



Curriculum: Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Module: Mindfulness

Level: Elementary

Objective: Students will be able to identify the definition of mindfulness and engage in various techniques for practicing mindfulness in their daily lives.

Course Intent: Provide students with a positive introduction to the topic of mindfulness, along with various exercises to practice and develop their mindfulness skills.

Useful Applications & Benefits: Pre-lesson mindfulness preparation provides improved comprehension for students as well as content retention. Pre-test mindfulness leads to stronger test performance. Calming an active classroom provides teachers with peace of mind and promotes positive classroom culture.

Course Snapshot

This course incorporates the following lessons.

	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Time Required</u>	<u>Resources and Materials Needed</u>
Introductory Lesson: Understanding Mindfulness	Whole group Simon Says game Discussion	15 – 20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson definitions • Optional additional resources
Lesson 2: Class Exercises to Introduce Mindfulness	Whole group	Varies; 10 – 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various resources dependent on activity choice
Lesson 3: Everyday Exercises to Promote Mindfulness	Whole group	Varies; 10 - 15 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm music (optional)

Lesson Rationale:

Research has shown that mindfulness helps students with attention, emotional control, relaxation, and compassion. Frustration and nervousness can hinder a child’s learning process, but mindfulness techniques help to reduce frustration levels and ease nerves. Children who can pause, assess their state of mind and self-regulate are better able to fully focus in a classroom environment. Students who are fully engaged in class have a higher retention rate than students who are distracted by their own intrusive thoughts or feelings.

A student should be conscious of how different situations can affect their mood, both positively and negatively. The student should regularly be asking themselves questions such as, "Why am I



feeling this way? Am I tired? Am I hungry? Am I nervous? Do I need a quick break? Am I ready to start learning?" Self-awareness is key to harnessing the power and effectiveness of mindfulness. A student that is self-reflective and focused on their own thoughts or feelings can make more mindful decisions.

The goal of this module is to provide students with an opportunity to practice being purposeful with their actions, emotions and responses to various social situations. Mindfulness can also help children develop an awareness of their surroundings, their body and their own emotions. Practicing mindfulness can be a valuable tool for students because it is a useful way to connect the mind and body together in a state of peaceful unison.

Establishing a regular practice every day can introduce a routine that aims to combat stress, combat distraction, and provide an activity that students can look forward to. Practicing mindfulness at the beginning of class will benefit the overall productiveness and focus for students when it is time to begin the day's activities.

The class exercises that you will find within this module can be a fun and easy way to introduce the concept of mindfulness in a way that is more engaging than a lecture. Each exercise focuses on being present in the moment in a fun and unique way that will captivate students. The goal of the module is to simply guide the students through the exercises and allow for them become acquainted with a practice they can do on their own, anytime of day.

Introductory Lesson: Understanding Mindfulness

What to Know Before You Begin

Definition

What is the practice of mindfulness and what does it mean to be a mindful individual?

Mindfulness is a state of mind that we can put ourselves into by focusing on being aware of the present moment and focusing on what is happening right now. While we focus, we calmly notice and accept our own feelings, thoughts, and how our entire body feels while we do our best to remain calm.

For Students:



The best way for students to understand mindfulness is through practice. While explaining that the practice of mindfulness is important and students need to understand the benefits of mindfulness, the best way for students to become interested in using mindfulness techniques is to practice it. There are many exercises that can be introduced to the classroom that can intrigue and introduce the mindfulness to students.

Activity

To introduce students to mindfulness, play a quick game of Simon Says. Acting as the leader in Simon Says, ask students to perform specific actions that force them to focus, such as the following that are listed.

- Walk slowly
- Take tiny jumps
- Breathe with your belly
- Breathe through your nose
- Look at your shoes
- Reach as high as you can
- Freeze your body

After ending the game, ask students what they had to do in order to not 'get caught' doing something Simon didn't say, or in other words, how to be successful playing Simon Says. Discuss the idea of paying close attention to the speaker, actively listening and being present or following along to the directions.

Lead the discussion into an explanation of mindfulness, following the definition provided. Ask students what the benefits of staying focused might be. Write down their responses on chart paper or the white board. Typical responses might include that focusing helps to do better on tests, helps to remember information, and helps to not get distracted by other things. As you discuss mindfulness, be sure to include the following key points about mindfulness.

- Helps individuals with attention and focusing
- Develops awareness of self, emotions, and surroundings
- Not religious, but part of a healthy, growing mind and body
- Can be practiced easily throughout the day
- Helps individuals retain information
- Promotes engagement between individuals
- Combats stress



Depending on the age of your students, you may want to include additional resources to help students explore mindfulness, such as storybooks, short video clips or posters. Here is a list of some helpful storybooks.

- I Am Peace: A Book of Mindfulness* by Susan Verde
- A World of Pausabilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness* by Frank J. Sileo, PhD
- Now* by Antionette Portis
- What Does it Mean to be Present?* By Rana DiOro
- Visiting Feelings* by Lauren Rubenstien
- The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers

As a conclusion, practice mindfulness with a simple breathing exercise. Model each movement first, and then ask students to follow. It is extremely helpful to model these actions through thinking aloud for students. Start with relaxed sitting and recognizing any body parts that are tense and relax them. You might model by thinking aloud and saying, "I feel my shoulder muscles are tight, so I am going to relax them." Next, model how you take a regular breath and feel the air enter your belly. Last, model feeling the air enter and exit your nostrils, focusing on each breath. Have students repeat these movements for two or three minutes.

After completing the breathing exercise, ask your students how they feel. Do they feel more relaxed? Do they feel more present in the moment? Do they feel less anxious? Explain to students that mindfulness can be practiced everyday

Fascinating Facts:

Focusing on your breathing is a great way to become mindful. Every time you take a breath in, each one of your cells that make up your body parts takes a breath in as well. When you breathe out, every one of your cells breathes out too. Your entire body follows your lungs. When you control your breathing, you are controlling every single tiny part of your body. Nobody else is controlling you. Remember, you are in control.

Lesson 2: Class Exercises to Introduce Mindfulness

Choose one or more of the following activities to help students practice and recognize mindfulness. Better yet, try them all!

A Breath of Fresh Chocolate

Materials



Bag of Hershey's Kisses, pre-sliced fruit (such as grapes) for students who do not like chocolate, napkins, a timer and calming music (you can find free music on YouTube by searching for calming music, meditation music, relaxing music or a similar phrase)

Teacher Instructions

Play relaxing music for the class and dim the lighting if possible or shut the lights off. Instruct the students that there will be a challenge to see if the entire class can remain still for two minutes. Most classes reach the two-minute mark without any problems.

Give a Hershey's Kiss to each child (be prepared for those who do not like chocolate by preparing another option of pre-sliced fruit).

Instructions to Students

"Ok class, it's time for our teamwork exercise. Place the food in your mouth but do not eat it for two minutes. Close your eyes, and remember; no chewing, don't swallow it until the two minutes is over, just concentrate on the food and your breathing, in complete silence. The entire group needs to be silent, as a team."

"When thoughts pop into your mind, pop them right back out and concentrate back on the food and your breathing. Listen to the breath going into and out of your body."

"Don't allow other thoughts in your mind for just two minutes, just the food in your mouth and the breathing. Together, everyone will be one silent group. This is a group exercise, for all of us to be silent together."

At the completion of the exercise, ask the class some discussion questions.

- What did you notice about this type of breathing?
- How was it different from regular breathing?
- What sensations did you focus on?
- What helped you to stay quiet?

Helpful tips:

Stand next to the children who might pose a problem, students known to be loud.

If much of the class is loud or rowdy, conduct a ten second countdown so the students can prepare mentally for the exercise.



Create engagement with the activity around mindfulness by presenting the exercise as a Top-Secret mission. Whisper while you tell students to enter stealth mode, where they have to be quiet and calm.

Start the very first exercise and stop it right at two minutes. The second session can go longer but aim to recognize and reward a successful first session.

Quiet and Comfortable

Materials

Each student can bring in a stuffed animal or a ball (football/baseball/tennis ball) or any other object that is sentimental or comforting to them. The students will hold their objects in their hands, on their desk, or on their lap.

Teacher instructions

By introducing a familiar and comforting object into the classroom, you are helping to make students feel more at home or relaxed in the classroom.

Play calming music or relaxing music and dim the lighting if possible or shut the lights off.

Most classes reach the two-minute mark without any problems. After the initial session, try extending the time to up to five minutes.

Instructions to Students

“Our challenge is to see if the entire class can remain still for two minutes, while holding your favorite toy or teddy bear. Close your eyes, take slow deep breaths and hold your toy in between your hands, very still. Concentrate on your breathing.”

At the completion of the exercise, ask the class some discussion questions.

- What did you notice about your breathing?
- How did you keep yourself from moving?
- What sensations did you focus on?

Wandering Mindfulness



Materials

None needed

Teacher instructions:

For this exercise, leave the classroom environment as it normally is. Walk around the class slowly and instruct students on controlling their breathing. Walking around allows the students to follow you using their hearing as their primary sense.

Instructions to Students:

“Close your eyes. Let the mind unwind and relax. Slow your breathing and take more intentional breaths. Allow your mind to wander while you focus on slowing down your breathing. As you focus on your breathing, follow the sound of my voice as I move around the classroom. Imagine that I am your mind, wandering around the room.”

As you move about the room, talk slowly and in a calm fashion to help students ease their minds. Provide gentle reminders to breathe, focus, listen, and follow the sound of your voice.

At the completion of the exercise, ask the class some discussion questions.

- How did you keep your mind focused on my voice?
- What did you notice about your breathing?

Lesson 3: Everyday Exercises to Promote Mindfulness

Choose one or more of the following activities to promote mindfulness in the daily lives of students. Better yet, try them all!

Making Sense of Senses

Materials

Calm or relaxing music (optional)

Teacher instructions

For this exercise, students should be instructed to sit in a comfortable position, close their eyes, and begin to take slow, deep breaths.



Instructions to Students

“Take time to focus on what you hear. Only pay attention to what your ears are telling you, nothing else matters except for what you hear. The sounds going into your ears are all that matter.”

“Now take a moment to focus on what you can smell. You might not smell anything at all, but focus on your nose, on the type of air moving in and out of your nose. Is it warm or cold? Is it dry or humid? Only think about the smell that your nose is telling your brain to recognize.”

“Now concentrate on what you feel. Are you relaxed? Are you calm? Are you comfortable? Keep taking slow breaths and enjoy the air as you breathe in and breath out.”

“And finally, slowly, open your eyes and remain quiet, remain calm. Look around you and keep breathing slow, deep breaths. Concentrate on your breathing and do not let what you see distract you from breathing in and breathing out.”

Helpful Tips:

This exercise may require more time than the others so starting it at the beginning of the class is advised.

Body Scan

Materials

Calm or relaxing music (optional)

Teacher Instructions

For this exercise, model deep breathing.

Instruction to students:

“Close your eyes and begin a breathing exercise. Take slow, deep breaths in, and slow deep breaths out. Now think about the muscles in your legs, and tighten them up as much as possible, hold them tight for a second, now let go and release all the tension from your muscles.”

“Now tighten your belly really, tight. Hold for a second, now let go. Take a slow, deep breath in, and let it out. Now tighten your arms and chest, hold it for a second, now let it go. Now tighten your face, bite down on your teeth, close your eyes tight, and tighten up your face, now let go of all the tightness all through your body.”



“Imagine you are doing a scan of your body, start at your toes and work all the way up to the top of your head. Release all the tightness and tension from your body while you breathe.”

Helpful Tips:

Suggest this to students who have a tough time getting to sleep, or that get nervous before going in front of a group. Stretching various muscles is an exercise that anyone can do at any time, discreetly, even in social situations.

Having control over your emotions is part of mindfulness, but your body is the physical tool of your mind. Keeping our muscles responsive can be beneficial to our sense of self-control and mindfulness. Relaxing your muscles can also, in turn, influence your brain.

Quick Quiz:

1. What is mindfulness?
 - A.) The practice of being loud in class
 - B.) The practice of studying for a test
 - C.) The practice of being present in the moment
 - D.) The practice of watching a movie

2. When can you practice mindfulness?
 - A.) At school
 - B.) On the bus
 - C.) Outside
 - D.) All of the above

3. What is the BEST way to learn mindfulness?
 - A.) Reading the dictionary
 - B.) Asking a friend
 - C.) Practicing mindfulness
 - D.) Not thinking about it



Teacher Feedback

Please provide insights on any adjustments made regarding the actual use of the content above. Feel free to share your thoughts, suggestions, constructive criticism. Email your feedback to: info@mylearningtools.org

Module Layout & Design ideas for designer:

<https://annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>