

# Fostering Mindfulness

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

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A Sampler of Reproducibles for Classroom Use

## Communication with Parents

It is a good idea to share with parents your intention to include secular mindfulness practices in the daily classroom schedule. Share your reasons for introducing mindfulness strategies and be prepared to back them up with research. Parents and guardians might have ongoing questions and it is important to share information and begin the conversation from the outset.

### **Introductory Letter to Parents**

Dear Parent/Guardian(s),

I'm excited to share details with you about some of the techniques and strategies being used in our classroom to help support your child's well-being and learning. Part of my promise to my students and to you is to create learning conditions that help your child feel calm, focused, and ready to learn. One very important skill set we are working on is self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to your child's ability to manage their attention, behaviors, and emotions. This set of skills has been shown to be more important than IQ when it comes to predicting a child's ability to do well in school. One of the techniques we have begun to integrate into our day to help teach and strengthen self-regulation is mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is a state of mind that encourages greater awareness of what is happening in the moment. It is a critical life skill. Mindfulness activities are a secular and research-based way to support and strengthen this habit of mind.

Scientific studies have shown regular mindfulness practice helps to improve resilience and academic performance. By beginning and ending each school day with a 2- to 5-minute mindfulness activity, such as focusing on the breath or engaging in mindful movement, your child is improving their ability to

- Focus their attention
- Reduce stress and anxiety
- Ignore distractions and stay on task
- Manage their behaviors and emotions
- Reflect on their thinking
- Formulate a goal and plan actions
- Be more empathetic and compassionate citizens
- Be more present

I have no doubt that your child will be excited to share their experiences with you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.



## Defining the Present Moment

Perhaps the most challenging concept for students to grasp is the notion of the *present* moment. Take a few minutes to have students define and understand what this means. One way to demystify the present is by differentiating it from both the past and the future.

### Tapping into the Present Moment through Your Senses

The present is what is happening right now. Take a few minutes to notice what you are experiencing through each of your senses right now. If you don't notice anything through one or more of your senses, that's okay. Just notice that.



sight

With my eyes, right now I see:



hearing

With my ears, right now I hear:



smell

With my nose, right now I smell:



taste

With my mouth, right now I taste:



touch

With my body, right now I feel:

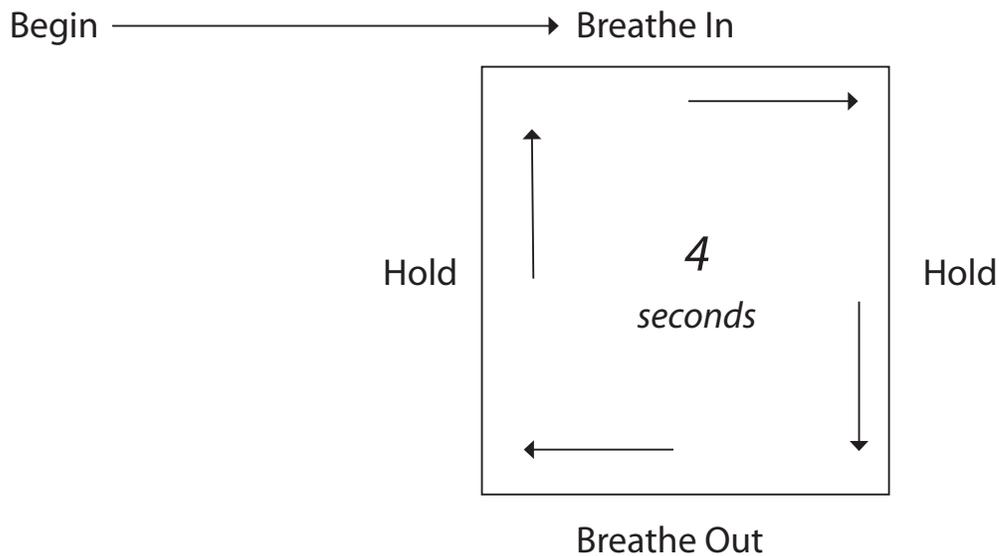


## Introducing Guided Mindful Breathing

Once students have become familiar with and accustomed to noticing their breath, they can be introduced to formal mindful breathing practice. Students can be invited to put one or both hands on their belly to help them notice the rise and fall as they breathe in and breathe out; this often helps them stay focused on their breathing.

### Square Breathing

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



For Square Breathing you can use this box to trace your finger along the lines as you breathe in, hold, breathe out, and hold again. Be sure to start where it says "Begin". What did you notice about your breathing as you tried this exercise? How did it make your mind and your body feel? Use the space below.

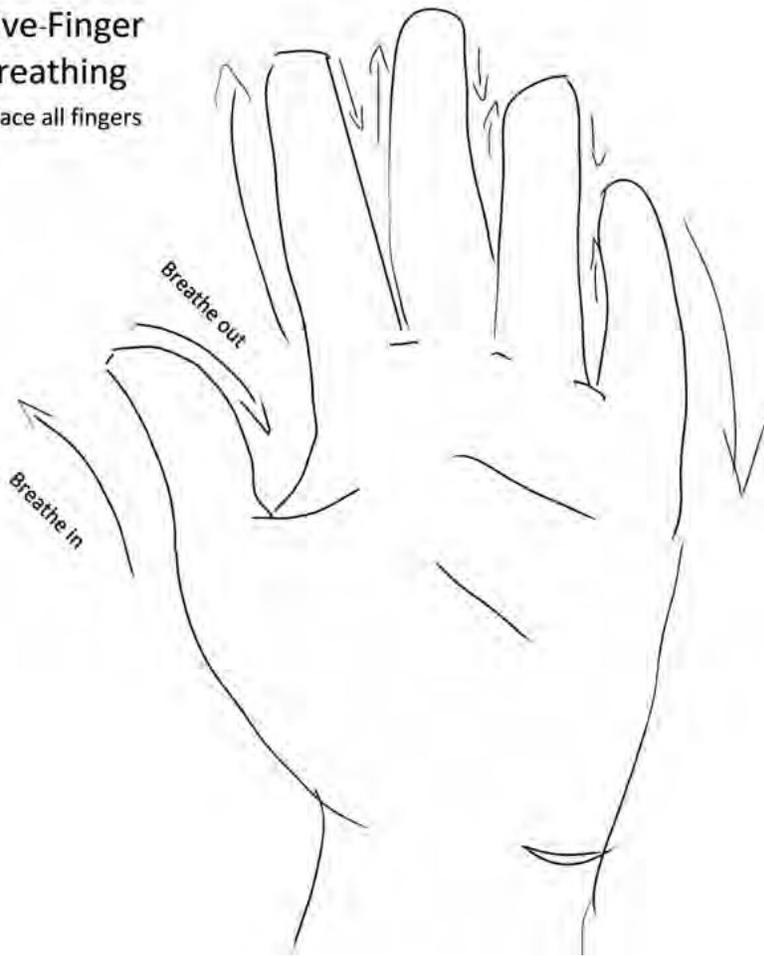


# Five-Finger Breathing

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Five-Finger  
Breathing  
Trace all fingers



What did you notice about your breathing as you tried this exercise? How did it make your mind and your body feel? Use the space below.



## Tapping Into Our Senses

Our senses are the main tool we use to perceive the world. We can invite our students to use their senses to help develop their mindful attention. Taking a tour of the five senses, one by one, helps students to use their senses as an anchor to connect and reconnect with the present moment.

### Tapping into Our Senses: All Grades

#### Page 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



touch

What is one way you used your sense of touch today?



hearing

What did you hear today that you want to remember?



taste

What was the best thing you tasted today?



sight

What did you see today that made you happy?



smell

Describe something that smelled good to you today.



## Mindfulness and the Brain

This lesson helps ensure students understand the difference between their fight-flight-or-freeze (survival) brain and their prefrontal cortex (learning brain). They also learn how mindfulness helps to support each of these parts of their brains, which ultimately supports self-regulation.

### Thinking Brain vs Survival Brain

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Now that you've learned about your Thinking Brain (Prefrontal Cortex) and your Survival Brain (Amygdala), decide which brain is being used in the following scenarios:

1. I saw a snake on the sidewalk and I jumped to the side.

This was my \_\_\_\_\_ brain in action.

2. My friend said something I didn't like, so I took 3 deep breaths and then responded.

This was my \_\_\_\_\_ brain in action.

3. I was angry so I threw my book on the ground.

This was my \_\_\_\_\_ brain in action.

4. I got mad at carpet time so I went into the Peace Corner to calm down.

This was my \_\_\_\_\_ brain in action.

6. A basketball was coming toward my head and I ducked out of the way.

This was my \_\_\_\_\_ brain in action.

7. I had to give a speech in front of the class so I did five-finger breathing so I would be less nervous.

This was my \_\_\_\_\_ brain in action.



# Emotion Mapping

When students can name and locate the difficult feelings they are experiencing, it helps them put the brakes on a negative emotional response. Invite students to write about or illustrate what they are feeling and where they are feeling it in their bodies. It will help them become more attuned to their emotions and better able to manage them.

## Emotion Mapping: Grades 3–6

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

When we learn to name the emotions we are feeling, it helps us to manage them better. We make wiser choices and feel happier. Can you find the words to describe what you are feeling right now?

Calm	Satisfied	Depressed	Scared
Surprised	Cheerful	Upset	Jealous
Proud	Hopeful	Angry	Uncomfortable
Grateful	Optimistic	Furious	Afraid
Excited	Unhappy	Frustrated	Worried
Wonderful	Hurt	Annoyed	Embarrassed
Happy	Disappointed	Disgusted	Nervous
Joyful	Ashamed	Grumpy	
Glad	Awful	Mad	

Take three mindful breaths and tune into your body more closely. Where in your body do you feel this emotion? On the image below, mark where you feel it most. Use the lines to write about what you are feeling and why.

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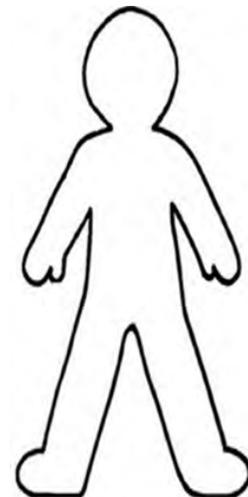
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If you are having a difficult emotion, think of something you can do to help yourself feel better (Five-Finger Breathing, Mindful Coloring, Mindful Movement, etc.). What will you try?



## Mindful Responding

When students engage in mindful awareness, it helps them become aware of their emotions before they reach extremes. This helps to create thoughtful space between impulse and action. This quick activity teaches students about responding more mindfully and thoughtfully, and helps them develop the tools to express and manage their more difficult feelings.

### Mindful Responding

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You can't always control your emotions or how you feel, but you can control how you respond. When you practice mindfulness, you learn how to respond to your emotions more thoughtfully and wisely. Think about how you can respond more wisely the next time you experience a challenging emotion.

When I get into an argument with someone and I feel angry I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel sad about something I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel worried about something in the future I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel disappointed that something didn't work out I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel frustrated that something isn't going my way I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel jealous I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When I feel scared I can \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# Mindful Heartbeat

This introductory mindful movement activity invites students to become aware of their bodies and connect to the present through their heartbeats. They will become aware of their heartbeats both before and after a brief movement exercise. Students who are able to stand/jump can do jumping jacks; students who need to remain seated can do the arm movements.

## Mindful Heartbeat

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You just tried the Mindful Heartbeat activity. You probably noticed there was a difference in how you felt before and after. Use the space below to describe what you noticed.



What did you notice about your heartbeat and your breathing before you exercised your body?

What did you notice about your heartbeat and your breathing after you exercised your body?



# Mind Jar

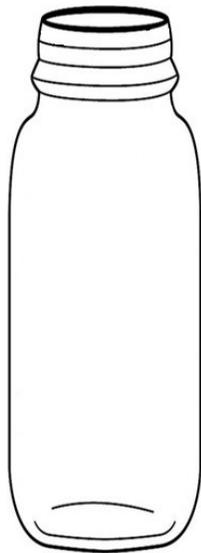
A Mind Jar is an excellent visual metaphor for teaching the passing states of the mind. It is also used by students to help bring awareness to their breath as they watch the falling sparkles and calm their minds. This activity is a student favorite and is especially supportive for students who are visual and tactile learners.

## Mind Jar

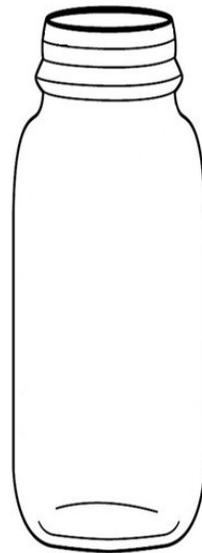
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

In the mind jar below, draw how your mind feels **before** mindfulness



In the mind jar below, draw how your mind feels **after** mindfulness



Write 3–5 words to describe how you feel before mindfulness:

Write 3–5 words to describe how you are feeling after mindfulness:



## Instructions for Using the Mind Jar



1. Begin by letting the sparkles completely settle to the bottom. Now you are ready to begin.



2. Shake the jar so the sparkles are spinning around; this is your busy mind.



3. Put the jar down and watch the sparkles fall as you focus on your breathing.



4. Continue to watch the sparkles slowly fall; as they settle to the bottom, let your mind settle and continue to focus on your breathing at the same time.



5. This is your calm mind.



## The Peace Corner

A Peace Corner is a dedicated space within the classroom. It is a structured space that gives students the opportunity to self-regulate in times of mounting distress; it is a way for students to redirect themselves back to the rhythm of the school day. The goal is for them to notice when they are beginning to feel dysregulated and to self-refer to this space.

### **Self-Care in the Peace Corner**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You just spent some time in the Peace Corner. Good for you for choosing to take care of yourself! What strategy/strategies did you use during your time in the Peace Corner?

How did it help you feel calm and ready to learn again?



***Fostering Mindfulness*** is an essential guide to mindfulness activities and strategies that support the needs of today's students. This timely book shows you how to help students cultivate the skills they need for self-regulation, stress management, and learning. Simple activities and practices throughout the book are designed to strengthen areas of the brain that allow students to better manage their own attention, emotions, and behavior in the classroom and beyond. Child-friendly language is used to explain mindfulness, physiology, and brain science.

This practical book shows you how to incorporate mindfulness in your classroom practice in just minutes a day, and includes definitions, teaching tips, and activities for

- making mindful breathing a core foundational practice
- using the five senses as anchors for mindfulness
- helping students recognize, name, and manage their feelings
- exploring the connection between body and mind through movement
- incorporating practices that encourage students to focus their attention in the present moment
- creating and using a Peace Corner in the classroom that is devoted to self-regulation and self-care
- developing habits of mind that are central to resilience

This comprehensive resource offers step-by-step instructions, scripts, activity sheets, ready-to-use templates, and scientific insights. Based on extensive classroom experience, this highly readable book includes stories from teachers who successfully incorporate mindfulness in their classroom practice.

Ideal for new and experienced teachers, ***Fostering Mindfulness*** is committed to building skills that nurture attention, cognitive and emotional development, and overall well-being.



**Shelley Murphy** has been a mindfulness practitioner and educator for more than 20 years. Shelley is a lecturer at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, where she teaches graduate courses in Mindfulness in Education, Literacy, Special Education, and Mental Health. Her work as a teacher educator, education consultant, and author is informed by her former role as an elementary school teacher and her extensive research in the field. A highly sought-after presenter on fostering student attention and well-being and on incorporating mindfulness-based approaches in classroom settings, Shelley's work has been featured in numerous publications.

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