

Author's note: *Minimal alterations to this document are permitted in the name of making mindfulness accessible to more children, adolescents, teachers and schools. Specifically, you may wish to remove the reference to Buddhism in the last sentence of the third paragraph. If you wish to make any other alterations or have questions or requests please contact Dr. Amy Saltzman at [dramy@stillquietplace.com](mailto:dramy@stillquietplace.com).*

# **Mindfulness: A Guide for Teachers**

**By Dr. Amy Saltzman**

## **What Is Mindfulness?**

This brief document provides a working definition of mindfulness, an overview of the scientific rationale for offering mindfulness to children and adolescents, a review of the professional and personal benefits of practicing mindfulness, specific suggestions for developing your own mindfulness practice (which is a prerequisite to sharing mindfulness with your students), and two examples of practices you can use in your classroom.

While there are many definitions of mindfulness, the definition I use with children and adolescents is: Mindfulness is paying attention to your life, here and now, with kindness and curiosity. One of the primary ironies of modern education is that we ask students to “pay attention” dozens of times a day, yet we never teach them *how*. The practice of mindfulness teaches students how to pay attention, and this way of paying attention enhances both academic and social-emotional learning.

As human beings we have the unique capacity to pay attention to/be aware of our internal and external worlds and the interactions between the two. We can attend to the breath, the body, thoughts, emotions, tastes, smells, sights, sounds, and our impulses and actions and their effects on others and our environment. This ability to pay attention is a natural, innate human capacity. One does not need to be Buddhist to pay attention in this way, any more than one needs to be Italian to enjoy pizza.

## **Why Is Mindfulness Important?**

### **Stress and Learning**

As a classroom teacher, you already know that many of your students are stressed. For some, the stress is simply living in our fast-paced, media-saturated, multi-tasking world. For others, the stress is performing, “succeeding,” and getting into a “good” college. For still others the stress is surviving in extremely challenging, even traumatic, home environments and life circumstances. You have also most likely realized that student stress frequently inhibits their ability to learn, and that the emphasis on academics is neglecting the development of the social-emotional qualities essential for skillful world citizenry.

Students are being diagnosed with depression, anxiety, ADHD, eating disorders, cutting, addictions and other self-destructive behaviors at epidemic rates. Cruelty, bullying and violence are on the rise. Most, if not all, children could benefit from learning to focus their attention, to become less reactive, and to be more compassionate with themselves and others.

Fortunately, science is now documenting the negative impact that stress is having on learning everyday, in classrooms across the country. The neurological processes that explain this interaction are collectively called *executive function*, which includes—

- goal-directed behavior
- planning
- organized search
- impulse control <sup>1</sup>

Not surprisingly the research proves executive function correlates with working memory, emotional regulation, and resilience. <sup>2,3,4</sup>

The data shows that stress and poverty result in lower executive function and working memory in kids.<sup>5</sup> Studies by Soniya Luthar at Columbia University Teachers College show that affluent teens are as stressed, depressed and anxious as their low-income peers.<sup>6</sup> Over 30 years of research with adults has shown that Mindfulness decreases stress, depression, anxiety, and hostility, and enhances executive function, compassion and empathy.<sup>7,8,9,10,11,12</sup> Related studies have shown that self-compassion has academic benefits, especially when dealing with perceived failure.<sup>13</sup>

## **Mindfulness as a Foundation for Learning**

The newly emerging discipline of Mindfulness in K-12 education is actively investigating whether offering mindfulness to children and adolescence enhances attention, executive function, and learning, and promotes pro-social behavior and general well-being. The *preliminary* data are encouraging; below are summaries of four recent studies that demonstrate the benefits of offering mindfulness across the K-12 age spectrum.

In a randomized controlled trial conducted by Maria Napoli, Ph.D., first, second, and third graders who participated in a bi-weekly, 12-session integrative program of mindfulness and relaxation showed significant increases in attention and social skills and decreases in test anxiety and ADHD behaviors.<sup>14</sup>

In studying second and third graders who did Mindfulness Awareness Practices for 30 minutes twice a week for 8 weeks, Lisa Flook, Ph.D. and her colleagues at the Mindfulness Awareness Research Center at UCLA documented that children who began the study with poor executive function had gains in behavioral regulation, meta-cognition, and overall

global executive control. These results indicate Mindfulness Awareness Practice training benefits children with executive function difficulties.<sup>15</sup>

A study conducted by Amy Saltzman, M.D., in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at Stanford, with 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> graders and their parents, showed that after 1 hour of mindfulness training for 8 consecutive weeks the children demonstrated increased ability to orient their attention, as measured by the Attention Network Task, and decreased anxiety.<sup>16</sup>

In research on teaching mindfulness to adolescents conducted by Gina Biegel, MA, MFT, the teens reported reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression and somatic (physical) distress, and increased self-esteem and sleep quality. Independent clinicians documented a higher percentage of diagnostic improvement and significant increases in global assessment of functioning scores in the mindfulness group (vs. the control group). In layperson's terms, this means that adolescents who were initially diagnosed with clinical depression and anxiety were no longer depressed or anxious.<sup>17</sup>

While the results are encouraging, it should be noted the field is young and more research is needed.

## **Personal and Professional Benefits of Developing a Mindfulness Practice**

Before we explore steps for developing your own practice, let's examine the personal and professional benefits of doing so. As an educator, you know that teaching is often extremely stressful. The profession requires that you teach specific academic content. High stakes testing creates additional pressure by emphasizing test scores, and knowing over learning. In the midst of this, you aspire to respond to your students with caring and sensitivity, and to communicate clearly and effectively with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Often you are working in under-funded, under-staffed settings, facing additional budget cuts. Given these stresses, it is essential that you learn to *care for yourself*. In fact, learning to balance the emotional demands of teaching with other professional and personal pressures is central to the teacher's art, and vital to professional longevity.

Data from other caring professions (and teaching is definitely a caring profession with all its attendant joys and challenges) shows that mindfulness training decreases burnout and compassion fatigue and increases empathy and effective communication.<sup>18</sup>

The SMART in Education™ (Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques in Education) program is an 8-week, 36 contact hour accredited teacher renewal program designed for educators and administrators. The program cultivates the skills necessary for educators to become aware of and regulate their thoughts, emotions and behavior so as to more effectively manage stress and improve health and well-being; to reclaim a sense of

wholeness and happiness in one's personal life and relationships, and to rekindle one's motivation to teach and improve classroom instructional quality.

Two randomized field trials of the SMART program are testing the program's feasibility and effects. Compared to teachers in the control group, teachers in the SMART program also reported increased mindfulness, decreased occupational stress, and increased work satisfaction from pre- to post-intervention. At the end of the program, 95% of participants said they would recommend the program to their teacher colleagues and their principal.<sup>19</sup>

A recently published a paper, by Patricia Jennings, Ph.D. and Mark Greenberg Ph.D., outlines how stress reduction and mindfulness programs which support teacher social-emotional competence, enhance the classroom environment, learning, as well as student social-emotional development. Based on their preliminary work, the Department of Education has funded a 1.2 million dollar grant to further investigate these effects.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, practicing mindfulness can decrease your stress and enhance your well-being. This in turn will improve the learning environment in your classroom and make you a more effective teacher. Developing a personal practice can offer significant benefits to you and your students, even if you choose not to share the practices with them in an explicit way. And teaching mindfulness is like teaching anything else: to teach with excellence you must know and be passionate about the subject. Since mindfulness is an experiential discipline, to offer it with integrity, the teaching must come out of your own practice.

## How Do I Practice Mindfulness?

Whether you want to develop a mindfulness practice to enhance your own well-being or in preparation for sharing the practices with students, below are some suggestions on how to do so.

- Read.
  - Schoeberlein, Deborah, **Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfully: A Guide for Anyone Who Teaches Anything** Wisdom Publications, Somerville, MA 2009.
  - Brady, Richard, and Irene McHenry **Tuning In: Mindfulness in Teaching and Learning**, Friends Council on Education, Philadelphia, PA, 2009.
  - Kaiser Greenland, Susan, **The Mindful Child**, Simon and Schuster, NY, NY 2010
  - Biegel, G, **The Stress Reduction Workbook for Teens**, New Harbinger Publications, Oakland, CA, 2009
  - Greco, Laurie, **Acceptance and Mindfulness Treatments for Children and Adolescents**, Oakland, CA, 2008.
- Enroll in a professional training. (Some recommended programs appear below; others can be found at [www.stillquietplace.com](http://www.stillquietplace.com) and [www.mindfuleducation.org](http://www.mindfuleducation.org) )
  - SMART: [www.smart-in-education.org](http://www.smart-in-education.org)

- Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course (especially for those who have a long-time practice in particular tradition): <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/mbsr/> (this link lists programs worldwide)
  - eMindful (If there is no program in your local area, you can participate in an online course): [www.emindful.com](http://www.emindful.com)
  - Center for Contemplative Mind in Society: [www.contemplativemind.org](http://www.contemplativemind.org)
  - CARE Garrison Institute: [http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/programs.php?type=contemplation\\_education&proj=ACT](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/programs.php?type=contemplation_education&proj=ACT)
- **Establish a devoted daily practice**, preferably with weekly support from a local (or online, if necessary) instructor and community.
  - **Maintain your daily practice for a minimum of one year**
  - Participate in at least one silent meditation retreat of 7 days or longer
  - Enroll in an in-person or online training on teaching mindfulness to children or adolescents.
    - [www.stillquietplace.com](http://www.stillquietplace.com)
    - [www.mindfulnessstogether.net](http://www.mindfulnessstogether.net)
    - [www.wellnessworksinschools.com](http://www.wellnessworksinschools.com)
    - [www.stressedteens.com](http://www.stressedteens.com)
  - Devote as much time as you need to in-depth exploration of your intentions, skills and challenges in sharing mindfulness with children.
  - Get additional support or supervision as needed.
  - For those of you who have an established practice in lineages other than MBSR, please be aware that **it is *crucial* that you be able to understand and present the practices in ways that are secular, accessible, inviting and jargon free.** Perhaps the most essential and brilliant aspect of MBSR, as a form, is its ordinary everydayness.
  - Enjoy the journey.

## How Do I Teach Mindfulness In the Classroom?

Mindfulness and awareness are *concepts* many young children, adolescents and adults may have a hard time grasping. However, with guidance, most youth can experience their natural inner stillness and quietness, what I call the Still Quiet Place. Below are two sample practices— an example of how to introduce the Still Quiet Place to students of any age and a practice called *P.E. A. C. E.* to be offered to students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade and above to support them in dealing with difficult situations.

Please be aware the written practices below are **not** intended to be used as scripts to be read to your students. While I can offer experience, language and suggestions, ultimately your teaching *must* come from the depths of your own practice; you must be able to deal skillfully with *whatever* comes up. In any given classroom there will be at least a few children who have lived through one or more of the following: neglect, divorce, illness, death of a family member, emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse, violence in their homes or communities, being uprooted from their homes, and war. Unfortunately, in some classrooms these experiences are the norm. These circumstances require that we stretch our capacity to *respond* to suffering with clarity and compassion. Even with the best intentions we can do harm if we expose a wound that we don't have the skill to attend to.

Again, it is strongly recommended that you discover your own inner stillness and quietness and practice creating P.E.A.C.E. in your own life before you attempt to share these practices with students.

### The Still Quiet Place

The language below is for students in Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and can be adapted for all ages.

*Hi, today I would like to share one of my favorite places with you. It is called Still Quiet Place. It's not a place you travel to in a car, or a train, or a plane. It is a place inside you that you can find just by breathing.*

*Let's find it now. If you feel safe, close your eyes. Whether your eyes are open or closed, take some slow deep breaths. See if you can feel a kind of warm smile in your body. Do you feel it? This is your Still Quiet Place. Take some more deep breaths, and really snuggle in.*

*The best thing about your Still Quiet Place is that it's always inside you. And you can visit it whenever you like. It is nice to visit your Still Quiet Place and feel the love that is there. It is especially helpful to visit your Still Quiet Place if you are feeling angry, or sad, or afraid. The Still Quiet Place is a good place to talk with these feelings, and to make friends with them. When you rest in your Still Quiet Place and talk to your feelings, you may find that the feelings are not as big or as powerful as they seem. Remember you can come here whenever you want, and stay as long as you like.*

To view a brief video of this and other practices go to:  
[http://www.stillquietplace.com/press\\_video.html](http://www.stillquietplace.com/press_video.html)

With minimal adaptation, the concept of Still Quiet Place can be used with students from ages three to 93. Children ages three to seven can simply *experience* the Still Quiet Place and *feel* it in their body-minds. For older children, the language can be more body-focused with less emphasis on the Still Quiet Place as a location. Children ages eight to ten can begin to remember to visit the Still Quiet Place when they are upset, and some may be able to use the practice to allow them to respond to upsetting circumstances. Most children 11 and older can begin to apply the practices of Mindfulness much as adults do; they can be aware of their thoughts, feelings and physical sensations, and then practice *responding* rather than reacting to their life circumstances.

For younger children, a simple 5-15 minute session will help them become familiar with the Still Quiet Place. Typically, a session will include two practices, each followed by a *brief* discussion, and close with a suggestion for home practice. For a single guided practice, a general rule of thumb is that children usually can practice 1 minute per their age in years. (For example, five-year-old children can generally do guided practice for about five minutes.)

With a group of ten or more kindergartners, if each child speaks after each practice, the children may get restless and the experience of the practice may be long gone before it is the last child's turn to speak. Thus, you may want to hear from some of the children after each practice.

### **Practicing P.E.A.C.E.**

Participants begin by attending to the breath and the body, then move on to observing thoughts and emotions. This is a transformative process. When we are aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can choose our behavior, and choosing behavior is how we create our lives. For example, when a student is struggling with a math problem or confronted in the hallway s/he can pause, breathe and then respond to the situation. Below is guided practice to support older students (including us adult learners) in dealing with life's frequent challenges.

*If we remember to use it, mindfulness can help us deal with difficult situations -- from ordinary every day difficulties like losing your cell phone to more extreme difficulties like failing a class, breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend, having a friend go to jail or maybe even going to jail yourself, getting pregnant or grieving a death in your family or community.*

*Mindfulness is much more than just watching the breath. For me, the power and beauty of mindfulness is that using it helps me when things are most difficult.*

*PEACE is an acronym for a practice that can be used in any difficult situation. Perhaps you can begin by practicing with small daily irritations. Those of you dealing with*

*more extreme circumstances may need to repeat the practice many times a day, and you may also want to get additional help from a friend, a parent, a counselor, or a doctor.*

*The practice goes like this.*

*P- P is for pause. When you become aware that things are difficult, pause.*

*E- E is for exhale. When you exhale you may want to let out a sigh, or a groan, or even weep. And after you exhale you want to...Inhale. Just keep breathing.*

*A- A is for acknowledge, accept, allow. As you continue to breathe, acknowledge the situation as it is. Your backpack with all your stuff is gone, your parents are getting divorced, your best friend is now dating the person who just became your ex... Acknowledging a situation doesn't mean you are happy about it. It just means that you recognize the situation is as it is, whether you like it or not.*

*Accept the situation, and your reaction to it. You are furious, devastated, heartbroken, jealous, or all of the above.*

*Allow your experience. Do your best to rest in the Still Quiet Place and watch the thoughts, feelings, and body sensations. Notice when you are tempted to suppress your experience by pretending you are fine, or to create additional drama by rehashing things in your head or with friends. And allow this, too. See if you can discover a middle way: having your thoughts and feelings, without your thoughts and feelings having you and making you act in ways you may regret.*

*C- C is for choose. When you are ready, and this may take a few moments, days, weeks or even months, choose how you will respond. At its best, responding involves some additional Cs.*

- *Clarity: being clear about what you want, what your limits are, what you are responsible for.*
- *Courage: the courage to speak your truth, and to hear the truth of others.*
- *Compassion: compassion for yourself, for others, and for how incredibly difficult it sometimes is to be a human being, and*
- *Comedy: (Actually, I prefer the word humor, but it doesn't start with C.) It is amazing what a sense of humor and a willingness to not take ourselves too seriously can do.*

*E- E is for engage. After you have paused, exhaled, allowed, and chosen your response, you are ready to engage with people, with the situation, with life.*

*Remember, if it is possible, practice with small upsets first. For extreme circumstances you may have to repeat this process over and over and receive additional support. The more you practice, the more PEACE you will have.*



Typically these practices are followed by a discussion or journaling about the following:

- What came up for you during the practice?
- Are there situations in your life where this practice might be helpful?
- Are you willing to practice PEACE when difficulties arise during this coming week?

May you discover your own stillness, quietness, and PEACE, and may you nurture these natural qualities in your students.

## Words from the Children

At the end of every Still Quiet Place mindfulness course, participants are asked to write a brief note to a friend who knows nothing about Mindfulness describing how it feels to rest in the Still Quiet Place, and how they use Mindfulness in daily life. Reflections from children who have completed the course appear below. The comments are taken verbatim from the children's notes, misspellings and all.

- *I think mindfulness has truly helped me become more aware of focusing. I learned to bring my attention back when it wandered which helped me with hard or confusing tests.*
- *It feels sort of strange but peaceful. I can't really tell how I use mindfulness at home, but I do know it helps me when I am mad at my brother.*
- *It helps you concentrate. I use it every time I have a hard test. It brings my attention back to the test and the problem.*
- *When I am sad or kind of in a bad mood I take about 10 breaths and I get relaxed. I also forget about my worries. I learned this from mindfulness. I enjoy coming here because I forget about my troubles and I forget about all the things in my life that is sad. My sadness just fades.*
- *Dear Keith, I am doing this thing called mindfulness. It is a way of understanding and being aware of feelings. One thing you do is go to the Still Quiet Place. It feels relaxing to be there. Mindfulness has helped me before homework because it relaxes me so I do a good job with my homework.*
- *Still quiet place has given me a lot of stress relief. I use mindfulness when I'm upset or stressed out. Mindfulness Rocks! Thank you Dr. Saltzman for introducing this wonderful program to me.*
- *Dear Friend, Mindfulness is a class I am taking at school. It is a time when we breathe and think about our thoughts, about NOW, not the past or the future. When we settle in breathing we go to our "still quiet place". It feels calming in the "still quiet place". I use mindfulness when I am nervous about something.*
- *Dear Invisible Bob, Resting in the Still Quiet Place is very relaxing. It helps you get in touch with your inner self. And find out how you are actually feeling.*
- *Mindfulness is a great class because you can chill out, and relax. It will cool you down and make you less stressed. You should try it if you are mad or sad or just want to feel better. That's what I do. Try it!*

## About the Author

Dr. Amy Saltzman is a holistic physician, mindfulness teacher, scientist, wife, mother, and devoted student of transformation. Her passion is supporting people of all ages in enhancing their well-being and discovering the Still Quiet Place within. She is recognized by her peers as a visionary and pioneer in the fields of holistic medicine and mindfulness in K-12 education.

She is trained in Internal Medicine, a founding diplomate of the American Board of Holistic Medicine, founder and director of the Association for Mindfulness in Education, and a founding member of the Northern California Advisory Committee on Mindfulness. Before establishing a private practice in Menlo Park, she served on the Board of Trustees of the American Holistic Medical Association, and as medical director of the Health and Healing Clinic, at California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco.

She has conducted two research studies evaluating the benefits of teaching mindfulness to child-parent pairs, and to children in low-income elementary schools; these research projects were conducted in collaboration with the Department of Psychology at Stanford University.

Dr. Saltzman offers lectures and courses for schools, parenting organizations, educational and medical conferences. She also provides individual mindfulness instruction and holistic medical care to children, adolescents and adults.

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