



Building Blocks of Resilience

Mindfulness Part 1: Benefits and Misconceptions

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is defined as “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 2017). Simply put, mindfulness occurs when one lives in the moment, without distractions or attachments (positive or negative) and with acceptance. There are many mindfulness promoting strategies; some take only a minute or two (“Mindful Moments”). Attending to one’s breath is one way to practice mindfulness.

WHY IS MINDFULNESS IMPORTANT?

Often, a person splits their attention between multiple things, including external demands (e.g., family, friends, pets, work) and intrusive thoughts that pop into their heads. By training the mind to focus on the current moment without judgment, we maximally benefit from undivided attention. Mindfulness is linked to many mental and physical health benefits, including improved blood pressure and sleep. Although multitasking (completing several tasks “at the same time”) is held in high regard, very few people can actually engage in it. Rather, mindfully focusing on one thing at a time may have better results.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS?

Many studies evidence the benefits of mindfulness for families, couples, individuals of all ages (as young as age 2), pregnant women, and people experiencing mental and physical health challenges (e.g., anxiety, pain, difficulty sleeping, and so on). The benefits may be long-lasting because mindfulness practices can be performed anywhere, anytime. For example, you take your breath with you everywhere you go; therefore, breathing practices can be performed before a stressful experience (e.g., interview, exam, meeting) and when feeling frustrated or upset.

IS MINDFULNESS RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

Distractions are everywhere. Often people are overwhelmed with to-do lists, thinking about the past, and worrying about the future. Present moment awareness can be liberating. Mindfulness practices encourage a focused mind on the here and now without judgment or attachment to the past or future, freeing up emotions and energy.

Mindfulness techniques can help if you find yourself distracted, missing details, or wanting higher quality experiences. You can spend as little or as much time as you have practicing.

MINDFULNESS IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE’S EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND DECISION-MAKING

Developmentally, children, adolescents, and young adults need help regulating their emotions and making thoughtful decisions. Their brains are still maturing, and they are primed to act and make emotional decisions. Numerous studies demonstrate the positive effects of mindfulness practices as young as age 2. This means when a person is overcome with emotions – particularly frustration, anger, anxiety, stress, sadness – mindfulness practices can help improve their mood, shift their thinking to something else, and promote positive behaviors.

WHAT ARE MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES?

Mindfulness techniques are practices that cultivate awareness, so you receive the most from every moment. Quiet breathing and centering, focused breathing, poses-standing or seated, guided meditations, and mindful eating are all common mindfulness practices.



DISPELLING MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MINDFULNESS

Common misconceptions and clarifications of what mindfulness is and is not are listed below.

MISCONCEPTION	CLARIFICATION
<i>Mindfulness is NOT</i>	<i>Mindfulness is</i>
A religion	Training in the mind to stay focused
Yoga is mindfulness	Yoga utilizes many mindfulness techniques including breathing techniques and physical practice. Yoga falls under the larger umbrella of mindfulness.
You need to be physically fit and pretzel-like to practice mindful movement and poses	There are many basic poses or movements that can be done at a wall or in a chair and are accessible to most people.
The practices use expensive equipment	These practices are can be completed with little to no new items. It is highly scalable.
Large time commitment	Can be performed for a few minutes to as long as you like
For adults only	People as young as age 2 can use these practices
Whimsical	Research and evidence based – 1000s of studies have documented positive effects including brain changes, improved breathing, increased empathy, stress reduction, and so on
I cannot do it	You can do it! Start with a few minutes and basic practices.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICAL RESOURCES

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2017). What is mindfulness. <https://www.mindful.org/jon-kabat-zinn-defining-mindfulness/>

Roeser, R. W., Galla, B. M., & Baelen, R. N. (2020). Mindfulness in schools: Evidence on the impacts of school-based mindfulness programs on student outcomes in P–12 educational settings. University Park, PA: Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, The Pennsylvania State University. <https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/PSU-Mindfulness-Brief-0223.pdf>

EVIDENCE BASED RESOURCES (SELECTED)

Dariotis, J.K., & Fishbein, D. (in press). *Mindful Yoga (MY) for Grade School Students*. In Tyler Renshaw (Ed.), *Using Mindfulness to Promote Mental Health in Schools*, Oxford University Press.

Dariotis, J. K., Cluxton-Keller, F., Mirabal-Beltran, R., Gould, L. F., Greenberg, M. T., & Mendelson, T. (2016). “The program affects Me’Cause it gives away stress”: Urban students’ qualitative perspectives on stress and a school-based mindful yoga intervention. *Explore*, 12(6), 443-450.

Dariotis, J. K., Mirabal-Beltran, R., Cluxton-Keller, F., Gould, L. F., Greenberg, M. T., & Mendelson, T. (2016). A qualitative evaluation of student learning and skills use in a school-based mindfulness and yoga program. *Mindfulness*, 7(1), 76-89.

Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M.T., Dariotis, J.K., Feagans Gould, L., Rhoades, B., & Leaf, P.J. (2010). Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38,” 985-99.

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