way to get some feedback from a quiet class, to check-in in the morning, or just to create some energy.

Everyone take a moment to notice how you are feeling right now. See if there is one word that describes how you are feeling right now. It may be calm, energetic, bored, interested, happy, irritated, or any other experience. We are going to do a quick whip-around to share the one word that describes our current experience. As I point to you, just say your one word. If you really don't want to share, is there a word that describes that? If you are paying close attention, the way you feel right now might actually change by the time it is your turn.

Have someone volunteer to start and then point to each person in succession.

Notice how you are Feeling

"Notice how you are feeling right now."

This is a great reminder any time you think of it. You can throw this in in the middle of a lesson, as students are starting or finishing a test, as students are arriving or leaving for the day, etc.

Sometimes I have the feeling that when I ask students to notice how they're feeling right after practicing mindfulness, that they think that I'm hoping they will say "calm" or "happy."

That I am looking for evidence that mindfulness works or want others in the class to hear that it's going well for some of you.

But actually that's not it.

Does anyone have any ideas about why I really ask that question?

For me the main point is to give you practice in noticing how you feel, being mindful of feelings, of emotions and their impact in the body. In mindfulness there is no right or wrong answer. Your only job is just to be aware of it.

I'm hoping that you will get in the habit of often taking the time to notice that about yourself.

Marshmallow

Science

I'd like to share to research studies with you. The first was about homeless children. The researchers noticed that homeless children were at a significant disadvantage when they started school. Most of them just didn't do nearly as well as their peers who had places to live.

But there was a small number who in spite of being homeless, living in poverty, and facing many other challenges, didn't seem to be affected. They did just as well or better than their peers who had stable places to live.

They studied these children to see what made them different. They wanted to know the secret of their success. Maybe if they could find out what it was, they could help the other homeless children who struggled. What do you think they found? Anyone want to make a guess?

The Marshmallow test

I'll tell you about the second research project to give you a hint. It's called The Marshmallow Test. The research was very simple. It was done by a psychologist at Stanford who worked with children at a daycare center on the Stanford campus. His subjects were children 5-6 years old. He took each child into a bare room with just a table and a chair in it. He asked the child to sit down in the chair and placed one marshmallow on the table. Then he told the child he was going to leave the room and come back in 15 minutes. The child could eat the marshmallow if they wanted to. But if it was still on the table when he returned the child would get a second marshmallow.

Now just stop for a minute and imagine yourself at age 5. What would you have done?

Now imagine for a minute another version of this test. Now I'm not really going to do this, but what would happen if today, right now, I gave you five marked \$100 dollar bills.

The test is that if you still have these same five \$100 bills in six months, I will give you five more.

I'm not going to ask you to share your answer to either test.

But just imagine what would happen for you.

Would you spend the money? Or would you wait to get another \$500.

The researcher at Stanford found that 2 out of 3 of the five-year-olds could resist the temptation and get the second marshmallow.

His daughter was among the subjects along with many of her friends.

Years later he noticed that when he would ask his daughter about her friends, it seemed that the ones who had been able to wait for the second marshmallow were doing much better than the ones ate the first marshmallow before he returned to the room.

He decided to check that out more thoroughly and followed up on all his subjects.

He found that those who could control their urge to eat the marshmallow had done better in school, had higher college entrance test scores, had better jobs than those who ate the first marshmallow.

How does this relate to the study of homeless children?

The one thing that was different about the ones that succeeded was not their IQ.

It wasn't their parents.

It was their ability to control their urges in the present moment for something better in the future.

Relationship to Mindfulness

Raise your hand if you have an idea about how this relates to mindfulness practice?

It turns out that the key to being able to resist present moment attractions for something better in the future is the ability to control your own attention.

What matters is what you pay attention to and if you have control over that or not.

Practicing mindfulness is all about learning to control your attention.

But it's not about me learning to control your attention .

It's about you learning to control your attention.

Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose.

By practicing mindfulness you get better at paying attention, at controlling your attention, a key to your success.

By practicing mindfulness you train your mind to be better at paying attention on purpose.

That's one of the best things, maybe the best thing, you can do for your future success.

And when you can do that you can keep your focus on the larger picture.

And you'll do much better at reaching your goals.

Any thoughts or comments?

Practice

OK. Let's practice some mindful breathing.

Use the time to develop your own ability to control your attention

Ring bell to close.

Brain Science

Executive Function

We could say that mindfulness can be a key to your future success. But why?

There is a particular part of the brain, the pre-frontal cortex, whose job it is to manage our thoughts, emotions, and actions in relation to our goals. Among other functions, the pre-frontal cortex is important in planning and decision making, and in the overcoming of a strong habit or resisting temptation. That's part of what we call executive function.

It's like that part of the brain is the chief executive officer of who we are. Does anyone know what the chief executive officer (CEO) of a corporation does? The CEO makes the big decisions about the company's goals then pays attention to make sure the the right strategies are chosen and the employees are putting those strategies into action. In a way it's a little like being the teacher of a class or the principal of the school.

If you have a strong habit that you want to change, it's this part of the brain that goes to work. If an emotion or an impulse comes up, the pre-frontal cortex asks the question: "Is this going to help me reach my goal or not?" If not, it works to counteract that impulse or emotion, to keep it from causing action on our part. If so, it works to encourage that impulse or emotion into action.

Examples of Executive Function in your Life

Raise your hand if you've ever had a really strong urge to say something, but some part of you knows that it will only make things worse so you bite your tongue and don't say it? That's the executive function at work.

Raise your hand if you've ever had a strong feeling and right away something pops out of your mouth and you wish you could get it back but it's too late? That's an example of the executive function not doing its job.

So we might suspect that the kids who waited to get the second marshmallow or the homeless kids who did better in school had stronger executive function. Their brains were stronger at resisting temptation. You might suspect that these kids had larger pre-frontal cortexes than the ones who ate the marshmallow. And since resisting the temptation to eat the marshmallow in order to get another one led to better grades in school, better jobs later on.

Brain Plasticity

Psychologists used to think that our brains weren't very changeable. Now the latest news, mostly in the last ten years, is what's called brain plasticity. Does anyone know what that means? Any guesses?

It means that the brain is actually one of the most changeable parts of the body. Just like we can change our muscles and the shape of our bodies by exercise, we can change our brain by exercising it as well.

How do psychologists know that? Scientists who study the brain use various techniques to study the brain. EEG (electroencephalogram) measures how active different parts of the brain are. MRI (magnetic resonance imagery) takes a picture of the brain. Scientists use these pictures to measure the size of different parts.

Some scientists are using this kind of equipment to study the effects of mindfulness on the brain. And as it turns out mindfulness is one of the best ways to exercise the part of the brain in charge of executive function brain. When we practice mindfulness, the prefrontal cortex gets more active (EEG). When we practice mindfulness over a significant period of time, the prefrontal cortex gets thicker (MRI). This leads to better executive function.

We can all change our brains

So all of us have the potential to influence our brain in this way to increase the activity and even the size of the pre-frontal cortex leading to better executive function. If you improve your executive function you improve the prospects for your future.

Recent research at an elementary school in Oakland that received the same mindfulness curriculum you are receiving, showed that students had improved executive function after learning mindfulness. And the really good news is that the increases were still there three months after the curriculum was finished.

Practice

So let's take a few minutes to thicken our prefrontal cortexes.

Let's exercise the part of our brain that improves our executive function.

Mindful breathing for a minute.

Mindful listening to whatever sounds arise.

See if you can notice the very moment that you first hear the bell.

Then raise your hand when you can't hear it any more.