
Mindful Schools

Engaging Children. Supporting Educators. Transforming Schools.

Mindfulness Teacher Manual

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Teaching Tips

Make it Your Own

This curriculum is kid tested, teacher approved! It is a great tool. But, also make it your own. Use it as a crutch while you get familiar with it and as you first start teaching. But as you get comfortable, feel free to bring in your own style and ideas. Students will respond to your natural flow and authenticity.

You are what makes this program successful. There is great beauty in seeing each individual bring their own magic to teaching. Get comfortable with the curriculum, be well grounded in your own mindfulness practice, come in with a mindful presence and good intentions, and then go with the flow. Be consistent as mentioned above, but let your own creativity and wisdom shine through.

Greetings

For Students

Let them know how you feel. One of our teachers always greets his classes saying, “I’m so happy to be here/see you today”. They are very responsive to love and kindness. This kind of greeting disarms all ages.

For Teachers

Introduce yourselves to the teachers on your way in on the first day. Continue to acknowledge them as you arrive each day. This encourages the partnership we are participating in with them.

Mindful Bodies Discussion

Although you encourage them to keep their back straight, you don’t want them to be rigid. The straight back is more a by-product of stillness and quiet. A flower that is watered, not wilted, is a good image. Or, a tree is that is well rooted and reaching for the sun.

If students are at their desks, have them all move their chairs away from their desks and turn them toward the front of the room. Explain that they can do this each time you come in. Remind them each time until it is a habit.

We often tell adults to put their feet on the ground. Remember that most students’ feet won’t reach the ground.

Some teachers use the directive “criss-cross applesauce” to have the students sit cross legged. Try not to use this and instead create a different association with a the posture by calling it “mindful bodies” or “mindful posture”.

Eyes Open or Closed?

Ideally, students will all close their eyes during formal “mindful minutes”. However, don’t force this. Some students will not feel safe with their eyes closed. Find a balance between encouraging or even challenging everyone to have their eyes closed and trusting that students are doing what is safe and

comfortable for themselves. To avoid distraction, students may want to cover their eyes with their hand or just look down.

It is important that *you* demonstrate eyes-closed, but you don't want to keep them closed the whole time if students are doing a minute or more of mindful breathing or mindful listening. Start with the students and then periodically open your eyes to see how they are doing.

Check In

Always ask if anyone has used mindfulness in last couple days. Specifically ask about the most recent lesson they learned. Let a couple/few share. This is useful for the other kids to hear and insightful for you.

Classroom Dynamic

If the first day was hard, try changing the dynamic in the room by having them turn their chairs toward the front or bringing them to the floor.

A circle will often cause distractions because they are looking at each other, but it can also be a great way to create intimacy. If a circle causes silliness, have them all face forward so they only see the backs of each other.

Silent Communication

If you want to get feedback from the class, but want to avoid everyone talking at once, try silent ways of communicating.

Thumbs up/Thumbs down

Use thumbs up/thumbs down for “yes” and “no”. A sideways thumb can be “maybe” or “kind-of”.

Mindful Hello/Good-Bye

Once students know you, they will likely be very excited to see you, even in the halls and on the playground. For that reason, and also to encourage mindfulness, you can develop a Mindful Hello and Good-Bye with them. A quiet wave with a hand or just a finger is great.

Time Challenge

Students often respond to the proposal of a challenge. If they were able to sit mindfully for one minute, suggest a time-challenge of two minutes. Increase the time by what you think they can accomplish, but will also be a challenge. Try setting the bar high - often they are capable of more than we might think.

Journals

The journal questions listed are for 2nd grade and up. K and 1st can draw pictures. Spanish speaking students can journal in Spanish. Keep the word “Mindfulness” in English.

I Noticed

Comment on what *you* notice. This is being mindful for them.

“I noticed some of you stayed quiet even when something was funny, loud...” etc. If there are giggles during silence, just acknowledge the silence that had occurred and moved in that direction. “What I really liked is that you stayed quiet even after the bell.”

Fidgeters

Students often don’t realize that they are bouncing a leg, or knocking on their desk, or rustling a paper. You can make them aware without singling them out by suggesting to the entire class, “Let your whole body become very still. Notice how your feet feel and let them become still. Notice how your hands and fingers feel, and let them become still.”

Also, periodically emphasize the importance of remaining quiet even if they don’t want to do the exercise, so those who do can really focus.

Please note, kids that move may be just as engaged as the others. They just sincerely might not be able to sit still. There’s no need to demand stillness. Often, over time, restlessness will lessen in students.

Rowdy Rooms

Disruptions

If a class has a few tough kids, you can comment indirectly. “Notice if you might be disrupting your classmates who are trying to focus. What can you do to support your classmates?”

Time to Leave

Sometimes when the room is rowdy and not settling down regardless of what you try, you can say, “You know, today just might not be a day for mindfulness. You all are having a hard time settling down, so I’m going to leave today. Maybe next time it will be easier.” Be mindful that your own feelings are accepting and neutral rather than frustrated. Then when you return saying, “I know last time we had a hard time.” Assess if you need to give any reminders or are they willing and ready to go again.

Simon Says

For a rowdy, restless class – explain less, do more, Simon-says style. This is especially useful in K-2 classes. For example, if you have lost their attention, say, “Everyone put one hand in the air, now both hands, put one hand on your belly, one hand on your heart, close your eyes, open your eyes, close your eyes, take one breath, take a longer breath...” etc. You will likely have all their attention again.

On and Off

If they are restless, have them take their mindful bodies off. This just means wiggling around a little. Then have them put their mindful bodies back on. This means total stillness and quiet. Demonstrate this. Move between on and off a couple times. This is actually teaching them how to regulate their own body.

A Time for Everything

Sometimes this is a useful reminder: “There are times in our day for everything. There’s time for playing, learning, laughing, creating, sharing, reading, eating, sleeping. And there is time for

mindfulness. What time is it right now? Ok, since it's time for mindfulness right now, let's put our mindful bodies on."

Active vs Passive voice

Sometimes, the way we suggest things has a strong influence on how they respond. To give them a sense of choice, you can choose a passive voice rather than an active voice:

"Let your eyes close" vs. "Close your eyes."

"Let your bodies be still" vs. "Be still."

"Let's get our mindful bodies on" vs. "Get your mindful bodies on."

Holidays and Breaks

After a holiday or break, start by checking if they remembered mindfulness over the break. Remind them of the things they've learned so far.

Cool Tool

Use their language. "We're going to learn a 'cool tool' today." This makes it cool and a tool.

Introduce Visitors

Introducing visitors makes the kids comfortable and limits curiosity. Often you can make them part of the class. Tell the students that your friend doesn't know how to do mindfulness and you need the kids help to explain and demonstrate.

Let the Quiet Moments Last

If things get quiet, let that linger. Don't move on quickly. And identify it: "Do you notice how it feels in here right now? I really feel how quiet and still this class is."

Talk Less

When there is chaos, our tendency is to talk more and explain more. Often less talking is better.

I'm Sleepy

When kids comment that they are sleepy, explain why we have mindful bodies. When our body is straight, our mind has to work a little harder and we won't become sleepy so easily. Also, have them experiment with slouching and trying to breath and sitting up and trying to breath. They will notice which is easier.

Difficult Situation

Sometimes the class is dealing with a difficult situation when you arrive; maybe an argument, a loss in someone's family, or discussing a sad story from the news (all of these have happened). This is a good time to let go of that day's plan and send kind thoughts instead. Make it relate to the situation they are dealing with. You can expand the phrases for self, the class, and beyond. Involve them by encouraging them to come up with wishes.

When in Doubt

The ultimate goal of each day is simply to increase the number of moments of awareness. If you accomplish just two minutes of mindfulness, that's a lot. Know that there will be days/classes that don't seem to go well. Trust that they are benefiting.

Teach to the Moment

Don't rush. If you don't get through the lesson, don't worry. Teach to the moment: if something arises, teach to that.

Raising the Hands – Keep it Up

Raising their hands becomes a way to develop a sequence. The sequence becomes:

1. listening
2. raising hand (mindfully once they've learned mindful movement)
3. mindfully bringing the hand to the belly
4. breathing...

This sequence can be quite long for classes that have really settled in.

Clear Reminders

Reminders must be clear and detailed. Speak slowly, let them imagine each suggestion.

School Bells

If the school has recess bells, suggest they use those as a reminder to stop and be mindful for 15 seconds. You have to really set that up clearly, practice with them, and get the teacher on board.

Sharing

Sometimes kids will say, "It felt funny." You can comment that sometimes when we are noticing something new it is hard to explain and so it might seem funny. Offer some possible ways to explain what they are noticing. Keep it simple: "Was is a good feeling or a bad feeling?" "Did you like it or not like it?"

Normalizing

The great thing about mindfulness is that there is no right or wrong, good or bad. Our only job is to notice our experience or our emotion. When students share it's important to normalize their experience. Some phrases that do this are: "Yes, that's okay" and "Yes, that happens sometimes", or "And was that okay for you?".

Words They Don't Get

It doesn't mean you can't use these words, but check in and explain them if necessary.

- "Tap into"
- "Honor"
- "Intense"
- "How was that?", "What was that like?" Sometimes these are too vague and abstract. Make sure they know what you're asking for by giving them an example.
- "In-touch with emotions" is also too abstract without explanation.

Stay on Topic Vs. Teachable Moments

Go in with a planned lesson for the day. If students are taking things way off topic, don't be afraid to bring them back. However, if something happens in class that has caused a disruption or crises, don't miss the teachable moments. Surprises and unplanned incidents are a great way to introduce mindfulness into the wider scope of their daily experience.

Little Ones (K-2)

Slowly, One Thing at a Time.

Mindful Bodies: 1. still body 2. quiet body 3. eyes closed.

Listening: 1. listening. 2. listen to the end 3. listen and raise hand at the end 4. close eyes and listen, and raise hand at the end.

Be Simple

Don't explain too much. Let your vocabulary be simple and your words clear, without a lot of words. Repeat simple phrases several times. Emphasize the silence. Let there be pregnant pauses where they are waiting in suspense for what you are about to say.

Something New

Little ones love learning something new. "Do you want to learn something new today?" You've got their attention!

Think About It

When you ask them a question follow it by saying "Think about it for a minute" or just "think about it". You may even want to point to your head giving them a visual of thinking.

Often Kindergardeners will just raise their hand without have a real answer. This often results in long pauses of waiting for a response or they just repeat what has already been said by their classmates.

Asking them to think first allows them to do so and give better answers.

Attention Span

Younger children have very short attention spans and are easy to lose (even in 15 minutes). When you see them mentally wandering off say "Eyes on me" or "all eyes on me so I know your listening". This often brings them back quickly.

Hands in Lap

Younger children tend to also be fidgety and wiggle around a lot. To keep their attention and promote still bodies you can cue them by reminding them "Hands in lap".

Demonstrate this each time by clasping your hands together and putting them still on your lap. After several visits you should be able to silently show them 'hands in lap' with the physical cue.

Crossed Legs

A silent way to remind students to cross their legs or get back into a “mindful” position is to cross your pointer and middle finger and hold it out. Soon students will know this is a signal from you that you want them to cross their legs.

Presence

Your warm presence and understanding demeanor is very important at these ages. These are wiggly age groups so don't worry if they aren't completely still.

With that said, don't be afraid to hold them at a high standard. These grades can be very responsive and keep their attention when they are given gentle reminders to do so.

Adult Demonstration

It's also important to have the teacher and aids sit with the students and participate along with them.

These age groups are very impressionable and learn by mimicking. The more adult examples the better.

Phrasing and Language

K takes things you say very literally. Watch your language and ask for help from the teacher if you're not sure how to phrase something in a way they understand. Keep your vocabulary as simple as possible.