



Mindfulness Practice

Facilitator's Manual

Ellen Robertson

for the Métis Settlements Life Skills Journey Program

Introduction to Mindfulness Practice

“Few of us ever live in the present. We are forever anticipating what is to come or remembering what has gone.” - Louis L'Amour

Mindfulness is most simply defined as a way of thinking about what is happening right now. That may sound very easy, but the reality is that our lives are busy these days – many of us struggle to maintain the balance of things like work, family, education, and friendships. Before we go any further, let's think of some common scenarios. Imagine you are driving to work in the middle of the week. You rush out the door and get behind the wheel of your car. You may turn on your stereo to listen to music, sip on your cup of coffee while you drive – before you know it, you are pulling up to your parking space at work. Are there ever days when you can recall nothing about your drive to the office? Do you wonder if you ran a red light, or went through a pedestrian crosswalk without noticing?

Paying attention to the present moment doesn't sound very complicated at first, but take a moment to consider our busy lives. In addition to the absent-minded driving example, think about some other situations. Have you ever left home and had to turn around because you weren't sure if you locked the door or left the stove on? The last time you visited with a loved one, were you fully engaged and listening or do you forget the details of your conversation? These scenarios are also common, and reflect the fact that we often proceed through our day on “auto-pilot”, going through the motions and not really paying attention to what we are doing (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). Our minds wander, and we ruminate about the past or worry about the future rather than focusing on what is happening right now. Mindfulness is a process that can teach us to notice and focus on the present moment.

A Definition of Mindfulness

“Mindfulness isn't difficult, we just need to remember to do it.”
- Sharon Salzberg

Mindfulness is awareness of the present moment, awareness of thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It is a way of paying attention to what's happening right now, without judging ourselves for any thoughts or emotions we are experiencing (Caldwell, Harrison, Adams, Quin, & Greeson, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2003; Palmer & Roger, 2009; Smith et al., 2011).

There are three primary elements involved in mindfulness:

- Attitude - includes compassion, acceptance, trust, patience, curiosity and kindness.
- Attention - refers to focused, sustained attention and the ability to switch attention from one thing to another.
- Intention - refers to a person's dedication towards directing, maintaining, and switching their attention.

**Source: Kabat-Zinn (2005); Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman (2006)*

Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be useful in a number of ways. For many people, the most obvious improvement is better focus and concentration, as well as the ability to notice when we aren't paying attention. Another important part of mindfulness helps us to understand how we analyze situations. While both pleasant and unpleasant experiences arise in everyday life, the impact of these experiences is increased by how we perceive them. By approaching challenges without judgment, we can avoid blowing things out of proportion, and will have the opportunity to reflect before we react. By consciously observing our thoughts, we can understand that they are not necessarily accurate representations of reality. Fear does not necessarily mean that there is real danger, just as feeling like a failure does not mean it is true (Allen et al., 2006; Baer, 2003; Hased, de Lisle, Sullivan, & Pier, 2009).

Mindfulness exercises are meant to be a time in your day for quiet reflection and grounding. The goal is to have an increased awareness of the present moment. Mindfulness can be practised throughout the day and in a variety of activities, even for just a few moments at a time.

It is important to note that mindfulness is best taught by an experienced practitioner, and that anyone instructing adults or children in mindfulness practice should engage in daily practice themselves (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).

What Mindfulness Is Not

Mindfulness should not be mistaken for meditation, as it is not meant to achieve higher consciousness. Mindfulness is not religious, and it is not about emptying your mind of thought or trying to get to a certain mental state. The goal is just to notice the thoughts you are having in the present moment, and not to think about them as "good" or "bad" (Baer, 2003; Gold, Smith, Hopper, Herne, Tansey, & Hulland, 2009).

Why Mindfulness for Children?

“Children have neither past nor future; they enjoy the present, which very few of us do. “ - French essayist, Jean de la Bruyere

Children have little control over the structure of their day. They are told when to go to school, how to do their activities, and what to eat for lunch. They follow a schedule determined by others - the adults in their lives do the planning and organizing, the children do the following and complying. This lack of control can lead kids to go through their day on “auto-pilot”, without really paying attention to what they are doing. When you ask a child for details about the previous day and they cannot remember, it is likely that they were not paying attention rather than that they actually have a poor memory (Burke, 2009; Hooker & Fodor, 2008). With so little ownership of their lives, they may not be learning some important skills that will serve them as adults, like emotional regulation and self-control.

Learning to Pay Attention

Mindfulness can be quite natural for children, even easier than it is for adults to learn. Children come into the world with “beginner’s mind”, which means they are open and curious. It is natural for them to explore their environments, and they are learning new things every day (Hooker & Fodor, 2008).

As they grow older, children start to receive more and more stimulation. They are learning to navigate an increasingly challenging social environment, develop and maintain friendships, and keep up with the pressures of school. We expect them to grow resilient, to pay attention, to learn emotional control, often with no formal instruction. Why shouldn’t they have some time to learn what it really means to pay attention and how to do it?

Effects of Mindfulness

There is growing research suggesting that mindfulness can have positive effects when children have opportunities to learn and practice. Some of these reported effects include:

- Improved focus and attention capacity
- Increased self-awareness
- Increased compassion for others
- Increased likelihood to think and reflect before acting

**Source: Weare (2012)*

Mindfulness is not intended to be used as a form of discipline. For kids, keep the ideas very concrete and the focus on attention – how mindfulness can increase their awareness (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). It starts with attention, but can have some great trickle-down effects too. For children, learning the concept and practice of mindfulness is intended to help them pay attention to their present surroundings and approach them with thoughtfulness. It is through living in the moment that we can achieve this.

“What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in the wintertime. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.” - Crowfoot

A Mindful Attention Exercise – All Ages

The exercise can be introduced using the following script:

Today, we are going to start learning how to be mindful. Being mindful means you are paying close attention to what's happening right now. That means you are aware of the people and things around you. Being mindful can help you notice your feelings. When you notice your feelings, you can learn to help yourself feel better.

This is a great introductory exercise intended to demonstrate how we use different degrees of attention, depending on what we are doing. This basic orientation is intended to increase awareness and sense of the present moment, a key factor in practising mindfulness. Ask the children to sit in a circle. Take a paper cup, half filled with water, and ask the children to carefully pass the cup around the circle. This stage of the activity does not require too much mindful attention. For the next step, fill the cup nearly to the brim so that the children will have to be more careful while they pass it around. For the third stage, turn out the lights and repeat with the almost full cup. The idea is for the children to bring their maximum attention to an action that requires more motor coordination. Encourage the children to pay attention to the movements of their bodies (abdomen, hands, arms, fingers) while they are accepting and passing the cup of water (Greenland, 2010).

Beginning to Practice: Mindful Bodies, Mindful Breath

“If you want to conquer the anxiety of life, live in the moment, live in the breath” - Amit Ray

Preparing for mindfulness practice is especially important when working with children. Having a specific time when mindfulness is to be practiced and giving them certain cues will help them get ready to participate in the exercise. We will get into Mindful Breathing shortly, but first let's talk about the environment for these exercises. Before each practice, encourage children to get settled and ready by getting into their mindful bodies. This means that children are prepared to be still, quiet, and focused. Once they have come to this place, you can use drum beats to signal the beginning of the meditation. This is also used to let children know the exercise is over. Before we get to that, let's talk about how to arrange the environment and help children get into their mindful bodies.

KEY FACTORS

- Placement
- Spacing
- Noise Level
- Presence

How to Set Up for Success

You might think about a busy classroom full of children and wonder how this could possibly work. The arrangement of the room during a practice will help to ensure that the children are getting the most out of it. Placement of their mats can help to direct their attention towards you as you lead them. Have them lay their mats pointing forward, so they are all facing the same direction (circles can lead to distraction). They may choose to sit or lie down during the exercise. When thinking about spacing, you don't want them to be too far apart from one another, as it may make leading the group more challenging – but they also need some space and comfort. Ensure there is enough room between mats so that you can move around them if you need to. Consider the noise level in the room, try to be sure there are minimal distractions. Finally, use your presence during the practice. Silently let the children know you are participating fully in this moment along with them. If there are multiple facilitators, have one person lead the practice, and others can participate. If your group is a bit on the rowdy side, have other facilitators scattered throughout the group to participate in the exercise.

Introducing Mindful Bodies – All Ages

At the beginning of any mindfulness exercise, prompt children to get into their mindful bodies. This means being still, quiet, and attending. It is likely that this will become a habit for them once a routine is established, but reminders may be needed in the beginning.

Feel free to use this prompt at any time throughout the day when you need to get everyone's attention. They can be reminded to get into their mindful bodies, meaning they are paying attention, looking, and listening to your voice.

The first thing that helps us to be mindful is to become very, very still – let's all try that.

What happens once we become very still? It gets very quiet. Now we have still, quiet bodies. These are called our Mindful Bodies. Let's just try sitting in our Mindful Bodies for a minute.

Great job! No, when I remind you to get into your Mindful Bodies, this is what we'll do.

**Source: www.mindfulschools.org*

Settling the Wigglers

There are always going to be instances when children struggle to settle. There may be children in the group who are consistently challenged by this, or maybe others who are just having a tough day. Be sure not to single any child out – instead, address the whole group.

If the whole group is having trouble settling, you could try prompting a brief group stretch and asking them to be still afterwards. This will help to get their attention, and is particularly useful for younger groups. For younger children, you can also use short, simple cues, such as “1, 2, 3, eyes on me” or “quiet mouths, looking eyes, listening ears”.

Roots of Practice: Mindful Breathing

“Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor.” – Thich Nhat Hanh

One of the most fundamental ways to practice mindfulness is through breathing. When we practice mindful breathing, we are training ourselves to pay attention to each breath in that very moment, as we inhale and exhale. Remember that we are not trying to breathe in a certain way, or change how we are breathing – we just want to notice when our mind wanders and gently bring our attention back to the breath.

Mindful breathing can be described as “belly breathing”. Children are encouraged to choose to focus on their nostrils, chest, or abdomen (Burke, 2009; Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010). Because younger children often use diaphragmatic breathing more frequently than adults, this tends to be quite natural for them. Ask them to place one hand on their abdomen to help focus their attention. If you are having trouble getting the group to settle before the breathing exercise, feel free to use any of the mindful attention tips discussed in the previous section.

A Mindful Breathing Exercise – All Ages

Encourage the children to get into their Mindful Bodies.

Time to get into our Mindful Bodies. When you get comfortable, you can either close your eyes or just pick a spot on the floor to look at. Take some big, deep breaths and think about how it feels. You can focus on the breath through your nostrils – paying attention to how the air feels cool coming in and warmer as it leaves your body. Or you can focus on the breath at your belly – feeling it rise and fall as your breath comes in and out. Try your best to pay attention only to your breath. Just focus on the air as it enters and as it leaves, entering and leaving. If your mind wanders, that’s ok. Your job is just to think about your breathing. Tell yourself “great job” for noticing, and then keep watching your breath.

Do you notice it most in the stomach, as your stomach rises and falls with each breath? Or maybe you notice it in the chest as it moves? Or maybe you notice the breath in your nose, as the air goes in and out of the nostrils. Pick one of these spots. Now, close your eyes, and focus your attention on spot that you picked. See if you can notice the different feelings as you breathe in and out.

If you start thinking about other things, that’s ok, just see if you can bring your attention back to your breathing, in and out. When you start thinking about other things, say “thinking, thinking” to yourself. Then put your attention back on your breathing by saying “breathe in, breathe out”. Practice that now.

When you are ready, you can open your eyes. Every time you practice this exercise, you are getting better at focusing on your breathing. Sometimes we have thoughts we don’t want to have, but by thinking about them we can let them go. Sometimes we are thinking about other things when we are supposed to be listening to our teachers or our parents, but if we notice that, we can listen better to other people.

**Source: Adapted from www.mindfulschools.org and actonpurpose.com.au*

Mindfulness of the Body

“To keep the body in good health is a duty, otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear. “ - Buddha

We only get one body in this lifetime, and it requires attention and care to promote wellness and health. By being mindful of our bodies, we can learn to really listen to our bodies and relate our physical sensations to bodily states. We begin by doing a body scan, which helps us to focus on the present sensations of our bodies. The process is meant to bring attention to our body, beginning with our feet and ending at the top of the head. A range of physical feelings, including itches, aches, tingles, pain, heaviness, warmth, or cold, may be noticed, and some of these feelings may come with emotions. The goal of this exercise is not to analyze your body and its sensations, but just to feel and acknowledge them (Stahl & Goldstein, 2010).

The body scan is introduced to children in a very concrete way. They are asked to pay attention to the parts of their bodies as you guide them from toes to head, and to simply notice what they are feeling in that particular area (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). When adults use the body scan, it can have some positive effects (Allen et al., 2006). Many therapists use the body scan as a relaxation technique, but this is a little misleading. Remember, mindfulness may make us calmer but that isn't really the goal of practicing. The goal of the body scan is to train us to be aware of our bodies.

A Mindfulness of the Body Exercise – All Ages

By learning to listen to our bodies, we can start to understand the relationship between our emotions and physical sensations. The Body Scan helps to bring awareness to our bodies, from head to toe.

Let's begin by lying down in a comfortable position on the floor, with your arms resting gently on the ground, and your eyes closed. Feel the weight of your body as it rests on the earth. Feel the earth supporting you. Feel your feet resting firmly on the ground. Pretend that you are an ice cream cone on a hot summer day and simply melt into the ground. Rest your attention only on the sound of my voice. Let all of the other sounds in the room fade away.

I am going to lead you on a scan of your body as a way of getting centered and relaxed – a reminder that you can be at home and at peace in your own body.

Start by settling your attention on your feet. Feel the weight of your feet as they rest on the earth. Notice the position of your feet, the sensations inside the feet, travel along the bottom and tops of your feet to your toes. Just notice what you feel there... Notice each toe and move your attention from toe to toe noticing how they feel. Notice the space between the toes.

Now bring your attention to the tops of your feet and then to your ankles. Bring your attention up your shins and around to your calves. Notice how the backs of your legs feel. Now, bring your attention to your knees, the front of your knees and the back of your knees. Notice how they feel.

Bring your attention to your thighs, the front of your thighs and the back of your thighs. Now move your attention up to your hips and see what sensations you feel there. Notice how your lower back is resting on the earth.

Move your attention to the back body, to the lower back, to the mid back, to your shoulder blades. You may feel stiffness or tension, whatever you encounter, simply notice it.

Keep moving your attention around to the front of your body, to your abdomen and rib cage. Notice how that feels as you inhale and exhale. Slowly move your awareness to your chest, noticing any sensations you find there. Notice the lungs themselves, as you breathe... Does the breath reach into all areas of the lungs? Notice the heart itself, and the sensations and movements within the heart. Notice how it feels...

Move your attention back to the tops of your shoulders. Slowly move your awareness down the upper arms, feeling your elbows, your forearms. Let your attention rest for a moment on your hands – the palms of your hands... the backs of your hands. See if you can feel each separate finger, each fingertip...

Slowly move your attention back up to the top of the hands, back up the arms to your shoulders and neck. Notice your neck and your throat. Notice any tension or tightness... notice the feeling of breath as it passes in and out with ease.

Bring your awareness slowly up to the front of your face. Be aware of what you encounter. Tightness, relaxation, pressure. Turn your attention to your eyes as they gaze inward, and feel the weight of your eyelids as they rest over your eyes... Move your attention to your nose. Notice the feeling of air as it passes through your nostrils. Is it warm or cool? Feel your cheeks and your jaw. Is your jaw clenched or loose? Just notice what you are feeling and continue to breath through these sensations... Feel your mouth, your teeth, your lips, the light pressure of skin on skin, softness, coolness.

Bring your attention to the back of the head, over the curve of your skull, notice your ears as they buffer the sounds of the room. Now, bring your attention to the top of your head and simply feel whatever sensations are there—tingling, pulsing or the absence of sensation.

Now bring your body as a whole into your awareness, and take a moment to scan through your entire body. Allow your breath to become more full, taking a few deep breaths...

Gently and gradually regain awareness of your surroundings. When you feel ready, open your eyes.

**Source: Cheryl Vidger Brause, 2bpresent.co*

Mindful Eating

Our society is becoming increasingly focused on body image, weight gain, and dieting. We are bombarded with “before and after” pictures on social media, and advertising for the latest diet trends. These diets typically offer a quick fix, promising fast weight loss with minimal effort. Rarely does anyone talk about the root of the problem many of us have developed with food - the love-hate, often guilt ridden relationship. Eating nourishes and fuels our bodies. It can be a positive and memorable experience when shared with family and friends. Why has it become a source of so many negative feelings?

When you engage in Mindful Eating it is like any other exercise in mindfulness. Your goal is to bring awareness to the activity in the present moment, in this case, your meal or snack. Let's think about how often you eat without mindfulness, without being present. Mindless eating is often stemming from a lack of awareness of the physical cues our body is putting out when we are hungry or full. Here are a few signs of mindless eating:

- Eating when you are not actually hungry
- Eating past the point of being full
- Eating too quickly without chewing properly
- Not taking the time to taste or enjoy your food
- Feeling guilty about eating foods you have labeled as bad
- Emotional eating

**Source: Stahl & Goldstein (2010)*

This kind of eating often occurs when we are “multi-tasking” – eating while working, watching TV, using social media, talking on the phone. We may often find ourselves rushing through a meal because we are focused on a list of things to do, or because we have ignored our body and let it become too hungry. In contrast, when we engage in mindful eating we are teaching ourselves not only to savour our food, but to bring attention to all the physical cues associated with eating. The following benefits have been reported by people who practice mindful eating:

- Eating more slowly
- Noticing when you start to feel full and when you are satiated, preventing over-eating
- Improved awareness of eating habits
- Improved awareness of urges to eat, why you are experiencing those urges
- Enjoyment of the taste of food

For children, we concentrate on being present while we eat, to be fully aware of what we are eating and the sensations and feelings that arise (Baer, 2003; Hooker & Fodor, 2008; Palmer & Roger, 200; Stahl & Goldstein, 2010).

A Mindful Eating Exercise – All Ages

To begin this exercise, pass around a few raisins, grapes, or fruit pieces to each child and guide them through the following:

Hold this object in your hand. Look at it very carefully, like you have never seen one before. Look at the colours of the object. What does the surface look like? Is it bumpy or smooth? Does the object feel dry or moist? Now explore the object with your eyes and your fingers. What is the texture? Does it have a smell? How heavy is it? Is it moist or dry? When you are ready, place it in your mouth. Feel it with your tongue, and try not to chew yet, just notice how it feels. What do you taste before you bite it? As best you can, keep paying attention to the object and also what you are thinking. Now, gently bite the object. Slowly chew it while paying attention to what you are tasting and feeling. Is it different on the inside different from the outside? Make sure to keep chewing slowly. When you swallow the object, feel it slide down your throat. Follow it all the way down to your tummy. Now bring your attention back to your mouth. Are there different flavours in your mouth now? Do you feel any different than before?

**Source: Adapted from Stahl & Goldstein (2010) and Willard (2010)*

Resources

For continuing education in Mindfulness practice and sample exercises, www.mindfulschools.org is an excellent resource that can offer training for educators.

Allen, N.B., Chambers, R., Knight, W., Blashki, G., Ciechomski, L., Hassed, C., Gullone, E., McNab, C., & Meadows, G. (2006). Mindfulness-based psychotherapies: A review of conceptual foundation, empirical evidence and practical considerations. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 40, 285-294.

Baer, R.A. (2003). Mindfulness training as a clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10 (2), 125-143.

Burke, C. A. (2009). Mindfulness-based approaches with children and adolescents: A preliminary review of current research in an emergent field. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*.

Caldwell, K., Harrison, M., Adams, M., Quin, R.H., & Greeson, J. (2010). Developing mindfulness in college students through movement-based courses: effects on self-regulatory self-efficacy, mood, stress, and sleep quality. *Journal of American College Health*, 58 (5), 433-442.

Gold, E., Smith, A., Hopper, I., Herne, D., Tansey, G., & Hulland, C. (2010). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MSBR) for primary school teachers. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 19, 184-189.

Greenland, S. K. (2010). *The mindful child: How to help your kid manage stress and become happier, kinder, and more compassionate*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Hassed, C., de Lisle, S., Sullivan, G., & Pier, C. (2009). Enhancing the health of medical students: Outcomes of an integrated mindfulness and lifestyle program. *Advances in Health Science Education*, 14, 387-398.

Hooker, K. E. & Fodor, I. E. (2008). Teaching mindfulness to children. *Gestalt Review*, 12 (1), 75-91.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2005). *Wherever you go there you are: mindfulness meditation in everyday life*. New York: Hyperion.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10 (2), 144-156.

Palmer, A. & Roger, S. (2009). Mindfulness, stress, and coping among university students. *Canadian Journal of Counselling*, 43 (3), 198-212.

Schonert-Reichel, K., & Lawlor, M. S. (2010). The Effects of a mindfulness-based education program on pre- and early adolescents' well-being and social and emotional competence.

Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A., & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62*. 373–386.

Stahl, B. & Goldstein, E. (2010). *A mindfulness-based stress reduction workbook*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications Inc.

Weare, K. (2012). Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People. www.mindfulnessinschools.org

Willard, C. (2010). *A child's mind: Mindful practice to help our children be more focused, calm, and relaxed*. Berkeley: Parallax Press, CA.

Life Skills Journey