HARNESSING THE POWER OF MINDFULNESS TO PROMOTE RESILIENCE IN YOUTH

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5th Annual Northwest Conference on Childhood Grief
March 26, 2019
A little bit about me...
Learning Objectives

• Be able to define and describe what mindfulness is and what it isn’t.
• Be able to define and describe what neuroplasticity is and how it relates to mindfulness.
• Understand the ways in which mindfulness practice affects the brain and promotes resilience in youth.
• Learn ways to implement mindfulness in a trauma-sensitive manner.
• Learn and practice a variety of mindfulness practices that you can use with youth (or yourselves).
Thrive, Flourish and Grow

- Resilience is not a fixed trait, it can be learned and cultivated
- Kids and teens need our help to be resilient
- We can help them build external and internal resilience
- A powerful way to do this is by engaging in mindfulness practices
- These practices can take place 1:1 or in a group setting and can be incorporated into already existing services or programs
- We can help kids and teens not only survive but also **thrive, flourish and grow**
Mindfulness is... Purposely paying attention to the present moment with curiosity

PART 1
Paying attention on purpose, steadying the mind, placing our attention where we want it to go (like a flashlight)

PART 2
Being in contact with the present moment and noticing our direct experience

PART 3
Approaching with curiosity, kindness, and acceptance of what is (not judgment)
“Mindfulness is the aware, balanced acceptance of present experience. It isn’t more complicated than that. It is opening to or receiving the present moment, pleasant or unpleasant, just how it is. “ –Sylvia Boorstein (as cited in Treleaven, 2018)
Mindfulness is not...
Mindfulness is not...

• Just a relaxation or calming strategy or spacing out
• One single kind of practice
• A cure-all/silver bullet/magic pill/quick fix/easy self-help technique for all situations, problems, illnesses or conditions
• Trying to shut off all of your thoughts or ignore all of your feelings
• Something you can do incorrectly or fail at
• Having to like how you feel or having to like what’s going on in the present moment
• For certain kinds of people only (e.g. religious or spiritual folks, people with $)
• Treatment to replace evidence-based treatments for trauma, grief, anxiety, depression, etc.
• Always serious or formal (can be fun, playful and informal)
Video: Mindfulness is a Superpower

https://youtu.be/w6T02g5hnT4
Neuroplasticity

• We used to think that after our brains fully developed in our mid-20’s that our brains were set and no changes could be made

• We have learned that the experiences that we have throughout our lives continue to change and shape our brains

• The brain will rewire in response to repeated experiences or to the things we ask it to do

• “Neurons that fire together, wire together”

• We can facilitate and provide experiences that change our brains in positive ways

• This is the key that allows us to benefit from mindfulness practices

• What habits will we choose so that we can **thrive, flourish** and **grow**?
“It starts by being in the present moment, seeing what is, rather than escaping from it or distorting it. In this way, mindfulness practice makes us stronger and more able to respond to life, rather than passive and apathetic. And the science backs this, too; mindfulness helps people become more resilient to traumas and setbacks, both large and small.” –Chris Willard (2016)
A small but growing body of research shows that mindfulness may improve adolescent resilience to stress. Read about that and much more in this article from The Northwest Bulletin: Family & Child Health from the University of Washington featuring iBme's co-founder, Jessica Morey.

CAN MINDFULNESS TRAINING HELP ADOLESCENTS WITH DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY SYMPTOMS?

It is well-documented that mindfulness helps to relieve depression and anxiety in adults.¹⁻⁴ A small but growing body of research shows that it may also improve adolescent resilience to stress through improved cognitive performance and emotional regulation.⁵⁻⁸ This is encouraging news for anyone concerned about the increasing rates of depressive symptoms and suicide rates among adolescents in the United States.⁹,¹⁰

https://depts.washington.edu/nwbfch/mindfulness-training-adolescents
Benefits of Mindfulness

• Supportive practice for adults working with youth
• Increases our ability to be accepting and to tolerate distress
• Increases our ability to self-regulate
  • Improves attention
  • Improves emotional regulation
  • Improves body awareness
• Develops our capacity to be grateful
• Develops our capacity to be compassionate towards ourselves
Benefits of Mindfulness

• Mindfulness can be a supportive practice for the adults who work with youth
  • Our nervous systems are the intervention
  • The more regulated and integrated we are, the better the youth will be
  • It’s also good etiquette to practice what we teach
Benefits of Mindfulness

- Increases our ability to accept, tolerate and be with what is, both positive and negative, in our environments and in our internal worlds.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

(James Baldwin)
Benefits of Mindfulness

• Increases our ability to self-regulate (Treleaven, 2018)

“Psychology professors Joan Littlefield Cook and Greg Cook defined self-regulation as ‘the ability to monitor and control our own behavior, emotions, or thoughts, and altering them in accordance with the demands of the situation’ ” (as cited in Treleaven, 2018).

For example: Putting on a sweater when we feel cold, taking a nap when we feel tired, or asking to talk to someone when we feel stressed or overwhelmed.
Mindfulness supports self-regulation in 3 ways

- Attention
- Emotional Regulation
- Body Awareness
Acronyms Are Our Friends

- **HALT** = Hungry, Angry/Anxious, Lonely, Tired
- Take a mindful **SEAT** = Sensations, Emotions, Actions (Urges), Thoughts (Willard)
- **SCANS** = Stomach, Chest, Arms, Neck, Shoulders (Willard)
- **SIFTing** = Sensations, Images, Feelings, Thoughts (Siegel)
- **STOP** = Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed
- Take a mindful **SNACK** = Stop, Notice, Accept, Curious, Kindness
- **CALM** Reminder = Chest, Arms, Legs, Mind (Willard)
A Mindful S.N.A.C.K.

The next time you're feeling stressed out, overwhelmed, or unsure, reach for a moment of calm awareness: a mindfulness SNACK. Here's how to do it:

**S**top
Just stop whatever you're doing. (Stopping, by definition, requires us to begin again. We can always begin again.)

**N**otice
What is happening within and around you?

**A**ccept
This is a tricky one. Whatever it is you're struggling with (time, kids, sleepiness, frustration) acknowledge it for what it is, without judgment.

**N**o
Ground yourself with questions about your experience and environment: What am I feeling? What do I need right now?

**A**cknowledge
Respond to yourself and others (mistakes and all) with kindness and observe how that helps things get back on track.

**C**urious
Take a breath

**K**indness
Observe
Feelings, Sensations, Thoughts, Urges, Situation

Procede
Benefits of Mindfulness

- Develops our capacity to be grateful
  - Gratitude practice is a way to train the brain to scan for the positives and balance out “negativity bias”
  - “Consistently grateful people are more energetic, emotionally intelligent, forgiving, and less likely to be depressed, anxious or lonely” (Achor, 2010)
Gratitude Practice Ideas

• 3 Gratitudes and Why (Achor)
• The Doubler (Achor)
• Taking In The Good (Hanson)
• Gratitude Jar
• Gratitude Letters

• Gratitude Art
• Gratitude Wheel
• Gratitude Books
• Gratitude Toss
• Sense and Savor Walk
Benefits of Mindfulness

• Develops our capacity of loving-kindness and self-compassion

“When we suffer, caring for ourselves as we would care for someone we truly love. Self-compassion includes self-kindness, a sense of common humanity, and mindfulness.” – MSC Curriculum
“When we are mindful of our struggles, and respond to ourselves with compassion, kindness, and support in times of difficulty, things start to change. We can learn to embrace ourselves and our lives, despite inner and outer imperfections, and provide ourselves with the strength needed to thrive.”

–Germer & Neff, Mindful Magazine, 2019
Why Self-Compassion is So Important

- Self-criticism and speaking in a judgmental way towards ourselves triggers our threat-defense system (fight/flight/freeze)
- This leads to stress in both the body and the mind and can become chronic
- Self-compassion deactivates the threat-defense system and, thus, increases our feelings of safety and stability
- “Self-compassion is a reliable source of inner strength that confers courage and enhances resilience when we’re faced with difficulties.”

--Germer and Neff, Mindful Magazine, 2019
Self-Compassion Practice Ideas

• Mindful Self-Compassion Class (8 weeks)
• Mindful Self-Compassion Workbooks
• Self-Compassion Break
• Ask self: What would I say to or how would I comfort a friend right now?
• Soothing/sensory activities: warm beverage, bath, fleece blanket, pet cat, etc.
• Soothing touch (e.g. hand on heart, rub arm or legs)
Self-Compassion Practice Ideas

• Letter to Self

• Imagine the kid in you

• Use of loving-kindness phrases
  • May I be kind and gentle, may I be healthy, may I feel safe, may I be happy, may I be courageous
  • To find phrases, ask “What do I need? What do I long to hear?”

• Sense and savor walk

• Giving and receiving compassion meditation
Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (Treleaven, 2018)

- Make sure you are regulated, grounded and embodied. Do your own work!
- Focus on safety and stability
- Relationship is key and can provide safety and stability (e.g. practice in a small group)
- Create agreements/norms, post them, review them frequently
- Be thoughtful about the physical space and where youth are in relation to each other
- Be flexible with posture
- Use a predictable routine, structure and schedule
Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness (Treleaven, 2018)

- Make sure that all mindfulness practices are an invitation and youth have a choice about participation; provide options (e.g. eyes open or closed)
- Know and watch for signs of dysregulation (e.g. hyperventilating, increased sweating)
- Use anchors that aren’t triggering and allow to switch anchor if needed during practice
- Turn attention in practice to what brings joy and energy (e.g. gratitude practice)
- Be cautious w/ focus on breath and body-based practices
- Provide avenues to use non-verbal info in presenting concepts, practices and activities (e.g. art, journals)
- Incorporate movement
In Summary

• Resilience is not a fixed trait, it can be learned and cultivated
• Kids and teens need our help to be resilient
• We can help them build external and internal resilience
• One powerful way to do this is through engaging in mindfulness practices
• These practices can take place 1:1 or in a group setting and can easily be incorporated into already existing services or programs
• We can help kids and teens not only survive but also **thrive, flourish** and **grow**
QUESTIONS?
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<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altered Traits</td>
<td>Book about brain-based benefits of mindfulness</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCFW</td>
<td>Center for Child and Family Well-Being at UW: Mindfulness courses for adults and teens, public lectures, workshops</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Mindful Self-Compassion</td>
<td>Created by Chris Germer and Kristin Neff; courses for adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Willard</td>
<td>Psychologist who writes books and speaks about mindfulness, youth, families, and resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan Harris</td>
<td>Author of meditation books; fabulous podcast 10% Happier; and great mediation app 10% Happier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan Siegel</td>
<td>Amazing author and speaker who studies youth, the mind, families, parenting, health and happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Treleaven</td>
<td>Author and therapist; trauma-informed mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Mumford</td>
<td>Author, speaker, mindfulness practitioner who has worked with pro athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Good Science Center</td>
<td>Great resource for evidence-based health and well-being interventions and information</td>
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<tr>
<td>iBme</td>
<td>Inward Bound Mindfulness Education: Mindfulness summer camps for teens all over the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon Kabat-Zinn</td>
<td>Author; Founder of MBSR and Center for Mindfulness at UMass: Mindfulness courses for adults</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karen Bluth</td>
<td>Author of Self-Compassion Workbook for Teens and creator of teen/young adult self-compassion curriculum</td>
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## Resources

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<tr>
<th><strong>May I Be Happy</strong></th>
<th>Documentary film about teaching mindfulness with youth</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mind Up</strong></td>
<td>Mindfulness curriculum for Pre-K-8th grade</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mindful Magazine</strong></td>
<td>Great magazine to learn more about world of mindfulness</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mindful Schools</strong></td>
<td>Awesome organization; online classes for adults; training program; great resources, videos, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Peace in Schools</strong></td>
<td>Org. in Portland that has mindfulness class in public high schools; educator trainings</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rick Hanson</strong></td>
<td>Author and speaker on the brain, resilience, 'taking in the good' and mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sam Himelstein</strong></td>
<td>Dir. of Center for Adolescent Studies; online courses for adults; trauma-informed mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sharon Salzberg</strong></td>
<td>Loving-kindness and compassion expert; author of books about how to est. mindfulness practice</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shawn Achor</strong></td>
<td>Author of Happiness Advantage; gratitude expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Susan Kaiser Greenland</strong></td>
<td>Author and speaker about kids, mindfulness, and families; Founder of Inner Kids</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Willoughby Britton</strong></td>
<td>Mindfulness researcher and creator of Meditation Safety Toolbox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your Fantastic Elastic Brain</strong></td>
<td>Great book about neuroplasticity for kids</td>
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References


References


Addendum: Gratitude Practices

• **3 Gratitudes and Why (Shawn Achor):** Spend at least 2 minutes saying out loud or writing down three things you are grateful for that day and why you are grateful for them. Try not to repeat the things you are grateful for.

• **The Doubler (Shawn Achor):** Think of the most memorable and positive experience you have had in the last 24 hours. Write or draw a picture in order to relive this moment. Include all the details you can think of and really dive back into that moment. What did you smell, taste, touch, hear or see?

• **Taking In The Good (Rick Hanson):** In a moment where you feel positive feelings, take at least a few extra breaths to stay in the moment a little bit longer and really feel the moment. What are you smelling, tasting, touching, hearing or seeing? How do you feel it in your body? Focus on what is enjoyable/meaningful/rewarding.

• **Gratitude Jar:** At the same time everyday, write down at least three things you are grateful for and put them in a jar. Good activity to do with a family or small group!
Addendum: Gratitude Practices

- **Gratitude Art:** There are many ways to make art and practice gratitude at the same time. One example is included below.

- **Gratitude Wheel:** Using a template from Mindful Schools, have folks write or draw things they are grateful for radiating from the center of the page.
Addendum: Gratitude Practices

- **Gratitude Letters:** Write a letter to someone in your life and express your gratitude for them. Extra credit—read your letter out loud to them! See this video for inspiration: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHv6vTKD6lg

- **Gratitude Books:** Read books that discuss the topic of gratitude.

- **Gratitude Toss:** Toss a ball back and forth and each time you throw the ball say something you are grateful for out loud.

- **Sense and Savor Walk:** While on a walk, look for things that make you smile and then spend some time with them. Notice texture, feel, all five senses. Extension activity is to then go back and take photos of these things and make art with them. Can also have a group of folks send all their photos to group leader and make a slideshow of all the photos.
All that matters is Right Meow

Thank you!
What’s opening up for you?

Jumpstart phrase to put as your first line:

The basket of twilight brims with colors...

Write for 2 minutes keeping pen moving.