

# Mindfulness in Education

Use this technique to reduce student anxiety and help students succeed.

**BY TARA HORNICH-LISCIANDRO**

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Standardized tests, course exams, homework, after-school sports, part-time jobs—many students live busy, pressure-packed lives. As educators, we teach them how to better organize all the “stuff” in their lives, but we rarely teach students how to organize their thoughts and soothe their anxieties. Often, the stress of their daily lives accumulates until a “worry ball” forms. Soon students show signs of fear, anxiety, and attention disorders. Soon after that, parents, teachers, and administrators attempt to fix these issues.

Many of these problems can be prevented if we instruct stu-

dents to use a tool called mindfulness. It’s not a new idea, but its use in education is a recent development. Founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Jon Kabat-Zinn, says mindfulness means “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

Early research on the strategy shows promise. According to [Mindfulschools.org](http://Mindfulschools.org), “Studies have shown that mindfulness is a powerful tool for combating multiple mental and physical problems and disorders, for example, attention-deficit hyperactivity (ADHD), mood, and anxiety disorders.”

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## Mindfulness in Education

### Mindfulness in Schools

Several years ago, I noticed my students were anxious about taking AP exams. Some were so worried that they were not eating properly or getting enough sleep. Having suffered from anxiety myself and having learned the activities that accompany mindfulness, I began to utilize mindful techniques in my classes.

Within a few weeks, students were asking for mindfulness activities almost daily. Mindfulness is the act of giving space to being able to think differently, or simply being able to focus on the present moment. I soon noticed a number of changes in the way they approached their work and the quality of that work.

I've attended several workshops to improve my mindfulness skills and continue to use them with my students. I've also worked with athletic teams and teens in other schools and introduced mindfulness activities at my daughter's preschool and kindergarten.

Using mindfulness has helped these students learn how to slow their thoughts, listen, communicate, focus, and become better students. Many students now practice mindfulness at home and share it with their friends and families. With time and practice, mindfulness has become a part of their everyday lives.

Following are some techniques you can use with your students:

### Mindfulness Resources

- [www.mindful.org](http://www.mindful.org)—resources for integrating mindfulness into education.
- [www.garrisoninstitute.org](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org)—click on the “Teaching & Learning” tab.
- [www.mindfulschools.org](http://www.mindfulschools.org)—the “Mindful Society” great information for teachers.
- [www.challengeday.org](http://www.challengeday.org)—nonprofit organization provides one-day programs to junior high schools, middle schools, and high schools with students in grades 7-12.
- [www.eomega.org](http://www.eomega.org)—this nonprofit offers workshops for teachers.



- Observe your breath. Breathe in "I am" and breathe out "Peace." Repeat several times.

- Observe thoughts or feelings as you breathe and acknowledge them.

- Count to two as you breathe; hold the breath for a two count and release the breath for another two count. Repeat.

- Watch Jon Kabat-Zinn's Body Scan video on YouTube, then use the technique in your classroom. This guided meditation quiets the body and mind by placing awareness on all parts of the body.

- Have students practice mindful eating. Have them observe what they are eating (taste, smell, texture). Then have them take one full minute to experience one mouthful of food and ask them for their observations.

- Mindful walking involves concentrating on one's feet, muscles, and sensations. Have students take 10 to 20 steps in a circle or line. Do this in silence to increase awareness.

- In a circle or row, have students pass an object that needs careful attention, such as a bell that is not allowed to ring or a cup of water that is not allowed to spill. Students should

not speak, but notice only their movements and the sensations associated with them.

- Mindful work/reading. Have students focus on the work presented to them. Ring a bell to begin and end the exercise. Students should work quietly and place their full attention on the task.

Mindfulness is a tool that students can use in class, sports, job, and activities. It can help better organize their lives because they can begin to organize thoughts and control their emotions. Mindfulness is a "win-win" tool for students and teachers. We all benefit when everyone in the learning community is more aware and better focused. ■



"Lesson planning involves allotting time to recover from lesson planning."

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