Cultivating Mindful Awareness

with Wendy Baron
Chief Officer, Social and Emotional Learning
Mind Full, or Mindful?
Welcome!

K-12 Educator  Mentor/Coach

Co-founder, NTC  Chief Officer, SEL
Certified: Meditation, Mindfulness, Yoga, Ayurveda Health and Wellness
Connecting with Mindful Listening
Mindful Awareness

• What do you already know about mindfulness or mindful awareness?

• What are you interested in exploring?
Mindful Listening

The quieter you become, the more you can hear.

Cultivate the capacity to suspend inner dialogue and be silent within.

When you notice you are thinking your own thoughts, gently shift back to listening with ears, eyes, and heart.

Allow space for others to talk. Breathe.
Elbow Partner Share

• Partner A shares prior experiences and interests in learning. Partner B listens with mindful awareness. (2 min.)

• Switch.

• Partner B shares and Partner A listens. (2 min.)

• Partners discuss commonalities and differences. (3 min.)
“Deep listening is miraculous for both listener and speaker. When someone receives us with open-hearted, non-judgmental intensely interested Listening, our spirits expand.”

—Susan Patton Thoele
Outcomes

Together we will explore:

• Neuroscience of mindfulness
• Impact on physical and mental health for educators and students
• Four dimensions of mindful awareness
• A variety of mindful awareness practices
• Applications for you personally and within your context
• Resources to support you on your journey
Agenda

• Connecting With Mindful Listening

• Overview

• Mindful Awareness: Neuroscience
  – Emotions and Learning
  – Stress and the Brain
  – Research

• Mindful Awareness Practices

• Closing: Reflections and Appreciations
Norms for Collaboration

• Be present; listen carefully
• State your views in ways that invite challenge
• Be suspicious of that little voice that says “What’s the point?” or “This won’t work for me.”
• Remind yourself to get curious and inquire into others’ views
• Be patient—people process in different ways and at different speeds
• Help each other do the above
Mindful Awareness Neuroscience Research
Do you know where your mind is?

Your body is present

Is your mind?

Past  Present  Future
We have 60,000 thoughts per day

What occupies your attention?

– The present moment
– Zoning out
– Distractions and multi-tasking
– Thinking about the future
– Thinking about the past

Your thoughts interfere with being fully present with whatever you are doing, saying, or feeling.
Our typical awareness is here

Event

Thoughts
- You observe an event filtered through your beliefs which trigger...
- You tell yourself a story that gives the event meaning, which triggers...
- Your emotions trigger...

Feelings

Actions
- You take action based on emotion
- Your body reacts with stress hormones and coping behaviors
Learning and Emotions

Downshifting is a metaphor often used to describe how negative emotions cause us to process in our emotional center and lose focus on higher order thinking (executive functions):

- Intention to pay attention
- Emotional balance and regulation
- Decision-making
- Cognitive flexibility
- Prioritizing, organizing, and time management
- Working memory
- Planning
- Goal-directed persistence

Alliance for Excellence in Education
Response Behaviors

Physical Survival: Flight, Fight, Freeze, Fold

Psychological Reactive (impulsive): Push against, withdraw, appease and please, complain-helplessness

Mindful Response: Neutral, aware of inner thoughts and feelings, conscious, thoughtful, non-judging, curious, attentive, clear, alert, calm, non-reactive, able to weigh positive and negative consequences before responding.
Emotional Triggers: Reflections

• What are 2–3 triggers for you in your work context?
  – What feelings typically come up? What thoughts do you have about yourself and others involved?

• Can you sense any areas of tension in your body when you think about these triggers? Where are those?

• To what degree are you aware of your thoughts, emotions, and body sensations when you are emotionally triggered?

• How do you usually respond to these triggers? What strategies do you use?
“Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn, Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
The Process of Becoming Mindful

1. Mind wandering
2. Distraction Awareness
3. Reorientation of Awareness
4. Sustaining Focus

—Scientific American, The Neuroscience of Meditation: How it changes the brain, boosting focus and easing stress
Get-Up, Stand-Up Meeting

Greet your partner with present moment awareness.

Begin sharing your thoughts and/or feelings about triggers as well as strategies you employ during those times.
This is Your Body on Stress

• Breathing speeds up.
• Blood pressure rises.
• Steady flow of cortisol (can damage your short-term memory).
• Stress hormones narrow the arteries in the heart and increase heart rate.
• Digestive process slows; changes in the balance of gut bacteria weakens the immune system and ups the chances of inflammation.
• Adrenaline from the sympathetic nervous system alerts muscles to tense up in preparation for action. Pain and spasms in neck and back may result.
• Chromosome endings (telomeres) erode, resulting in early aging.
Stress in Your World

Reflect:

• When do you experience stress in your work context?

• What are some causes of stress for students, teachers, and school leaders?

• What impact do you think stress may be having on individual student learning as well as the overall culture and climate?
3-Part Breath

• Lower — abdominal muscles
• Middle — thoracic muscles
• Upper — clavicular muscles
"Just Breathe" by Julie Bayer Salzman & Josh Salzman ... - YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg
Surprising Benefits of Deep Breathing

• Happier mood

• Deeper sleep

• Less anxiety

• Healthier heart

• Better air intake and blood flow

• Reduction in stress and blood pressure

Source: Dr. Andrew Weil
MINDFUL (ness)

Why should we practice mindfulness?

BECAUSE...

1) Concentration gets stronger
2) Decision making gets easier

ALSO... After mindful practices...

Studies show that after mindful practices...

the limbic system shrinks
while the prefrontal cortex gets thicker! 😊
Mindfulness

Prefrontal Cortex
Function: Promotes rational thought, flexible problem solving, and emotion management.

Limbic System
Function: Source of emotions and survival; food, water, safety.

Brain Stem
Function: Promotes basic regulation; breathing, swallowing, and digestion.
Here’s What the Science Says…

When students practice mindfulness:
• More kindness
• Better math scores
• More self-control
• Fewer ADHD symptoms
• Improved focus
• Less depression

Mindful Awareness Practices

JOURNEY #3
Bringing awareness to one’s experience — mindfulness can be applied to our *senses, thoughts*, and *emotions* by using sustained attention and noticing an experience without over identifying.

—Mindful Schools
Wheel of Awareness

Courtesy of Daniel Siegel MD

1) AWARENESS OF SENSORY EXPERIENCE
   Sound-Touch-Sight-Taste-Smell

2) AWARENESS OF BODY
   Musculoskeletal System and Viscera

3) AWARENESS OF MENTAL SPACE
   Feelings-Sensations-Thoughts-Images

4) AWARENESS OF RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTION TO THE UNIVERSE
   Family-Friends-Social-Community
   World-University

WHEEL RIM = ALL THE THINGS YOU CAN BE AWARE OF
Awareness of Sensory Experiences

Hear
  – Listen to nature sounds, instruments, music, and to one another

Taste
  – Explore the flavors and textures of your food

Touch
  – Experience the quality of textures, such as roughness, smoothness, coarseness, fineness

Smell
  – Savor aromas of spices, herbs, foods, essential oils (lavender, mint, rose) things in nature (trees, earth, flowers)

Sight
  – Observe with soft eyes, without labeling or judging
Awareness of the Body

Practices to become aware of your Musculoskeletal System and Viscera (internal organs) include:

• Breathing (Belly Breathing, Alternate Nostril, 4-7-8 Breath)
• Body Scan (noticing areas of tension, intentionally relaxing each area)
• Mindful Movement
  – Walking
  – Standing and sitting
  – Stretching, yoga postures
  – Any outdoor activity such as swimming, skiing, dancing, biking
  – Daily household routines, such as washing dishes
  – Personal habits such as showering, putting on lotion, self-massage
4-7-8 Breath

• Breathe in for a count of four (4)
• Hold for a count of seven (7)
• Breathe out for a count of eight (8) with tongue at “fire point,” creating a hissing sound

Source: Dr. Andrew Weil
Awareness of Mental Space

• Thoughts
  – Self-talk (including criticism, blame, judgment)
  – Thinking about the past or future

• Feelings
  – Emotions: anger, sadness, boredom, frustration, anxiety, happiness, regret, worry, stress, disappointment, joy, satisfaction, etc.

• Images
  – Pictures, colors, shapes, and images we create in our mind

• Sensations
  – Physical feelings
Awareness of Relationships and Connection

Expressed through:
- Gratitude
- Sending kind thoughts
- Compassion
- Empathy
- Caring
- Generosity
Loving Kindness

May I feel safe
May I feel happy
May I feel strong
May I live with ease

Someone you love
Someone you don’t know well
Stranger

May all beings everywhere feel safe, happy, strong, and live with ease
CLOSING

Reflections, Resources, and More Research
Don’t just look. Observe.
Don’t just swallow. Taste.
Don’t just sleep. Dream.
Don’t just think. Feel.
Don’t just exist. Live.
Going Deeper

• What resonates with you?

• What are some ways you might apply these learnings:
  – In your work context
  – Personally
Resources

- Dr. Daniel Siegel
  - The Mindful Brain
  - Mindsight Institute
- Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, RULER
- Inner Explorer [www.innerexplorer.org](http://www.innerexplorer.org) (classroom mp3 tracks, K-12)
- The MindUp Curriculum, Brain-Focused Strategies for Learning and Living, Hawn Foundation
- *Mindfulness for Teachers*, Tish Jennings
- Mindful Schools [www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org)
- David Black [www.mindfulexperience.org](http://www.mindfulexperience.org)
  - Summary of research on Mindfulness (40 studies/month)
- *Scientific American, The Neuroscience of Meditation, Nov. 2014*
- Whil.com (mindfulness and SEL for teens and adults)
30 Years of Research

Benefits shown in adults:

- Decrease of emotional reactivity and turmoil; fewer intense negative emotions and mood swings
- An ability to cope more effectively with stressful situations
- Increased ability to relax
- Reduction in pain levels
- Greater enthusiasm for life
- Improved self-esteem
- Increased empathy
Research: Adolescents

• Depression, Stress, and Well-Being
  – British Journal of Psychiatry (2013)
  – 522 adolescents
  – 12 schools
  • Significant impacts on depression, stress, and well-being
  • The degree to which students practiced the mindfulness skills was associated with better well-being and less stress at a 3-month follow-up
  • Well over half the students had used mindfulness at least once since the end of the course with over 20% continuing to use it once a week or more
Research on Children

• Executive Function
  – UCLA research (published)
    • Executive function in 2nd- and 3rd-grade students
      – Found that kids with the lowest executive functions had the most vast improvement over time

• Improved Working Memory and Test Scores
  – UCSD research (*Psychology Today*, 2013) randomized clinical trial
    • Higher overall working memory
    • Decreased mind-wandering during “tasks”
Results: Kinder Associates Behavioral Rubric

- Teachers gave each student 4 simple sub-scale ratings using 5-point scales:
  - Paying Attention
  - Calmness & Self-Control
  - Self-Care / Participation
  - Care and Respect for Others

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<th>Control (n = 262)</th>
<th>Significance p-value</th>
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<td>Pre</td>
<td>Post</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Overall Average*</td>
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* Effect size for Overall Average using Cohen’s d = 0.18. p-values were computed using t-tests.
Feedback

• Please complete the session evaluation via the Symposium 2017 Mobile site.

• Session evaluations are located under the Session and Conference Evaluation link and sorted by Track and then Session Number.

• Session evaluations can also be found under the Workshop and Session Information link.

• Click on the session number you attended and the evaluation link is below the session description.
THANK YOU!

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