

*Calm*

Calm Classrooms Initiative

On-Boarding Package

# Welcome

Welcome and thank you for taking this step towards bringing mindfulness into your classroom. We are so glad you are here. This welcome package is designed to prepare and assist you in introducing mindfulness to your students, classroom and school. We know there is a lot to consider when starting a new initiative as a teacher. Questions like: “how will my students respond to mindfulness? What will their parents think? Can I fit this into an already busy semester? I’m not very calm myself, how can I teach this to my students?” are all natural and normal concerns. The good news is that you’ve already taken the most important step by acknowledging that your students need something more to not only cope with the day to day whirlwind, but to truly find a solid place to stand where their deeper potentials for lifelong joy, connection and fulfillment can take root. Our commitment to you is to be your partner in bringing these tools and resources into your school. Step by step, we are here to support you in nourishing an intelligence of the heart and mind so that your students can flourish. Now, all that is needed is a willingness to practice, time, and a little bit of curiosity to see where mindfulness takes you.

## What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a practice of paying attention to the present moment on purpose with kindness and curiosity. Mindfulness is a non-religious, non-dogmatic practice with roots that can be tied to Eastern contemplative practice. Today, mindfulness is practiced by people all around the world, with many diverse languages, cultures and spiritual beliefs. Mindfulness is a very simple practice. The work of the practice is to bring our attention

to the present moment. While the mind is a great time traveller, planning summer holidays or remembering the birth of a child, the body is only ever right where it is. So, when we practice coming home to the present moment, we use the body as an anchor to what is really happening right here, right now. In this moment, can you feel the sensation of the soles of your feet? Can you notice the feeling in your chest? Can you notice your breathing? By coming home to the body and the senses, we are cultivating an awareness of life as we live it, moment to moment. This is mindfulness.

Mindfulness has both formal and informal practices. Formally, to practice mindfulness, we take time apart from the rush of our day to sit, lie down, or bring focused attention to the tasks of walking and eating. There are core formal mindfulness practices which include, breathing meditation, body scan, mindful movement, mindful walking and mindful eating. These formal practices are where we really build the muscle of focused attention and compassionate insight. The length of formal practice can range from 5min – 1 hour with the potential to go on for much longer periods of uninterrupted silence. Some of the barriers to formal practice include finding the time, falling asleep, discomfort and feeling like you are doing it wrong. All of these barriers are part of the practice. Developing a new skill is challenging and rewarding work. Formal practice asks us to actively work to create time in our days and years to slow down, rest, connect with ourselves and breathe. While the barriers may seem immense, any small step you can take towards developing a regular formal practice will reap great rewards.

Mindfulness can also be practiced informally, amidst the rush and whirl of our days. We practice mindfulness informally when we take a deep breath before the start of classroom period, or when we simply become aware of the sensation of walking as we move between classes, we can notice the colour and taste of our food at lunch hour, and we can take a moment to look into the eyes of a loved one at the end of a hectic the day. These moments of mindfulness are important as well. While we may not

be wearing special clothing, or sitting peacefully on a mountain top, we are still practicing present moment awareness through the demands of a normal day. Informal practice can be an extraordinary way to bring more depth and pleasure to repetitive tasks and as a resource for times when life gets particularly tough. Can I take a breath when I see my exam and realize I studied the wrong content? Can I notice the sensations in my stomach when I say yes to something when really I want to say no? These moments of mindfulness cultivate a stronger relationship with ourselves, our bodies, and our own knowing.

We said that mindfulness is a simple practice. It is simple, but it is not easy. Coming home to ourselves can often be an overwhelming experience; all of our disappointments, fears, and anxieties for the future are faced. The work of turning towards ourselves requires courage as we forge a new, uncharted path of simplicity, kindness and awareness and step away from the well-worn groove of numbing, rushing, and pushing. For this reason, mindfulness is not a neutral, unfeeling practice. In fact, mindfulness could also be heartfulness, because at its core is a kind, compassionate, curious interest in what is happening. Mindfulness turns the loving kindness we would extend to a best friend towards ourselves. Remember to always bring this warm, nurturing attitude into your practice, for it is truly the best part.

## Mindfulness for Kids

The developing mind and heart of a young child and adolescent is very distinct from that of an adult. As much as we adults feel the stress of exposure to violent media, worries about chronic and complex human challenges like climate change, lack of connection to nature, and a general sense of being rushed, developing minds are all the more sensitive to

these stressors. As a teacher, you are well aware of the gifts children bring into the world, they see things with fresh eyes, open hearts, and with an innocence we watch in awe. Even adolescents, as their world expands to include the larger human community, possess a unique sensitivity and passion for the state of the world. This greater openness means that all of the stresses of modern life are actually impacting kids in a much stronger way. Because of this, we need to nourish their developing hearts and minds with moments of stillness, quiet and calm. Mindfulness can become a refuge for kids, a quiet place to return to in all the rush of the outside world, a steady place to stand in all the change and hard work of growing up.

**Common Question:**

*Do any kids in particular benefit from mindfulness practice?*

Mindfulness practice can be applied to many different educational settings. Mindfulness has been used with at risk youth, youth with ADHD, autism, fetal alcohol syndrome, behavioural challenges, and developmental disabilities. The benefits of mindfulness practice can be quite palpable for any young person dealing with greater challenges. Research has shown that regular, formal mindfulness practice develops the pre-frontal cortex of the brain and positively impacts functions such as regulating emotions, decision making and empathy. Mindfulness is a wonderful empowerment tool for youth dealing with big life challenges. Mindfulness increases resilience, flexibility, and cultivates greater compassionate attunement towards oneself, which can often be missing development for high needs kids. If you are working in an education setting where youth and their families are facing complex problems, we encourage you to work with these practices in much the same way. If the practices are shorter, that's ok. If your students don't respond at first, give it time. It will require more patience and openness from you, their teacher, but mindfulness does have the potential to meet youth who need it most.

# The Potential for Change: Mindfulness in the Classroom

What happens when a classroom starts practicing mindfulness together? Well, we've seen a lot happen. We've seen barriers break down between social cliques. We've seen the most unlikely students be the greatest advocates. We've seen a few tears and big sighs of relief. We've seen the tone of the classroom shift, with students become more grateful for one another.

When you begin to practice mindfulness in your classroom on a regular and consistent basis, unexpected and much appreciated positive changes will take root.

A few changes that you can expect to see include:

- o Developing a shared language for self-awareness and self-regulation, an excellent tool for managing difficulty and getting at the heart of behavioural matters.
- o Greater alertness for learning.
- o Skills to focus attention to the task at hand.
- o Greater presence and warmth in the classroom and an ability to respond more skillfully to the needs of individual students and the larger group.

# Teaching Mindfulness

Teachers know how crucial it is to model the behaviour you are asking for from your students. In much the same way, developing a personal mindfulness practice is the best place to start in bringing mindfulness to your classroom. We encourage you to review our 7 days of Calm program which is a collection of 7 brief meditations, to offer you an introductory level understanding of mindfulness practice. It will help you articulate the practice to your classroom and who knows, it may also inspire you to go deeper into your own practice.

## **Common Question:**

*I've never practiced mindfulness before, can I really teach it?*

Yes, we have developed the audio practices so that you can also be a beginner right alongside your students. That said, we both know how important it is to understand, master and model the subject you are teaching. To that end, we recommend you take some time to read some of the resources we have provided at the end of this welcome package and to try the 7 days of Calm audio program developed for adults.

## Getting Started

With a deep breath, let's begin.

Start by giving yourself some time to thoughtfully prepare and create a space in your classroom for mindfulness practice. Here are some reflective questions and tips to help guide you through the process:

*What routine will I establish with mindfulness practice in my classroom?*

TIPS:

- o Find a time of day where your students are most likely to succeed, a time when they are rested, fed, alert and more focused.
- o Be consistent once you start, daily practice is best, but whatever rhythm you establish do your best to stick with it.
- o Consider any technological needs you have to play the audio mindfulness practices with enough volume so everyone can hear.
- o Signal the shift to mindfulness practice by turning off the lights and closing the door. If you like, you may choose to ring a bell as well.

*What considerations do I need to make to have uninterrupted time before, during and after the practice (20 min total)?*

TIPS:

- o Ask students to refrain from leaving the room during the practice.
- o Set up a routine that they use the washroom either before or after mindfulness practice.
- o Turn cell phones off or to silent.
- o Clear desks from other distractions.
- o Schedule the practice outside of regular PA announcements.

*Are there any student needs I should consider?*

TIPS:

- o Creatively separate students who may be disruptive
- o Consider any histories of trauma, abuse, neglect and monitor their engagement with the practices

Once you've taken the time to prepare yourself and your classroom, you can introduce your students to the practice. We would recommend letting students know a week in advance, the rhythm you have planned for mindfulness practice the following week. So for example, let your students know that next week, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday after the morning bell, we'll be starting our class with a mindfulness practice. Remind students before they go home for the weekend that next week will be a special week, with new mindfulness practices. Then, follow through on what you promised. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday, as planned, play the Calm audio meditations. Start with the Intro session we've designed for your classroom demographic. The audio sessions will walk your students all the way through the practice, starting with an introduction to what mindfulness is and then into a first practice. Feel free to review it with your class as many times as you like before moving on to the other sessions we offer.

Make sure you give students time to come out of the practice slowly. You may wish to go around the room afterwards and ask students "what did you notice?" about the practice. This kind of open question is preferable to "did you like it?" which will elicit attitudes of preference. In the beginning, encourage curiosity and openness. If a student responds negatively to the practice, welcome their feedback. There may be substantial information for you to consider like "it was too cold!" in which case you could consider

how to make the room more comfortable, or it may be reactive or evaluative “I was bad at it” or “nothing happened!”. For these reflections, do your best to remain neutral and kind. You can say something like “thank you for sharing” or “that’s interesting, you noticed judgmental thoughts”. For now, it is enough to simply acknowledge their experience and drop any expectations that they need to feel or be a certain way.

## Best Practices

- o Practice regularly. The more frequently you can practice, the better, once a day would be ideal. Whatever rhythm you set up to work for your classroom though, do your best to stick with it. Over time this will become the new normal, you may even find students reminding you if you forget.
- o Keep it playful and fun. Engage in these sessions in a relaxed way so there is less resistance.
- o Encourage patience and acceptance, reiterating frequently that this takes time and there’s no pressure to be perfect. In mindfulness practice, there is no right or wrong.
- o Offer support. Remind them they are doing a great job. Congratulate them for doing their best.
- o Use this practice as a connecting tool. After meditating, open a discussion to learn about the kids experience and inspire discussion. Mindfulness practice is a very opening practice that can bring up emotion, insights and create connection.

# Resources for Further Reading

Mindsight by Daniel Siegel

The Mindful Child by Susan Kaiser Greenland

<http://www.stressedteens.com>

## A Final Word

Wherever you are in your journey to bringing mindfulness into your classroom is ok. You may be a seasoned practitioner who feels quite confident about introducing these skills; that's wonderful. Or you may be new and unsure, weary of how the practices will land and if they will have any benefits. That's ok too. Let's turn our mindfulness practice towards ourselves and acknowledge whatever is arising as we take this new step. Be it excitement, nervousness, hesitation, or mistrust, they are all welcome and all perfectly understandable. Just like in mindfulness practice, if we can focus our attention to each small step there is to take in the process of beginning, we are more likely to feel supported, connected and strengthened. Remember that we are here as your partner in this endeavour. If you need assistance, just reach out.

Over the coming year, we will be steadily adding to our Calm Kids library, in order to equip you with an ever-expanding supply of mindfulness education content. We look forward to the journey ahead.