

# Fostering **Mindfulness**

Building skills that students need to manage their attention, emotions,  
and behavior in classrooms and beyond

Shelley Murphy

© Hawker Brownlow Education



**Hawker Brownlow**  
Education a Solution Tree company

# Contents

## **Introduction** 6

Using This Book 8

Acknowledgments 9

## **Chapter 1: Why Mindfulness Matters in the Classroom** 11

What Is Mindfulness? 11

Common Myths about Mindfulness 12

Self-Regulation and Emotions, Attention, and Behavior 13

Mindfulness and Emotion 13

Mindfulness and Attention 14

Mindfulness and Behavior 15

Mindfulness and a More Compassionate World 16

## **Chapter 2: Getting Started** 17

Key Considerations 17

Start with Your Own Practice 17

Ensure Mindfulness Practice Is Secular 18

Be Trauma-Sensitive 18

Differentiate for Diverse Student Needs 19

Have Reasonable Expectations 19

Treat This Time Differently 20

Give Mindfulness Invitational Status 21

Preparing for Mindfulness 21

The “So What?” 21

The Ready Position 22

Daily Practice 22

Planning and Scheduling Mindfulness 23

Opportunities to Debrief 23

Communication with Parents 24

Resources and Tools 25

Introducing Mindfulness to Students 26

Starter Lesson: Mindful Listening with a Chime 26

Starter Lesson: Defining the Present Moment 28

## **Chapter 3: Mindful Breathing** 32

What Is Mindful Breathing? 32

Tips for Teaching Mindful Breathing 33

Breath Activities 33

Breathing Sphere Activities 34

Pinwheels 35

Birthday Candle Activity 36

Introducing Guided Mindful Breathing	36
Three Deep Breaths	36
Mindful Breathing	37
Thoughts As Clouds	38
Breath Counting	39
Buddy Breathing	40
Snake Breathing	41
Bumblebee Breathing	41
Elephant Breathing	42
Back-to-Back Partner Breathing	42
Square Breathing	43
4-7-8 Breathing	44
Five-Finger Breathing	45

#### **Chapter 4: Mindfulness and the Five Senses 55**

What Is Mindful Sensing?	55
Tips for Teaching Mindful Sensing	56
Introducing Sensory Awareness	56
Tapping Into the Senses	56
Individual Senses	57
Sense of Smell	57
Sense of Hearing	57
Sense of Touch	62
Sense of Taste	63
Sense of Sight	63
All Five Senses	64
Five-Senses Tour	64
Mindful Eating	66

#### **Chapter 5: Mindfulness of Emotions 81**

What Is Mindfulness of Emotions?	81
Tips for Teaching Mindfulness of Emotions	82
Mindfulness and the Brain	82
Reaction vs Response	86
Mindful Responding	86
Recognizing, Naming, and Managing Emotions	87
Emotion and Traits Vocabulary Chart	87
Emotions Graffiti Board	88
Emotion Mapping	88
Worry Box	89
Gratitude Practice	89
Grateful-Heart Mindfulness	90
Gratitude Journal	90
Gratitude Cards	91
Gratitude Tree	91
Loving Kindness	92

#### **Chapter 6: Mindful Movement 107**

What Is Mindful Movement?	107
---------------------------	-----

Tips for Teaching Mindful Movement 107  
Mindful Heartbeat 108  
Mindful Mirroring 109  
Mindful Walking 110  
Mindful Yoga Movement 111

**Chapter 7: Guided Mindfulness 122**

What Is Guided Mindfulness? 122  
    Tips for Teaching Guided Mindfulness 123  
Introduction to Guided Practice 123  
Body Scan 124  
Be the Mountain 127  
Favorite Place 129

**Chapter 8: Mindfulness and the Peace Corner 139**

What Is a Peace Corner? 139  
    Tips for Creating and Using a Peace Corner 140  
Mind Jar 140  
Mindful Coloring 142  
Mindfulness Cootie Catcher 143  
Self-Care in the Peace Corner 143  
    Self-Care Anchor Chart 143  
    Recording Self-Care in the Peace Corner 145

**Resources 157**

Recommended Resources 157  
References 160

**Index 163**

© Hawker Brownlow Education

# Introduction

**“We are constantly invited to be who we are.”**

— Henry David Thoreau

Imagine a third-grade classroom. It is morning and students begin to arrive with the hustle and bustle that typically precedes the start of their school day. Dante skips through the door. He is talking from the moment he enters, providing a running commentary on everything he sees. Dante has a hard time “making thoughts in my head stop,” as he puts it. When we all take our seats, his wide eyes fix on the bell at the front of the class. I can almost see his thoughts easing toward a less obtrusive stream. We are now months into the school year and, as always, each day begins and ends with a brief mindfulness practice. Dante and his classmates know this and ready themselves for the sound of the bell. At its signal, they are invited to participate in a brief mindful breathing exercise that asks them to become increasingly more present through focusing their awareness on their breath.

Most eyes are closed and students’ attention is focused on noticing their own in-breath and out-breath. With hands on bellies, they ride the waves of their own breathing. As I look around the room, I see shoulders gradually dropping, the loosening of tense jaws, and faces softening. Quick and shallow breaths have converted to slower and deeper breathing—a sign that bodies and minds have moved into a more relaxed state. There seems to have been a palpable shift to presence and calm in the room. These few moments have been a welcome and calming refuge for all of us. They are also teaching valuable lessons in how to manage the demands of school and everyday life. After just a few moments, I ring the bell to signal the end of our practice. Students open their eyes and ready themselves for our literacy learning block. And so the day goes.

Dante and the rest of his class have come to expect and look forward to brief mindfulness lessons, activities, and practices as part of their school day. I have noticed, as many of them have, that they are becoming increasingly more able to manage their thoughts, attention, behaviors, and emotional responses. They are less restless and more easily able to deal with classroom stimulation, distraction and conflict. They are kinder to themselves and each other. In general, they are

more focused, less reactive, and more at peace. Parents have noticed this too. Dante and the rest of his classmates will continue to spend a few minutes each day learning how to be more mindfully aware. They are learning how to manage their own thinking, attention, behaviors, and emotions, and are being given the tools to do so.

I first learned about mindfulness in the late '90s, while working as an early career elementary teacher in the heart of San Francisco. I was introduced to a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program (Kabat-Zinn, 2013) started by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor Emeritus of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts. After beginning to reap the personal benefits of mindfulness myself, I was motivated to try a few practices with Dante and the rest of my students. Fast forward a few decades: I continue to have a dedicated daily practice that has positively influenced every aspect of my life. As a mindfulness educator, I teach educators, parents, principals, administrators, teacher educators, graduate students, and teacher candidates how to embody and teach mindfulness practice.

Over the past 25 years, I have witnessed the ever-growing complexity and demands of the profession. As teachers, we are being called upon to support an increasingly diverse student population with varied strengths, challenges, and ways of being, knowing, and learning. The demands placed on our students have also changed. Studies show that today's children are experiencing a rising level of stress and worry that is alarmingly persistent and pervasive. They are also navigating a complex, fast-paced digital world that is a strong competing force for their attention, in the classroom and beyond. This seemingly magnetic pull toward their digital devices and social media, and the levels of stress they are experiencing, act as barriers to engagement, learning, and well-being. Teachers know this and are coming to understand the importance of giving students opportunities to learn how to strengthen their self-regulation skills, social emotional competencies, and ability to manage stress. This learning is as important as literacy and numeracy skills; it is foundational for successful learning and well-being.

Perhaps this is why interest in bringing mindfulness practice into educational settings has grown so rapidly in the last decade. Universities and K-12 schools across the globe are finding ways to incorporate mindfulness programs and practices into their regular schedules. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, where I am a teacher educator in the Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning, has recently introduced opportunities for mindfulness education and practice to our entire community, in order to support mental health and well-being. Schools are responding because there is a mounting depth and breadth of scientific research being published on its benefits.

I have written this book for those of you in the educational field who are interested in deepening your understanding about mindfulness and its role in the classroom. It will help you incorporate simple and effective mindfulness lessons and activities that can help students cultivate the skills they need to support self-regulation, emotional well-being, and learning. Perhaps you will find, as so many of us have, that mindfulness practices encourage children to more mindfully and heartfully respond to their inner and outer experiences of the world and to the experiences of others. Through brief daily activities, students can learn to meet each moment of their school day (and beyond) with greater awareness, attention, and resilience. This ultimately helps prepare them for learning and for life.

## Using This Book

This book will help you build mindfulness skills in the classroom through simple, creative, ready-to-use lessons. Step-by-step lessons can be easily and immediately integrated into your school day and adapted for diverse classrooms. Scripts accompany many of the lessons; they are offered only as suggested guides. They should be modified to fit your particular needs and the diverse needs of your students. Most importantly, they should reflect a depth of understanding that comes from your own practice.

This book is not meant to be used as a prescribed curriculum or program. If you are experienced in bringing mindfulness practices to your students, you may choose to use this book as a way to enhance your already-existing program. In this case you might find it most helpful to jump around through the chapters to sample some of the skill-building exercises that might be new to you and your students, and that apply to your particular setting.

If you are embarking on bringing mindfulness into your classroom for the first time, Chapters 1 to 3 can be used as a somewhat chronological overview. These chapters offer the building blocks for introducing, teaching, and leading mindfulness in your classroom. Once you have laid the foundation for mindfulness, you will find many lessons to choose from in the remaining chapters of the book. Please consider what resonates with you and applies to your setting and your students.

In Chapters 2 through 8, you will find lessons that include step-by-step instructions and guiding scripts. You will find practical reproducible templates and activity sheets, as well as illustrative photos and text written by practicing teachers to share their experiences of implementing particular mindfulness practices into their school day.

**Chapter 1: Why Mindfulness Matters in the Classroom** explores what mindfulness is, presents common myths, and explains the science behind how mindfulness helps support emotion, behavior, and attention regulation.

**Chapter 2: Getting Started** provides suggestions for how to prepare yourself and your learning environment for mindfulness practice. It includes sample letters to parents and two starter lessons for introducing mindfulness to students. These lessons help set the stage for mindful breathing (Chapter 3) and the remaining activities and practices throughout the book.

**Chapter 3: Mindful Breathing** introduces a core mindfulness practice that is foundational to all mindfulness practices. It explains what mindful breathing is and the rationale for students practicing it. It includes various lessons for introducing activities to help your students become aware of and learn about their breath. The remaining activities give you an opportunity to guide your students through various fun and engaging mindful breathing exercises.

**Chapter 4: Mindfulness and the Five Senses** includes various lessons to help students use their senses (smell, hearing, touch, taste, and sight) as anchors for mindfulness practice.

**Chapter 5: Mindfulness of Emotions** introduces mindfulness and the ABCs of the brain, and various lessons and activities to help students learn how to recognize, name, and manage their emotions.

**Chapter 6: Mindful Movement** includes mindful movement games and activities, including yoga, to help students bring awareness to the connection between their bodies and their minds.

Once you and your students are familiar with a particular activity, you may bypass the introductory steps and dive straight into the practice.

**Chapter 7: Guided Mindfulness** includes several guided mindfulness and guided imagery activities to give students opportunities to use their imaginations and awareness to practice focusing their attention and being in the moment.

**Chapter 8: Mindfulness and the Peace Corner** includes suggestions and ideas for how to introduce, set up, and manage a Peace Corner to give students opportunities to engage in practicing self-regulation and self-care.

May the lessons within this book help you foster mindfulness for yourself and for your students in the classroom and beyond.

## Acknowledgments

I have many wonderful people in my life to thank for what I have learned, practiced, and taught, and for helping me to bring this book to life.

I am very grateful to Mary Macchiusi for believing in this book and for being such an amazing support through the various stages of publication. I am indebted to my editor Kat Mototsune for shepherding this work so beautifully from start to finish.

As this book is culled from years of learning experiences and practice, I would like to acknowledge a few of the people whose profound influence shines through its pages. My deepest thanks to Jon Kabat-Zinn, Jack Miller, Thich Nhat Hanh, Jack Kornfield, and Elizabeth Cotton. Thank you to OISE colleagues and students who continue to create an environment that supports inquiry, reflection, and growth. I wish to thank Brenda Stein Dzaldov, Linda Cameron, Clare Kosnik, and Clive Beck for ushering me toward writing this book. Grateful acknowledgment is made to my students, past and present, the most recent of whom are future or practicing teachers. You kindle the flame of my continued learning. A heartfelt thank you to the incredible teachers whose stories from the classroom permeate this book, and to anyone who teaches, leads, and/or practices mindfulness. You help make the world a better place.

I am eternally grateful to the memory of David Booth, who was my mentor, colleague, and dear friend. David championed the Pembroke author in me, and was a pillar in my life and in the lives of so many. A special note of deep gratitude to the memory of Rob Greenhalgh, who was my friend since elementary school and whose influence on my life is indelible. He envisioned this book and inspired me to write it.

I wish to thank Bill Young, a touchstone and wordsmith whose encouragement and feedback through the decades helped me to become a teacher, academic, and writer. Thank you to Susan Hammond, Dana Chapman, Jacqueline Gervais, Monica McGlynn-Stewart, and Bev Swerling for their friendship and encouragement along the way. Thank you also to Sam Gardner for his wit, imagination, and diligent support. A special thank you to Cynthia Somai, whose creative insights and unwavering assistance helped guide this book to completion. It would not have reached its full potential without her.

Without my family this book would not be before you. Thank you to my sister Cheryl for being both a mirror and a window, and for her many insights and discerning editorial feedback. A debt of thanks to my mom Dorothy Murphy, whose endless energy and joy fuel me. Thank you to my twin brother Shawn for his positive nature and affirming encouragement that ground me beyond measure. I thank my sister-in-law Kathy Teed, my brother-in-law Dave Robinson, my nieces

Danielle and Megan Murphy, my nephews Noah, Mason, and Ben Robinson, and the memory of my father James Murphy. My expression of gratitude for their strength, humor, and support could take up another book.

Finally, thank you to Rich Goldstein for being beside me for the writing of this book and for taking the journey with me through life. How much sweeter it all is because of you.

### Illustration Credits

Blamb/Shutterstock.com: Brain, pp. 14, 95, 96.

Eladora/Shutterstock.com: Back-to-back breathing, pp. 42, 51, 52.

Fesleen/Shutterstock.com: Coloring template, p. 152.

Sam Gardner: 4–7–8 Breathing, p. 44; Five-Finger Breathing, pp. 45, 54; Make and Play with Your Mindfulness Cootie Catcher, p. 155.

GlinskajaOlga/Shutterstock.com: Yoga poses, pp. 112–114, 117–121.

Kimazo/Shutterstock.com: Be a Mindful Listener, p. 78.

Vanessa Mauro: Coloring template K–2, p. 153; Student sitting and practicing mindfulness, p. 48.

passengerz/Shutterstock.com: Icons of five senses—touch, taste, hearing, sight, smell, pp. 31, 57–64, 70–75, 79–80.

© Hawker Brownlow Education

# 1

## Why Mindfulness Matters in the Classroom

**“We are what we repeatedly do.”**  
— Aristotle

**Our brains are fantastic time-travel machines. We spend a lot of time thinking about the past and plenty of time thinking and worrying about the future. In other words, we spend a lot of time thinking about what is not happening in the moment.**

### What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is both a way of being in the world and a practice. As a way of being, mindfulness is the quality of presence we bring to everything we do. It describes our innate capacity to pay full and conscious attention to something in the moment. It is the awareness that emerges from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of our experience (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Each of us naturally experiences states of mindfulness. Think of being in nature and hiking to the peak of a beautiful mountain. When you are completely attentive to where you are and what you are experiencing as you make your way to the summit, you are in a state of mindfulness. You may feel the rise and fall of the path beneath your feet or notice the majesty of the trees, the curve of a stream, or the calls of wildlife as you climb. This present awareness is an experience of mindfulness. You are not experiencing mindfulness if you are in the midst of hiking and your mind is elsewhere. The *elsewhere* is often described as “mindlessness” or “being on autopilot.” This is when our bodies are in one place but our thoughts are somewhere else. Many of us have had the experience of driving in a car to get from one place to another and having had very little or no awareness or recollection of what we passed along the way. Our bodies were in the car getting us from point A to point B, but our minds, for the most part, were elsewhere. While we were focused enough on our driving and the environment around us to get to our destinations safely, our attention was being distracted by the endless stream of thoughts in our head.

A recent Harvard study showed that our minds wander 47% of the time (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010). This means we are spending almost half of our waking hours thinking and worrying about something other than what we are actually doing. Our brains are in a default mode of mind wandering and are, in essence, being perpetually hijacked.

**"I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."**

— attributed to Mark Twain

**It is important to be gentle and kind to a wandering mind during mindfulness practice.**

While mindfulness is an innate capacity we all naturally possess, it is also more readily available to us when we practice on a daily basis. In this sense, it is helpful to think of mindfulness as a skill that can be cultivated and strengthened over time through various formal and informal exercises. We recognize the importance of exercising our bodies to help keep them healthy, resilient, and strong. In the same way, our minds require attention and exercise to keep them healthy, resilient, and strong. Think of mindfulness as mental strength training for your students' brains. Like a workout for their bodies, it takes regular practice and some discipline.

Here is how the practice of mindfulness works. Mindfulness practice is often defined as the intentional focusing of our awareness on our thoughts, our feelings, our body sensations, and the surrounding environment without judging them. It typically involves directing attention to a specific focus, often called an *anchor*, such as the breath. I invite you to experiment with this for a moment. Shift your attention away from reading this book to focus solely on your breathing. Close your eyes and just notice your in-breath and your out-breath for one minute. Then come back to reading where you left off.

Chances are, within a very short period of time, your mind was drawn away to thoughts, sounds, or physical sensations. Actually, this is the nature of our minds; it is typical and expected. Despite this, people most often give up on mindfulness practice because they think they are doing it wrong when their minds wander repeatedly. In fact, it is when you realize your mind has wandered and you bring your attention back to your breath that you are experiencing, practicing, and strengthening mindfulness. It is the repeated redirection of the mind back to focusing on the anchor that breaks the conditioned response of distraction. It also strengthens the part of the brain that controls self-regulation and promotes greater resilience and a variety of positive mental and physical outcomes.

## Common Myths about Mindfulness

As mindfulness increases in popularity, misconceptions, myths, and confusions abound. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Myth: *Mindfulness practice is a religion.*** While mindfulness has its roots in many cultures, philosophies, religions, and psychologies, it is a universal practice that is now most widely considered secular or mainstream. Secular mindfulness exercises were brought to the mainstream, in part, through the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn. The mindfulness exercises, lessons, and practices introduced in this book are not connected, in any way, to religious or spiritual practice. They are life-skill practices designed to help students develop habits of mind central to learning, resilience, and well-being.
- **Myth: *Mindfulness is about clearing the mind.*** In fact, it is quite the opposite. In mindfulness practices, we give our students' minds something to focus on. Thoughts will actually come and go, and this is part of the practice. Mindfulness is about becoming a witness to those thoughts without being drawn into them. It is not about making thoughts stop. It is about simply noticing them.
- **Myth: *Mindfulness requires a lot of time.*** Daily practice is important, but it does not take a lot of time from the school day. When you engage your students in as little as 10 minutes a day of regular practice, you are giving