

PILLAR ONE: MINDFULNESS

Notes:

Mindfulness Pillar Unit Summary

Mindfulness is cultivating focused, nonjudgmental attention to the present moment, which is an important practice as we begin to cultivate an awareness of our inner world. When we are being mindless, it is easy to become hijacked by intense emotions or ruminating thought patterns, because we're not focusing our attention on what's happening right now.

When we practice mindfulness, we're increasing the sensitivity and resolution with which we can sense the world around us and, more importantly, the world within us. Humans have been practicing different forms of mindfulness for thousands of years, and over 3,000 scientific studies have been published over the past few decades on the physical, mental, and social benefits of mindfulness practices. So far, scientists have documented hundreds of observable, reliable health outcomes that mindfulness offers even for a practice as short as 20 minutes a day. Some examples include immune system boosts, increased physical energy, reductions in addiction and trauma impact, boosts in prosocial behaviors, and massive increases in wellness.

Mindful Breathing will be the Core Tool for building a practice of mindfulness and the ways it can apply to our life to create a sense of wellbeing. Through the practice of Mindful Breathing, mindfulness will be understood as giving kind attention to our experiences in the present moment. The Mindful Breathing practice is extremely simple – we sit in a comfortable seated position, bring the attention to the sensation of breathing, and when the attention wanders we bring it back to the breath. This process continues until the session is complete.

Mindful breathing gives students a regular practice for focusing their awareness and modulating the flow of attention using the breath. Students will learn ways to manage their attention and will apply concepts of loving-kindness so that attention is focused in a healthy, positive way.

During Mindful Breathing students will practice mindfulness of their body sensations, emotions, and thoughts – all experiences that can bring attention away from the breath. When attention is distracted by these sensations, the student is instructed to simply notice the distraction, let it go, and return to the breath.

Ultimately, mindful breathing progresses beyond sitting and watching the breath into a regular experience that can be applied to standing, walking, and everyday life and will be relied upon to facilitate self-awareness, self-focus, and self-regulation. By adopting a regular practice of mindful breathing and understanding of the theory behind the practice, students will be able to use mindfulness to experience a sense of self-control when making choices with self and others – without falling into old reactive patterns of decision-making.

At the beginning, we'll try to have students sit in their mindful posture for one minute with their eyes closed or looking down. With each lesson we may increase the amount of time depending on the class' ability to find stillness in their minds and bodies.

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ESTABLISHED GOALS (US SCHOOLS ONLY)

SEL Standard (Illinois State) Develop self-awareness and self-management (self-regulation) skills to achieve school and life success. This unit of study will target the core competencies for SEL (outlined by CASEL) of self-awareness and self-management.

IDENTIFIER (US ONLY)

Identify and manage one's attention, focus, emotions, and behaviors.

STANDARD (US ONLY)

Early Elementary:

- Recognize and accurately label emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations - and how they are linked to behavior.
- Demonstrate control of impulsive behavior.
- Identify ways to calm yourself.

Late Elementary:

- Describe your physical responses to strong emotions.
- Recognize that feelings change throughout the day.
- Practice self-talk to calm yourself.

Middle:

- Apply strategies to manage stress and motivate focused, disciplined performance.
- Describe the physical responses to a range of emotions.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS (EUS): STUDENTS WILL KNOW THAT...

1. Focused attention is developed through noticing and labeling distraction and beginning again with the original object of attention (e.g., the breath).
2. Our attitude toward our self when we make a mistake matters – we approach distraction with kindness and curiosity.
3. We can use our attention to bring awareness to our body, emotions, and thoughts. This skill of bringing awareness within is an essential skill to wellbeing. We pay attention without getting lost in the thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations.
4. Bringing awareness to the body, emotions, and thoughts is the first step toward managing them.
5. Noticing when we are not in the “here and now” (present moment). When this occurs, we bring our focus back on the object of attention or task.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (EQS):

1. What does it mean to pay attention?
2. Why does the way we pay attention to our Self matter? Why does the way we speak to our Self matter?
3. What are the parts of ourselves that we can pay attention to and be curious about?
4. How do our breath, mind, emotions, and body work together?
5. What are some practices we can use to pay attention to and manage strong emotional experiences?

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MISCONCEPTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS	
Misconception	Clarification
Mindful Breathing is mindfulness.	Mindful Breathing is a type of mindfulness. It's the main tool we use because the breath is always there, and we have the ability to watch the breath with our focused attention. Mindfulness is not limited to the breath – we can be mindful of anything.
Mindful Breathing is for calming down.	While mindful breathing often makes us feel calm, it is more importantly a way to pause and pay attention to what is happening. Paying attention to our experiences is the first step to a greater self-awareness.
Mindfulness is something that we only use for regulating difficult experiences or prolong pleasant experiences.	While we can use Mindfulness to manage our emotions, avoiding pain and pursuing pleasure is not the purpose. We use Mindfulness to cultivate nonjudgmental attention to the present moment regardless of whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.
When an emotion arises we are using Mindfulness so that we don't have to experience it.	With mindfulness, we are trying to be “with” whatever is happening, without pushing it away. We want to observe any experience that comes into our awareness, regardless of whether it is pleasant or unpleasant.
Mindful Breathing requires taking big deep breaths.	With Mindful Breathing we are paying attention to regular, natural breathing. We don't change our normal breathing in any way.
Mindful Breathing requires sitting on the floor with our legs crossed.	While sitting on the floor with legs crossed, usually on a pillow, is a nice way to keep the body soft and strong, it is not the only way to do Mindful Breathing. We can practice it in any position that keeps us alert and comfortable.

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KNOWLEDGE & SKILLS

Knowledge - Students Will Know:

- The breath is a sensory experience, and we can develop an awareness for where we feel our breath the most.
- Mind wandering is natural and normal. It's how we respond to mind wandering that matters.
- The way we bring our mind back to the object of attention matters – in a gentle and open way.
- Mindful breathing can be practiced in a sitting, standing and walking posture.
- It's important to practice mindful breathing when we feel calm, so that we can access it as a self-management tool when difficult emotions arise. Also a calm environment is best so that we can cultivate deeper understanding of our inner world.
- Thoughts and feelings come and go, for a “visit” and recognizing this reduces stress and increases wellbeing.

Skills - Students Will Know How To:

- Cultivate a personal practice of Mindful Breathing.
- Locate a spot on their body where they can anchor their attention to the feeling of the breath.
- Identify and label distractions in the moment.
- Develop the “attention muscle” by letting go of distraction and starting over.
- Explain why curiosity and self-kindness are integral to mindfulness.
- Extend and apply a mindful breathing sitting practice to their everyday life.
- Construct meaning for mindfulness in their own words.
- Explain different kinds of mindfulness – body, emotions, thought, movement.
- Build the skill of noticing what is happening in their moment to moment awareness of body, emotions, or thoughts.

PERFORMANCE TASK SUMMARY (USING GRASPS)

Students will pick an area of their life they could improve upon and apply the Mindful Breathing tool to grow. Examples can be similar to the following:

1. Keeping track of belongings
2. Listening fully to someone who is speaking
3. Speaking to yourself in a friendly way
4. Staying focused on one task for a longer period of time
5. Using mindful breathing as a self-centering strategy when triggered by a strong emotion

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Mindfulness Pillar Assessment Evidence

OTHER EVIDENCE OF STUDENT UNDERSTANDING	
Other Assessments	Knowledge and Skills
Turn and Talk	Have students consistently turn and talk about their use or lack of use of Mindfulness strategies in their day-to-day experience. This will be utilized in each of the individual lessons and then shared with the whole group.
Lesson Reflections in Journal	Daily Reflections that answer questions in each lesson.
Pre/ Post Assessment	Before teaching Mindfulness to students, give them a stressful scenario and have them describe how they would handle it. At the end of the unit, give them that same scenario and see if they have new Mindfulness-based strategies to apply.
Home Log	Students will keep track of Mindfulness practice at home. Perhaps sitting and doing Mindful Breathing for a few minutes. Students write about how they feel before and after a Mindful Breathing sitting practice.
Community Connection	Students will meet with a buddy or group of buddies to discuss how it's going. Buddies can practice mindful breathing together and encourage each other throughout the process.
Creative Expression	Students can create a piece of evidence that explains how mindful breathing helped them grow. This could be through writing, art, or any other creative expressions.

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Mindfulness Learning Plan — Activities

EXAMPLES

Has anyone ever told you to pay attention? Discussion around paying attention. Make a list of when parents and teachers tell students to pay attention. Discuss how students feel when told to pay attention. Ask students how they would feel if you had a special way to teach them how to get better at paying attention, a way that could actually make their brain stronger at paying attention.

OR

Have student Role Play distracting sounds in the classroom while class closes eyes and tries not to get distracted.

Mindfulness Learning Plan — Lesson Overview

Fifteen Lessons are provided with this pillar. These fifteen lessons move through the very basic fundamentals of developing a personal Mindful Breathing practice. We begin with finding a mindful posture, learn how to find the breath, and then move into thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. We then learn more advanced practices like nonjudgmental noticing, self-kindness, and letting go of all distractions. Finally, Mindful Breathing advances into a practice that can be applied to everyday life, even when walking, moving, talking, or doing any activity.

Be sure to reteach any of the lessons at any time based on student needs. Some lessons may need more time, and others less. In general, they are meant to take around 30 minutes, and some may be a bit longer depending on your class.

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Mindful Posture	Finding the Breath	Mindful Listening	Words to Support Concentration – “Breathing in, Breathing Out”	Mind Wandering/ Noticing Distraction
Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
Friendly Attitude Toward Self – Friendly Wishes	Mindfulness of Body/ Labeling Body Sensations – The Body Scan	Mindfulness of Thoughts/ Labeling Thoughts	Mindfulness of Emotions/ Labeling Emotions	Putting it All Together: Labeling all Distractions – Sounds, Thoughts, Emotions, Body
Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14	Day 15
Mindful Standing – Mindfulness of Body in Standing Posture	Mindfulness of Slow Motion – the Inflatable Me Game	Mindful Moving & Walking	Mindfulness and the Brain	Mindfulness in Everyday Life