

MINDFULNESS FOR MIDDLE & SECONDARY SCHOOLS



“School reform is doomed to failure until it faces the reality of kids as they come: stressed-out, overwrought, and inattentive to work.” – Jerome Murphy, Dean Emeritus, Harvard Graduate School of Education

MINDFULNESS PROTECTS TEENS

Many middle and high school students today suffer from stress, depression, anxiety, and an inability to focus, and often have trouble sleeping and regulating their emotions. These can be obstacles to academic and personal success and potentially set the stage for more severe mental health issues later in life.

Mindfulness helps protect teens from the multiple stressors they face in school. It helps achieve the Ministry of Education’s well-being goal that students “develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.”¹

¹ Ministry of Education, April 2014, Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario, page 3.

MINDFULNESS PROVIDES DEEP SEL

There is clear evidence that explicit social and emotional learning (SEL) instruction improves academic outcomes² and is suitable for class-wide student engagement. Class-wide programs mean there’s no stigma to participating.

Mindfulness provides SEL in a particularly powerful way. It improves attention and allows students to develop a meta-awareness of their thoughts and emotions.

“Over a third of Grade 9-12 students reported that they were under a lot of stress (38%) and also reported they were nervous or anxious (34%) ‘often’ or ‘all of the time.’ ”

– Toronto DSB, 2013 Student Survey

² Gov’t of Ontario, *Supporting Minds – An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being*, Draft Version 2013, p.18

BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS

Training in mindfulness awareness “allows students to relate to their internal and external experiences in ways that are present-centered, objective, and responsive, rather than in ways that are past or future-focused, subjective, or reactive.”³ It actually changes brain structure and results in many benefits, including the following:

Decreased Stress and Depression

Mindfulness is well established as a way to reduce stress and prevent depression. A recent study of 500 students aged 12-16 showed significantly less stress and symptoms of depression and significantly greater well-being compared to students who hadn’t had mindfulness training.⁴

Emotional Regulation

Through continued and impartial observation, mindfulness techniques allow students to develop emotional literacy and regulation.⁵ As University of Toronto researcher Rimma Teper describes it: “This sort of attentive and open stance towards one’s own emotions and thoughts allows the individual to still experience emotion, but also to detect emotions early on and stop them from spiraling out of control.”⁶

Improved Behaviour and Social Skills

Mindfulness training has been shown to improve students’ social skills and behaviour, and to reduce interpersonal problems.⁷ Mindfulness helps create the pause between a stimulus and a response that allows a student to choose positive social interaction rather than problem behaviour.

³ Meiklejohn, J. et al. (2012), Integrating Mindfulness Training into K-12 Education: Fostering the Resilience of Teachers and Students. *Mindfulness*, 1(1), 291-307 (meta-analysis)

⁴ Kuyken et al. (2013) Effectiveness of the Mindfulness in Schools Programme: Non-randomised controlled feasibility study. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 126-131.

⁵ Meiklejohn et al., supra.

⁶ Nauman, E. (2014). “How Does Mindfulness Improve Self-Control?” Greater Good Science Centre, UC Berkeley.

⁷ Meiklejohn et al., supra.

Reduced Fatigue

Mindfulness training has been shown to improve middle and high school students’ sleep quality and help reduce tiredness.⁸

Mood and Self-Esteem

Mindfulness can increase feelings of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance,⁹ and produce feelings of significantly greater well-being.¹⁰

Academic Skills

School mindfulness programs have been shown to improve working memory, attention, and concentration, and to reduce test anxiety.¹¹ These will almost certainly result in improved academic performance for middle and high school students, in the same way mindfulness training resulted in a 15% gain in math achievement for grade 4 and 5 students, after just 15 mindfulness lessons.¹²

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.

To see other Fact Sheets, please go to discovermindfulness.ca/tool-kit.

To see the detailed studies, please visit discovermindfulness.ca/evidence.

⁸ Meiklejohn et al., supra.

⁹ Meiklejohn et al., supra.

¹⁰ Kuyken et al, supra.

¹¹ Meiklejohn et al., supra.

¹² Schonert-Reichl et al (2015), Enhancing Cognitive and Social-Emotional Development Through a Simple-to-Administer Mindfulness-Based School Program for Elementary School Children: A Randomized Controlled Trial, *Development Psychology*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 52–66.