

Mindfulness

CASEL Core Competencies: Self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making skills

State Health Standards: Standard 4, Standard 5, Standard 6

Learner/Participant Objectives: Apply skills to become self-aware leaders in their communities, making thoughtful and unimpulsive decisions.

Content Warnings: There is no definitive religious or spiritual connotation and no underlying agenda other than to simply help calm the mind if participants so that we may have more productive sessions

Facilitator Tips: This activity includes multiple mindful tools that can be used as ice breakers or brain breaks for other sensitive topics and as coping tools beyond the group time. Because scents or eyes closed can be traumatic, you may also consider prompting “if it’s comfortable look downward or maybe close the eyes” and “if there’s a comforting scent, consider smelling that scent...”.

Key Terms: mindfulness, concentration, making better decisions, self-awareness

Time: 5–10 minutes each

Materials needed: Each activity varies

Background: Mindfulness is noticing our thoughts, our sensations and being grounded in the present moment. Becoming aware of our thoughts and external and internal environment can help participants focus, concentrate, and simply make better, more conscious decisions by not allowing every urge and impulse to take precedence.

Resources:

- <http://leftbrainbuddha.com/10-ways-teach-mindfulness-to-kids/>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scqFHGI_nZE

References: <http://kidsrelaxation.com/uncategorized/spider-man-practicing-mindfulness-and-increasing-focus>, Adapted from: Willard, Christopher, 2010, A Child’s Mind: Mindful Practice to Help Our Children Be More Focused, Calm, and Relaxed, Parallax Press,

CASource: <http://blog.atriushealth.org/2013/04/smart-kids-practice-mindful-eating>

List of Mindful Activities

Listen To the Bell

An easy way for children to practice mindfulness is to focus on paying attention to what they can hear. You could use a bell, a set of chimes, or a phone app that has sounds on it. Tell your participants that you will make this sound, and they should listen carefully until they can no longer hear it (which is usually 30 seconds to a minute). This exercise has a calming effect, and it is a fun way to teach participants to pay attention to their surroundings.

Mindful Walks “Noticing Walk”

Stroll through the neighborhood, nearby park or open field and have the participants notice things they haven’t seen before. Designate one minute of the walk to being completely silent and simply attention to all the sounds they can hear—birds, wind, cars, a lawnmower etc. Come back to the room and have the participants write and discuss any new sensations which may have emerged.

Gratitude Practice

Gratitude is a fundamental component of mindfulness, teaching participants to appreciate all that they do have instead of what they do not. Have the participants share one thing they are grateful for after writing their list down on a piece of paper. Let them sit with that for a moment and remind them how fortunate they and we all are to be here, to have family, friends, and food etc.

Meditation

Materials needed: Relaxing sounds on a CD or video, writing utensils, flashcards, screen with audio

Relaxation of the body is important to maintaining wellness. When your body is tense or tired, problems appear to be magnified and decisions can be made without proper thought. Relaxation enhances clear thinking. Brainstorm with the group stressful situations that may make relaxation breaks useful. Come up with multiple quick ways to relax.

- Start by explaining how crucial a clear mind is to decision making, problem solving, and learning throughout the school day. Although we get busy or there are times when our minds are on multiple things, it is important that we take time out of our day to relax and refocus. This time can be as quick as 2 minutes and can be practiced in various methods. Today we will be listening to calming music to reflect and clear our minds.
- Prompt the group to find a comfortable space in the room to sit or lay down with their eyes closed in silence. Provide water or calming scents to relax the Participants.
- Play the relaxing recording and read the prompt softly: Sit back and make yourself comfortable. Allow your eyelids to close. Become conscious of your body's growing relaxation. Imagine yourself as a leaf floating peacefully to Earth. Feel the muscles relaxing in your scalp ... your face ... your neck ... shoulders ... arms ... and hands. Continue floating to Earth. Breathe easily, with each breath becoming relaxed and free of tension. Relax your chest ... stomach ... abdomen. Be calm and comfortable. Let go of all your problems. Continue floating to the ground. Relax your legs and feet. Drift comfortably ... deeper ... deeper ... until you rest gently on the ground. Enjoy the calmness ... enjoy the quiet ... enjoy the peace.
- Allow the recording to finish playing.

- When the Participants arise from reflection, ask them to jot down some things that they thought about, how they felt, empowering words, or other relaxation methods that might be helpful to them.
- Have each Participant display their cards in a space where they may be reminded to take a relaxation break. For example, in a binder or inside their desk or locker.

This activity was adapted from the 2016 Girls Only! Toolkit created from the San Diego County District Attorney's Office and Project Concern International.

Spider-Man Meditation: Practicing Mindfulness and Increasing Focus

Materials needed: Bell, flower, small food item (such as a berry, piece of cereal, or raisin)

- Prompt the group to find a comfortable space in the room to sit or lay down with their eyes closed in silence.
- Read the prompt: One of Spiderman's superpowers was the ability to tune into his senses. Like a spider, he could hear very faint sounds. He was able to pay very close attention to them. When you pay very close attention, you can calm your mind and Jet go of all the loud thoughts in your head that can be distracting. With practice, you can improve your focus and relax right now, right where you are. Right now, we are going to learn to activate your superpowers and tune into your senses, just like Spiderman. These are your Spiderman super senses. What it takes is a little practice. Let's start with your sense of hearing.
- First let's sit down. Close your eyes and place your hands on your knees. I am going to ring a bell. When you hear the bell, pay attention to the ring until you can no longer hear the ringing sound. (Repeat 3 times). Like Spiderman, we have activated your superpower of hearing! Excellent work!
- Next, we are going to activate your superpowers of sight, touch, and smell. I'm going to give each of you a flower. Hold your flower gently in your hand. When I ring the bell, I want you to close your eyes and gently touch the petals. Feel what each petal is like beneath your fingers. Is the petal soft, rough, wet, furry, smooth, or prickly? Pay attention to other things that you may feel. As I ring the bell next, I want you to keep your eyes closed and smell the flower. Is it sweet? Maybe it has very little smell at all? What do you smell? Now, finally, as I ring the bell, I want you to open your eyes and look very closely at the flower. Pay attention to the lines on the petals. What does the center of the flower look like? Is it bumpy? Smooth? Silky? What color is it? Is there powdery pollen in the center? See what details you can notice in the flower, what little shapes, what lines, what circles, if any. (*Ring the bell a final time to signal the end of the activity*).
- The final activation of your Spiderman super senses is to practice your sense of taste. We are going to activate our taste buds! (*Please feel free to use whatever small food you like such as a piece of cereal, a sunflower seed, a raisin, etc ...*). Start

by looking at the berry and using your superpower sight, notice first what the berry looks like. Turn the berry gently between your fingers, feeling what the berry feels like. Next, place the berry in your mouth. Allow the berry to move slowly in your mouth, paying attention to how it feels on your tongue, how the juices in your mouth start to flow. Now slowly begin to chew the berry. See how slowly you can chew it. How does it taste? Sweet? Tart? Sour? Gently swallow the berry, paying attention to the taste that remains in your mouth after you swallow it.

- Now you have activated all your Spiderman super senses! Remember that when you get very quiet and focus, your body and mind can relax and take a break from the day's busy activities. You have the power to activate your Spiderman super senses whenever you want to calm down and focus for a moment.

Mindful Eating Practice

Mindful eating is an experience that engages all five senses. **Remember to look, smell, taste, touch, listen.** By using all your senses, you will appreciate all the characteristics of the food. You are more likely to really taste the bites, eat slower, digest better and enjoy the food more. Mindful eating means that one understands why he or she is eating and the 3 different triggers for eating – hunger, appetite and emotion. Walk the Participants through some scenarios to help grasp these concepts.

Prepare for Exercise – (2 minutes)

Abdominal or Diaphragmatic Breathing: Use the following script to guide yourself and the group through this exercise to prepare for a mindful eating practice.

- Let your body rest comfortably in the chair. Notice your legs and feet. Relax them. Let any tension move out of them. Close your eyes, notice your shoulders, arms, and hands. Let the tension pour out of them. Relax your hands, your arms, let your shoulders sink into a relaxed state. Place a hand on your belly so you can feel the air come in and go out. Now focus on your breath.
- Slowly breathe air into your body. First in through your nose or mouth then fill up your belly (full diaphragm) and feel your belly rise as your lungs fill with air. When your belly is full, slowly exhale: first empty the air from your belly, feel the belly get smaller. Continue to slowly move the air out through your mouth. Repeat the full breathing process one more time. Then slowly open your eyes and prepare to begin the mindful eating activity.

Mindful Eating Practice (3–4 minutes)

- Place the selected food on a plate in front of your Participants (recall the raisin example). Take your Participants through the script below, varying it as you feel appropriate.
- "Look at the (food's name). What is its shape? What size is it? What color is the (food)? What smell do you notice? What sensation do you notice in your mouth as you look at the (food)? What's the feeling in your stomach? Pick up the food slowly.

Hold the (food) in your fingers and look at it in your grasp. What does the (food) feel like in your hand: its texture, temperature?

- Bring the (food) slowly to your lips. Before putting the food to your mouth, pause and be aware of what you are experiencing in your mouth. Slowly open and place the (food) on your tongue for a moment without biting into it. Feel what your mouth wants to do with this (food). Take a few moments before you bite into it. Feel its texture on your tongue and in your mouth. What do you taste?
- Now bite into it noticing what you taste and what it feels like. As you continue to taste, try not to swallow the (food) right away. Does the taste and feeling change as you are chewing? Feel the food going down as you swallow. Refocus on your mouth. Notice your stomach and what it may be feeling. Notice what you are feeling? Now you have finished your exercise.

Adapted from: Willard, Christopher, 2010, A Child's Mind: Mindful Practice to Help Our Children Be More Focused, Calm, and Relaxed, Parallax Press, CA. Source:
<http://blog.atriushealth.org/2013/04/smart-kids-practice-mindful-eating>