

mindfulness for life

What is mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way – on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally – to the unfolding of experience, moment to moment.” (Kabat-Zinn 1994)

Why practice mindfulness?

Mindfulness, as a practice, has been shown to reduce anxiety, lower psychological distress, and foster a better quality of life in numerous studies since Kabat-Zinn first introduced the idea to mainstream populations in 1994 (Barbosa, et. al. 2013; Rosenzweig, et. al. 2003; De Frias and Whyne 2014). In some of the most significant studies, researchers have found that students, from middle school to college, who practice mindfulness “have lower levels of stress, negative thinking, worry, and other feelings associated with anxiety, and they also have better grades and score higher on tests (Sohrabi et. al. 2013; Senay et. al. 2012; Hall 1999)” (Ahmed, et.al. 2017).

Why practice mindfulness *in middle school*?

Managing stress in our daily lives is a very human thing to do; mindfulness helps us remain “present and empathically responsive to our ever-shifting world” (Rechtschaffen 2016, p. 91). This is of particular interest because “adolescence is a period of unique sensitivity to stress” due to the “significant structural and functional changes” occurring in the prefrontal cortex of the human brain (Broderick 2013, p. 15). Neuroscientists have discovered that this area of the brain is responsible not only for “higher-level cognition,” but also for “emotion processing and regulation” (p. 7). This means that between ages 11-25, the area of the brain responsible for both sophisticated thinking and emotional self-regulation is under major construction, making it simultaneously vulnerable to stress and open to new ways of being. Therefore, the middle school years are pivotal times for building healthy neural pathways that will positively impact students’ sense of personal agency as they journey onward (Rechtschaffen 2016).

How will mindfulness be practiced in the classroom?

from AUTOPILOT to AWARENESS – Bringing nonjudgmental, focused attention to what is happening around and within us is the foundation of our mindfulness practice. Each person’s unique lived experience will inform how we come together as a community. There are four main branches of awareness we will explore:

- ◆ BEING – Students examine who they are as individuals as they enter middle school.
- ◆ BODY – Students discover the many ways they are in relationship with their physical sensations.
- ◆ BRAIN – Students reflect on how their emotional responses affect their thoughts and actions.
- ◆ BREATH – Students harness the breath as a tool for navigating stress and anxiety.

