

Mindfulness: Rewiring the Brain for Resiliency

Objectives

- Understand what mindfulness is – and what it is not
- Understand what happens when you practice mindfulness
- Learn how mindfulness reduces negative thoughts
- Discuss and practice various mindfulness techniques like meditation, movement, drawing, and more

Checking In

Choose 3 to 5 words that describe how you are feeling mentally, physically and emotionally

 Appreciative Encouraged Content Enthusiastic Excited Fulfilled Grateful Glad Happy Hopeful	 Balanced Caring Compassionate Concerned Empathetic Loving Open-Minded Open-Hearted Trusting Loving	 Afraid Anxious Clingy Concerned Conflicted Guarded Judgmental Hesitant Nervous Uneasy	 Alienated Ashamed Defeated Unhappy Discouraged Helpless Guilty Insecure Sad Hurt	 Angry Close-Minded Arrogant Disgusted Envious Grumpy Impatient Irritated Frustrated Defensive
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And Breathe...

Count your breaths for 1 minute and write down how many breathes you took:

Think of your favorite place. Focus on the details like how it feels when you are there and hold the image in your mind for 2 minutes.

Count your breaths again for 1 minute and write down how many breathes you took:

Was there a difference?

Mindfulness is NOT...

- Mindfulness is not obscure or exotic. It takes many shapes and names: prayer, meditation, focused breathing, taking a walk, yoga, Tai Chi, doodling, etc.
- Mindfulness is not an added special thing – it can be things you are already doing.
- Mindfulness does not have to be spiritual or religious.
- Mindfulness is not always about feeling good; it is about being able to sit with and work through your thoughts and feelings.
- Mindfulness does not have to be complicated. It can be something as simple as breathing.

Mindfulness is...

“Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to what is happening right now, by observing what’s going on inside (your thoughts, feelings and physical sensations) and outside (your interactions and surroundings) with curiosity, openness and acceptance.” - *Mindfulness Activities for the Classroom*/©Stop, Breathe & Think

“[Mindfulness is] the practice of maintaining a nonjudgmental state of heightened or complete awareness of one’s thoughts, emotions or experiences on a moment-to moment basis.”
- *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

Mindfulness is becoming aware of body sensations, thoughts and emotions and relating to them with an open, nonjudgmental attitude.

Mindfulness is...

- A natural human capacity
- Trainable
- Is practiced inside or outside formal meditation
- Important in today’s pressure filled environments

Settle your Glitter

The Five Components of Mindfulness

- Observing: “... noticing or attending to internal and external experiences, such as sensations, cognitions, emotions, sights, sounds, and smells”
- Describing: “... labelling internal experiences with words”
- Acting with awareness: “... attending to one’s activities of the moment and can be contrasted with behaving mechanically while attention is focused elsewhere (often called automatic pilot)”
- Nonjudging of inner experiences: “... taking a nonevaluative stance toward thoughts and feelings”
- Nonreactivity to inner experience: “... the tendency to allow thoughts and feelings to come and go, without getting caught up in or carried away by them”

Source: Baer et al. (2008, p. 303)

Informal Mindfulness

- Awareness of Daily Tasks
 - Mindful Eating
- Body Awareness
- Mindful Listening & Speaking
- Doodling or Coloring
- Engaging your Senses
- Journaling
 - Gratitude
- Pausing to take in the good

Mindfulness of Touch

- Lower or close your eyes.
- Take the index finger of your right hand and slowly move it up and down on the outside of your fingers.
- Once you have mindfully stroked your left hand, swap and let your left hand stroke the fingers of your right hand.

Write down any thoughts you have about this exercise:

Formal Mindfulness

- Meditation
- Yoga
- Tai chi



What to Expect...

- A lot of thoughts & feelings can come up as you practice mindfulness; good & bad
- It may feel great; it may feel uncomfortable
- You may find yourself judging
- You may find yourself distracted
- This is part of the experience – Just observe what is happening

Notes:

Mindful Breathing (5-10 minutes)

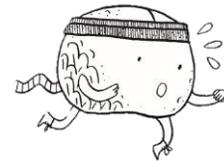
Mindfulness Activities for the Classroom/©Stop, Breathe & Think

- Sit in a chair or on the ground. Hands in a comfortable position like at your sides, folded or on your knees.
- Close your eyes. Bring your attention to the feel of your body on the chair or on the ground below you. Feel the weight of your body on the chair or ground below.
- Begin finding a comfortable posture. Lean slightly forward, then back. Lean to one side and then the other. Find a comfortable balance as you come back to the center.
- Now sit up straight and feel the head on the top of your neck. How can you sit so your head, neck and back feel the most comfortable?
- Take a few deep breathes.
- While breathing deeply, relax your shoulders, your stomach, the muscles in your face and your hands and legs. Let go of all the tension in your body.
- Now bring your attention back to your breath. Where do you feel it most? In your nose or your stomach? In the rise and fall of your chest?
- Just notice where you feel it the most. Let your breathing be natural and relaxed.
- Notice what the breath feels like as it enters through your nose, and goes down your throat, filling your lungs and back out through your nose.
- Notice your stomach and chest rise and fall with each inhale and exhale. Let your breathing be natural and relaxed.
- Bring your awareness to the sensation of your breath in your nose. Feel your breath as it comes in and goes out. Focus on this sensation, paying attention to each inhale and exhale.
- If your mind wanders or you get distracted, notice what is going on in your head and then gently bring your attention back to your breath going in and out. Focus on the sensation of your breath in the foreground while allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go in the background.
- Just notice where you feel it the most. Let your breathing be natural and relaxed.
- Now bring your attention back to the touch of the seat or ground below you.
- Open your eyes.

How was mindful breathing for you? What thoughts came up?

Practice Makes Perfect!

- Just like working out – mindfulness strength builds over time
- Start with short sessions and work mindfulness into your daily routines
- You may not feel all the positive feelings from meditation right away – that’s ok!
- Give yourself the chance to feel them
- Be compassionate with yourself!

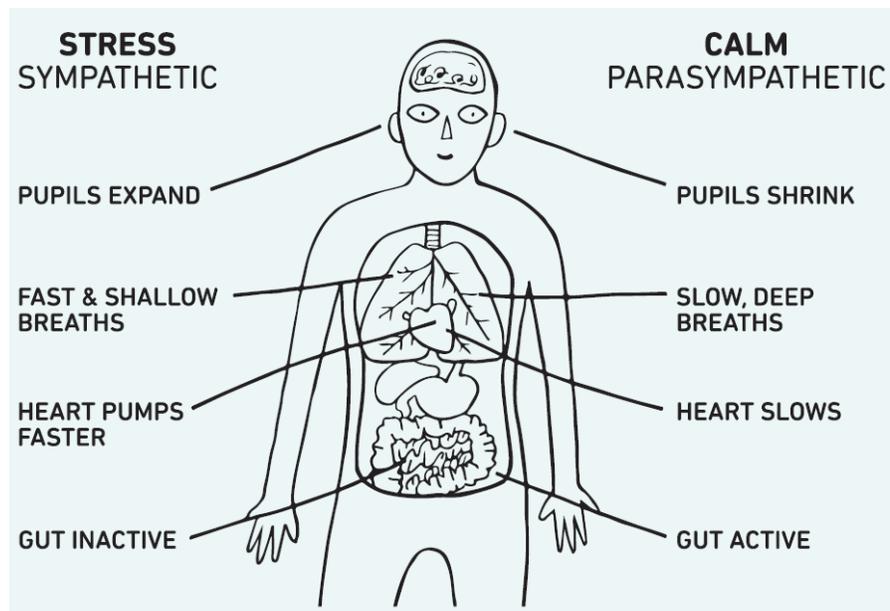


Stress & the Amygdala

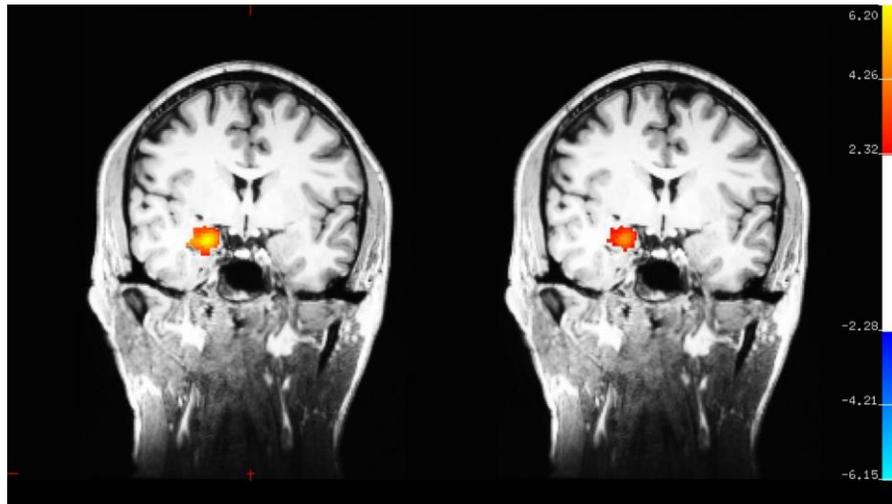
Under stress your brain activates the amygdala

- Prepares the body for fight, flight or freeze
- Shuts down signals to the pre-frontal cortex

Practicing Mindfulness shuts off the Sympathetic Nervous System



Long-Term, Mindfulness Reduces Emotional Reactions



Functional MRI (left) showing activation in the amygdala when participants were watching images with emotional content before learning meditation. After eight weeks of training in mindful attention meditation (right) note the amygdala is less activated after the meditation training. - *Courtesy of Gaelle Desbordes*

The Benefits of Mindfulness

- Rewires the brain to be more peaceful, compassionate, positive and imaginative
- Reprograms negative thoughts that cause stress
- Puts space between thoughts and reaction
- Increases sense of well-being and resiliency
- Improves decision making

Alpha Meditation

Alpha brainwaves are dominant during quietly flowing thoughts and is some meditative states.

- Alpha: the resting state for the brain
- Alpha waves aid overall mental coordination, calmness, alertness, mind/body integration and learning.



Alpha Mediation with the Crystal Countdown (5-10 minutes)

Going into Alpha

- Sit or lay in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes and look at the screen in front of your mind's eye.
- On the screen of your mind, see the color Red and the number 7. (The number/color may only be a flash as you begin but it will stay longer as you practice.)
- Now see the color Orange the number 6.
- On the screen of your mind, see the color Yellow and the number 5.
- Now see the color Green and the number 4.
- On the screen of your mind, see the color Blue and the number 3.
- Now see the color Indigo and the number 2. Indigo is the color of the night sky.
- Now see the color Orchid and the number 1.
- Slowly count from 10 to 1 to reach alpha level.
- You are now at alpha level, where everything is accurate and correct.
 - Stay in alpha for as long as you like.

Coming up from Alpha

- Take your right hand, place it over the top of your head palm down.
- Move your hand from the top of your head to your stomach, pushing out when you reach your belly button. Clearing your energy.
- Now count slowly from 1 to 10.
- Then count slowly from 1 to 7.
- Open your eyes.

Your Safe Space Visualization (1 - 10 minutes)

- Imagine walking through a gate onto a path or trail that leads to your safe place
- Enter the safe place; notice everything that helps you feel comfortable, relaxed, protected, at ease
- Sit and savor the feelings of safety
- Know you can return to this safe place any time you need to

How did this feel for you? What thoughts came up?

A series of horizontal lines for writing, starting with a shaded box at the top.

Checking In

Choose 3 to 5 words that describe how you are feeling mentally, physically and emotionally

				
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Routine Mindfulness at Home

- Choose one (or more) routine activities, such as brushing your teeth, eating, doing the dishes, taking a walk, and try to do the activity with full attention. Focus only on that activity.

What activities will you try?

1.

2.

3.

4.

- During the next week, try to pay attention to how you engage in a conversation. Try to focus on the conversation as fully as possible and the person/persons with whom you are communicating. The moment you notice that your thoughts are distracted, return your attention to the conversation.

- Try one or more of the meditations or exercises we learned today. What exercises will you try?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Day of the Week:

Exercise	Times Performed	Observations or Perceptions during the Exercise
Routine Activities		
Mindful Listening		
Meditations or Exercises		

Integrating the Take-Aways

Write Down:

- What tools/exercises will you use for yourself?

- What tools/exercises could you use with clients?

- What obstacles might get in the way?

- What resources could you use to overcome those obstacles?

Additional Exercises for you to try!



Mindful Doodling - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o6w_Czrff4

The goal of Mindful Doodling is to fully engage with your doodles in a meditative way. It requires slowing down, focusing on the paper and pen and doodling repeatedly with full intent. Thus, you become present in the moment.

Like all mindful practices, mindful doodling:

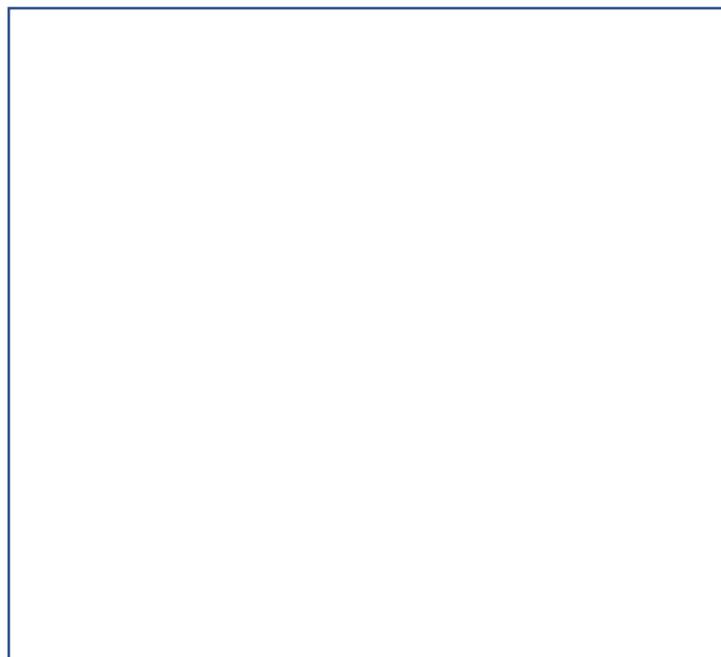
- focuses the mind
- calms the body and mind
- relieves stress
- encourages relaxation
- increases your sense of wellbeing
- replaces negative or bored habits
- allows you to be present and aware

Mindful Doodling Practice (5 – 25 minutes)

- Get a piece of paper and a pen. Sit comfortably, holding your pencil as you would normally. Keep the tip resting on the page and close your eyes.
- Take a few moments to focus on the feeling of your pen between your fingers. This is something we do almost every day—we write, we scribble notes, we sign our name, but very rarely do we pay attention to how it actually feels to hold a pen in our hand.
- See if you can notice the different places the pen presses against your skin. Is it resting on a knuckle or on the soft pads of your fingers? Is the surface rough or smooth? How does it feel?
- Experiment with how you hold the pen. Are you holding it tightly or with a loose and relaxed grip? Can you loosen or tighten your hold so that it feels poised and yet still relaxed?
- Start to make some simple shapes on the page. Make shapes simply because it feels good to make them. They might be continuous circles or spirals, zig-zags, straight lines, wavy lines, geometric type shapes, anything at all, just one or a combination of all.
- Don't try to draw anything in particular; you're not drawing either from life or from your imagination here, you're just doodling, just making marks, just making marks that feel instinctive and enjoyable to make.
- When you feel yourself getting a little tired or bored with one shape, change your focus and draw another shape. Keep coming back to the sensation of your hand drawing, brushing against the paper, holding the pen. Keep drawing—keep doodling just what feels good, the shapes you feel you instinctively want to draw.

Mindful Doodling & Problem Solving (5 – 25 minutes)

- Visualize a problem you are having in your life. It can be any problem or situation you are frustrated with, something that scares you, or something you want to change.
 - How is it being represented in your mind? Describe how you are seeing and feeling the problem or issue.
- Set that off to the left in your mind's eye.
- Now visualize something great in your life. Your partner, kids, a place you love, your pet, or a good friend, anything you want.
- Set that off to the right in your mind's eye.
- Take a small sheet of paper, like a post-it note or something. Draw a shape on the paper all the way to the edge.
- Divide that shape into 4 areas however you like.
- Draw a different pattern in each of the 4 areas.
- When you are finished doodling, close your eyes and visualize the thing you thought was a problem in your life.
 - Has anything changed about the way you see that problem? Has its condition improved?
 - Describe how you are seeing or feeling the problem now. Take a few moments to focus on the feeling of your pen between your fingers.

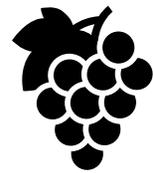


How did doodling feel for you? What thoughts came up?

Handwriting lines for reflection on doodling.

Mindful Eating

- Take a piece of candy and mindfully eat it. Slow down, sense it, savor it and smile between bites.
- Purposefully slow down. Use all your senses to see it, touch it, smell it, and sense it.
- Then gently pop it into your mouth and really savor it.
- Savor its texture, its taste, how it feels in your mouth.
- Let it linger and then swallow it.
- After you have swallowed it, let your lips turn up slightly and smile.
- Do the same thing for each candy you eat or bite you take.



How did mindful eating feel for you? What thoughts came up?

Handwriting lines for reflection on mindful eating.

Engage Your Senses (10 -20 minutes)

*Mindfulness Activities for the Classroom/©Stop,
Breathe & Think*

- Focus your attention on your surroundings. Observe the colors, shapes and textures of what you see.
- Choose one thing and look at it carefully. Examine the specific details without having an opinion about it. Analyze the size and shape, its color, and its texture.
- Now close your eyes if you can.
- Focus your awareness on sound. Notice what you hear.
- Listen to the quietest sound you hear.
- Listen to the loudest sound you hear.
- Try listening to a single sound. Where does it come from? How would you describe it? Try not to have an opinion about the sound.
- Now focus your awareness on your sense of smell.
- What do you smell? How many odors can you detect?
- Choose a scent and examine it. How would you describe it? Is it strong or faint? Sweet or sour? What else do you notice about it?
- Now focus your attention on your sense of taste.
- Imagine your favorite food. Picture it in your mind and imagine how it tastes.
- Describe the flavors and textures. Notice how your body responds to thinking about this food.
- Notice your tongue. Do you taste anything? Is it sweet, sour, bitter, or salty?
- Observe the taste in your mouth without having an opinion about it.
- Now focus your attention on your sense of touch.
- Reach down and touch the ground beneath you with your fingertips. How many sensations do you feel?
- Choose something to touch. How does it feel?
- Analyze its size, its texture, its shape, and its temperature. What else do you notice about how it feels?
- Try not to have an opinion about how the object feels.
- Bring your awareness back to your breath going in and out. When you are ready open your eyes.



Meditation Through Movement - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVcihFqvNJE>

Tai Chi: Here are some Free videos for you to try out.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEOS2zoyQw4>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHBR5MZmEsY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxcNBejxlzs>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwlvTcWR3Gs>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEwqP6RumuA>

How did Tai Chi feel for you? What thoughts came up?

Gratitude and Mindfulness

People that express gratitude:

- Experience less stress and pain relief
- Improve their health overtime
- Alters brain function in depressed individuals



A Simple, yet powerful gratitude exercise:

- Reflect on positive events of the day & the things you are grateful for...

Take in the Good

- Notice: in the moment or in memory
- Enrich: the felt sense in the body
- Absorb: savor 10-20-30 seconds, felt sense in the body
- Repeat: 6 times a day; install in long-term memory?

