



MINDFULNESS MATTERS: 4 STRATEGIES TO NURTURE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS

By Sara Curran

You may have noticed students experiencing increased anxiety, grief, trauma, and stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have become more prevalent, to which we can attribute changes in academic and social-emotional outcomes. We need to foster students' social-emotional well-being as the 2020–2021 school year continues, as many school districts that began the year online transition back to classroom learning.

Mindfulness activities worked into the school day assist students in managing ACEs. *Psychology Today* (2020) explains, "Mindfulness encompasses awareness and acceptance, which can help people understand and cope with uncomfortable emotions, allowing them to gain control and relief." Instruction in mindful practices in schools has shown promise in improving social-emotional outcomes for students (Sibinga et al., 2015). You can incorporate mindfulness strategies into asynchronous remote learning,

during live online class sessions, or within school classrooms.

1. Introduce mindful practices.

Employ mindfulness strategies as brain breaks for students to calm their bodies and refocus their minds. Practice these activities in classrooms, include them in online assignment posts, or integrate them into live sessions.

- Use picture books, short videos, and activity cards to suggest beneficial strategies for students to replicate.
- Implement yoga and breathing exercises as practices for students to apply later.
- Introduce the Zones of Regulation for emotion management (bit.ly/RegZones).

2. Promote a supportive classroom environment.

Give students chances to discuss their feelings and experiences in class meetings and partner discussions to support mindful practices. In remote learning, you can have whole-class sharing during live sessions or in online formats (such as Jamboard, Google Docs, Kidblog). Use chat messaging for partner discussions.

Mindfulness strategies in your classroom or remote learning lessons give your students tools to reduce their stress levels and cope with these uncertain times.

- Have students share their high and low points for the day or week. This normalizes conversations about feelings in the classroom while promoting self-awareness and self-reflection.
- Ask students to select an item that represents their feelings or current experiences and share it with others.
- Utilize Monday check-ins for partners to debrief about their weekends and discuss their excitement and concerns about the upcoming week. If you establish consistent partners, you can nurture trust and support among classmates.
- Incorporate journaling as an outlet for students to reflect upon and express their feelings. Provide prompts or reflection questions, or simply allow for free writing. Create gratitude journals to focus on positive experiences.
- Assign exit slips focused on monitoring social-emotional outcomes. Have students rate their learning and confidence, reflect on positive and negative experiences throughout the day or week, or include “I wish my teacher knew...” reflections.

Students’ stress levels have likely been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mindfulness strategies in your classroom or remote learning lessons give your students tools to reduce their stress levels and cope with these uncertain times. Take a deep breath and embrace mindfulness! 🍎

References

- Psychology Today*. (2020). The benefits of mindfulness. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/mindfulness>
- Sibinga, E. M. S., Webb, L., Ghazarian, S. R., & Ellen, J. M. (2015, December). School-based mindfulness instruction: An RCT. *Pediatrics*, 137(1), 2015–2532. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-2532>

3. Establish a calming area.

Dedicate an area in or out of the classroom where students who need a break can practice calming, mindful strategies to manage their emotions. Students can ask to utilize the space before a stressful situation becomes overwhelming. Have a set amount of time for students to be in the space before returning to classroom activities. Include items in the space appropriate for the students’ ages and needs:

- *Emotion management*: Stress balls, Mandala coloring pages/posters, mindfulness activity cards, calming music
- *Reflection*: Paper, pencils, coloring utensils, mindfulness books
- *Movement*: Movement activity cards, small trampoline

During remote learning, encourage students to ask their parents to help create calming areas at home, with coloring books, pillows, stuffed animals, and/or a notebook. Students could color a picture or write a journal entry to express their feelings. If students can’t create a calming area at home, teach them how to access a calm, “happy” place in their minds. Instruct students to imagine the sights, smells, and sounds in this place. Model and practice this visualization during live class sessions.

4. Encourage self-reflection and self-awareness.

Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their daily experiences. Students can complete these activities on paper or by using a web-based format (Kidblog, Flipgrid, Google Forms, Google Slides).

Picture Books to Introduce Mindfulness

- *The Isle of You*, by David LaRochelle
- *Master of Mindfulness: How to Be Your Own Superhero in Times of Stress*, by Laurie Grossman, Angelina Alvarez, and Mr. Musumeci’s Fifth-Grade Class
- *I Am Peace: A Book of Mindfulness*, by Susan Verde
- *Breathe Like a Bear*, by Kira Willey

Resources for Mindful Activities

- *Mindful Kids: 50 Mindfulness Activities for Kindness, Focus and Calm*, by Whitney Stewart
- *Mindful Games Activity Cards: 55 Fun Ways to Share Mindfulness with Kids and Teens*, by Susan Kaiser Greenland and Annaka Harris
- GoNoodle.com’s *Flow, Empower Tools, and Think About It* channels
- Calm app



Keep an eye on KDP’s Webinar Calendar kdp.org/events/webinarcalendar.php and check out the recordings for a presentation from Sara Curran.



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