

## Mental Health Newsletter

### What is Mindfulness?

**Mindfulness** is the ability to be present and pay attention to your life, with kindness and curiosity. The practice of mindfulness allows one to bring a gentle, accepting attitude to the present moment.

Rather than worrying about what has happened or might happen, mindfulness trains us to respond skillfully to whatever is happening right now, regardless of if it is good or bad. Mindfulness can be done in simple, daily practices, such as: having gratitude, setting intentions, purposeful actions, or taking deep breaths to reset yourself when you feel sudden bursts of emotion.

Mindfulness is not just about your own inner thoughts and feelings, it's also about becoming more aware of others. The ability to put yourself in the shoes of another person brings about the thoughts of wanting to relieve the suffering of others. Being mindful allows for you to be compassionate for others – some believe that this arises from having compassion for yourself.

### Why is Mindfulness important?

Students and families deal with a great deal of stress in their everyday lives and this stress can subsequently inhibit the ability to learn.

Mindfulness can help students and families increase focus and concentration, improve impulse control, and aid in better decision making skills. In the classroom, mindfulness has proven effective in enhancing attention, reducing school related stress, and boosting retention. Mindfulness can help parents and caregivers by promoting happiness and relieving stress.



*"Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different" – James Baraz*



# Mindfulness in the Classroom

Below are some different mindfulness practices that can be implemented either in the classroom or at home.

## Mindfulness Breathing

Deep breathing activities allow you to focus your attention on your own breathing in order to calm the body and reduce stress and anxiety. When we are stressed or worried, we have the tendency to take shallow, quick breaths that only fill up the top of our chest. The goal of deep breathing techniques is to fill up the chest and belly when inhaling and empty them as you exhale. Practicing slow, deep breaths tells your body to slow down and releases tension to help you feel calm.

### Balloon Breath

- Place one hand on your belly and one hand on your chest.
- Take a nice, slow, long inhalation through your nose and pretend you are blowing up a balloon in your belly. Feel your belly expand as you breathe in.
- Hold your breath for a moment and then exhale your breath. Feel your body fall and picture the balloon releasing air.
- Repeat for a few more times, slowly breathing in and out and feeling your body become calm.

### Shoulder Roll

- Take a deep breath in through your nose and roll your shoulders up to your ears as you inhale.
- Release your breath through your mouth and roll your shoulders down as you exhale.
- Repeat slowly in a continuous movement of shoulder rolls, timed with the inhale and exhale of your breath

## Mindful Muscle Relaxation

Muscle relaxation activities allow for you to physically release anxiety. When we activate the relaxation response, we are able to effect the following changes to our body: our heart rate slows down, breathing becomes slower and deeper, blood pressure lowers, our muscles relax, and blood flow to our brain increases. Combining muscle relaxation techniques with deep breathing relieves stress and anxiety.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a classic meditation that teaches you how to relax your muscles using a two-step process.
  - Squeeze your muscles tight and hold for 5-10 seconds.
  - Release your muscle tension and relax your entire body for 5-10 seconds
  - Repeat with each muscle group: face, eyes and lips, neck and shoulders, arms and wrists, hands, chest and stomach, bottom, legs, feet

### Quick Burst Muscle Relaxation

- Breathe in, and tense your entire body, squeezing your whole body tight.
- Hold tension in your body for 5-10 seconds.
- Breathe out and release the tension in your muscles quickly.
- Once you release, completely relax your entire body for 5 seconds before tensing again.
- Repeat 5-10 times

## Mindful Awareness

Do you know what it's like to feel **grounded**? When we *don't* feel grounded, we can feel overwhelmed and have trouble concentrating. This exercise is called "five senses," and provides guidelines on practicing mindfulness quickly in situations where we want to feel **grounded**. This activity can help slow our heartbeats, calm our breathing, and help stop overwhelming feelings.

1. Notice five things that you can **see**.
  - Pick something that you don't normally notice, like a shadow or a small crack in the concrete.
2. Notice four things that you can **feel**.
  - Bring awareness to four things that you are currently feeling, like the texture of your pants, the feeling of the breeze on your skin, or the smooth surface of a table you are resting your hands on.
3. Notice three things you can **hear**.
  - This can be the chirp of a bird, the hum of the refrigerator, or the faint sounds of traffic from a nearby road.
4. Notice two things you can **smell**.
  - These smells can be pleasant or unpleasant. Perhaps the breeze is carrying the scent of pine trees if you're outside, or the smell of a fast food restaurant across the street.
5. Notice one thing you can **taste**.
  - Focus on one thing that you can taste right now, in this moment. You can take a sip of a drink, chew a piece of gum, eat something, or just notice the current taste in your mouth.