

# STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



“The basis of emotional intelligence is this capacity to be aware of what we’re doing and how we’re doing and to make a mid-course correction.”

Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence

## MINDFULNESS IMPROVES MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

School mindfulness programs have been shown to improve working memory, attention, academic skills, social skills, emotional regulation and self-esteem, as well as self-reported improvements in mood and decreases in anxiety, stress and fatigue.<sup>4</sup>

Mindfulness trains students to be aware of their thoughts and emotions. It creates space to manage their emotions, to cope with their situation, and to behave in a pro-social manner.

Mindfulness improves students’ ability to self-regulate and helps them develop social and emotional well-being and good habits of mind.

## MINDFULNESS PROVIDES DEEP SEL

There is clear evidence explicit social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction improves academic outcomes<sup>1</sup> and is ideal for class-wide student engagement.

Mindfulness provides SEL in a particularly powerful way. It improves attention and allows students to develop a meta-awareness of their thoughts and emotions. This gives them deep self-awareness and self-regulation, allowing them to recognize emotions in the moment and to make the kind of “mid-course correction” noted by Daniel Goleman in his seminal book Emotional Intelligence.

As noted in *Supporting Minds*<sup>1</sup>, “the ability to self-regulate, or to set limits for oneself, allows a child to develop the emotional well-being and the habits of mind, such as persistence and curiosity, that are essential for early learning and that set the stage for lifelong learning.”

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<sup>1</sup> Gov’t of Ontario, *Supporting Minds – An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being*, Draft Version 2013, p.18

## MINDFULNESS REDUCES MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Mindfulness programs have been shown to improve a wide range of mental health problems directly, and to decrease many of the risk factors and increase many of the protective factors. The following is a list of the mental health problems identified in *Supporting Minds*<sup>1</sup>:

### ANXIETY AND STRESS

Student mindfulness programs have been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and fatigue.<sup>3</sup>

### DEPRESSION AND MOOD PROBLEMS

Student mindfulness programs have been shown to reduce depression<sup>2</sup> and improve mood.<sup>3</sup> They also improve emotional regulation and self-esteem.

### ATTENTION AND HYPERACTIVITY

Mindfulness is particularly well-suited to improve attention, as the essence of mindfulness is paying attention. It has also been shown to help ADHD in adolescents.<sup>4</sup>

### BEHAVIOUR PROBLEMS

UBC researchers found a 24% gain in positive social behaviors as a result of MindUP, a K-8, 15-lesson mindfulness program.<sup>4</sup> Over 3,500 teachers in BC have been trained in MindUP.

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<sup>2</sup> Kuyken et al, "Effectiveness of the Mindfulness in Schools Programme: non-randomized controlled feasibility study," *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 20 June 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Meiklejohn et al, "Integrating Mindfulness Training into K-12 Education: Fostering the Resilience of Teachers and Students", *Mindfulness*, March 2012, Springer (meta-analysis of youth mindfulness studies)

<sup>4</sup> Schonert-Reichl et al, "Enhancing Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development Through a Simple-to-Administer School Program," under review.

### GAMBLING

Coping skills are a protective factor that is strengthened through mindfulness.

### EATING AND WEIGHT PROBLEMS

Low self-esteem and obsessive tendencies are risk factors that are addressed by mindfulness training.

### SUBSTANCE USE

Stress is one cause of substance abuse that is reduced through mindfulness. Resilience is a protective factor that is strengthened.

### SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE

Mindfulness has been shown to reduce suicidal thoughts and self-harming thoughts and behaviours in grade 6 students.<sup>5</sup>



**Discover Mindfulness** is an Ontario-based, non-profit whose mission is to be a hub for information and a catalyst for the integration of mindfulness into education as a means to overall well-being for educators, students, families and society.

For more information, please contact [info@discovermindfulness.ca](mailto:info@discovermindfulness.ca).

To see the detailed studies, please visit [discovermindfulness.ca/evidence](http://discovermindfulness.ca/evidence).

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<sup>5</sup> Britton WB, Lepp NE, Niles HF, et al. A randomized controlled pilot trial of classroom-based mindfulness meditation compared to an active control condition in sixth-grade children. *Journal of School Psychology*. 2014;52(3):263–278