

How can mindfulness support K-12 teaching and learning?

The benefits of mindfulness for both students and teachers have led to a growing interest in mindfulness practice within school settings over the last decade. Mindfulness is our ability to bring full attention to our experience in the present moment. However, a Harvard study found that our minds wander 47% of the time, disrupting our ability to remain focused on the present moment. This study also found that a wandering mind tends to be an unhappy mind (i.e. fewer experiences of positive emotions and a reduced sense that life is meaningful, worthwhile, and has purpose). Over time, this can have a negative impact on our resilience, learning, and overall well-being. Yet, recent research has demonstrated that daily mindfulness practice (e.g. focusing on the breath or mindful movement) can change the structure and function of the brain in highly beneficial ways.

THE IMPACTS OF MINDFULNESS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS INCLUDE:

Impact on teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased levels of caring, enhanced relationships with students, and strengthened resilience • Decreased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and teacher burnout
Impact on students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved attention, executive functioning (e.g. planning, problem-solving, self-regulation, etc.), kindness, compassion, empathy, and perspective-taking • Increased academic achievement and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) • Decreased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression

HERE ARE FOUR KEY TIPS FOR TEACHERS LOOKING TO INCLUDE MINDFULNESS IN THE CLASSROOM:

- 1. Begin with yourself.** When teachers commit to a personal mindfulness practice and apply it to their teaching, there is often a positive ripple effect in the classroom. Practicing also provides the embodied experience necessary to teach and lead mindfulness in ways that are sensitive to students' experiences.
- 2. Ensure mindfulness practices are introduced in secular ways.** By introducing research-based mindfulness practices, teaching will be consistent with current scientific understanding and inclusive for all students.
- 3. Offer mindfulness practices that are trauma-sensitive.** Mindfulness practices should be designed to support the safety and stability of students – particularly for students who are experiencing high levels of stress and/or who have a history of trauma.
- 4. Integrate mindfulness into a culturally responsive and inclusive approach to teaching.** With equity at the centre, teachers are more likely to be responsive to the identities, contexts, backgrounds, histories, abilities, and needs of students as they develop their own mindfulness practices.

Cultivating mindfulness is beneficial for both teachers and students. When mindfulness is intentionally embedded in teaching and learning, entire school communities can experience improved well-being including lower levels of teacher stress and burnout, more positive teacher-student relationships, and improved student learning outcomes.

For online resources and references please visit:
www.edcan.ca/facts-on-education

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