

Growing Up Breathing

Building Contemplative, Socio-Emotional, and Preventive Mental Health Education in Spain and Latin America



Project Link (resources):

*<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/10JpnWI7JwrtmtuVMaSNd9PTWNPurKrAQ>

*<https://nirakara.com/mindfulness-en-la-educacion-crecer-respirando>

The Catalyst

***Growing Up Breathing** emerged from a simple yet deeply important question: **What might happen if children had access, from an early age, to tools for developing attention, emotional regulation, self-compassion, and compassion?** Motivated by this question, researchers and educators began exploring how these practices could be integrated into schools to promote socio-emotional development, mental health, wellbeing, and learning. **We believed that all children should have access universally to these skills from an early age.**

How We Got Off the Ground and Kept Going

***2014–2018: Building the foundation.** One of the program’s co-founders received funding from the Spanish Ministry of Education to pursue doctoral research on mindfulness-based interventions in schools. This support enabled the development and evaluation of Growing Up Breathing through a series of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) conducted in schools in Madrid.

***2016–2020: International expansion.** Support from Mind & Life Europe, through the Francisco J. Varela Award, enabled the implementation and evaluation of the program in a school serving children living in conditions of high social vulnerability in Santiago, Chile. This project strengthened international collaborations.

***2019–2026: Development of the Teacher Training Program.** As interest in the program grew, we developed a training pathway for teachers and education professionals.

***Current Status.** Our main challenge is sustaining an active and resilient community of practice that continues to learn, collaborate, and support one another over time.

The Role of Research and Communication

***Research from the beginning.** Growing Up Breathing was built alongside research from its earliest stages. Studies conducted in Spain and Chile found improvements in mindfulness, executive functioning, emotional regulation, prosocial behaviour, mental health, and wellbeing.

***Evidence as an advocacy tool.** Beyond scientific findings, research helped build credibility, address skepticism, and open conversations with schools, educators, families, and institutions.

***Communicating beyond science.** We learned that publishing articles is not enough. Evidence also needs to be translated into accessible language through conferences, teacher training programs, outreach activities, and dialogue with educational communities.

Our Champions

***Our greatest allies have been teachers.** Educators who have personally experienced the benefits of these practices have become the best ambassadors of Growing Up Breathing and have contributed decisively to its expansion. Currently, after seven editions of the Teacher Training Program, more than **150 professionals from Spain and Latin America** have completed the training and are implementing the program in their own educational communities.

***Organizations such as Nirakara and Sukha Mindfulness,** which organize the Teacher Training Program, school leaders committed to educational innovation, researchers interested in evaluating and improving the intervention, and organizations such as Mind & Life Europe and the Contemplative Education Network (CEN), are contributing to generating evidence, training educators, increasing the visibility of the initiative, and facilitating its implementation across different educational contexts.

The Lesson We Want to Leave With You

***Our advice:** Start small, build relationships, generate evidence, invest in teacher development, and create the conditions for a community of practice to emerge and grow.

***Our main takeaway:** Meaningful educational change often begins with small communities of educators, school leaders, researchers, and institutions willing to innovate, learn together, and build trust over time. Scientific evidence helps build credibility, but sustainable change happens when people share ownership of a common vision and work together to bring it to life.