

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the here and now without judgement. It can be practiced where ever we find ourselves, in whatever we are doing. The first step into the present moment is breathing with awareness. By simply zooming our focus on breathing-in and breathing-out, we can quiet our minds, reduce felt sensations of stress, and cultivate compassion for self and others.

As educators (and parents), we often expect, tell, even demand that young people focus and pay attention. Yet many times we fail to model, guide, and teach them how to do this. By integrating more mindful moments into our own lives, and bringing simple, but very powerful, practices into the schools (and home), we can help young people nurture the seeds of awareness, reflection, executive functioning, and emotional regulation. Mindfulness improves both social-emotional and academic learning. Plus, the very nature of mindfulness exercises are experiential, which we know is one of the most impactful ways to cultivate not only learning but also the *joy of learning*.

Before inviting young people to try out different mindfulness activities, invite yourself to practice too. As it goes, we can only teach and guide what we know. Experiment with different mindful activities, noticing the ones that resonate and the ones that don't. Then share different exercises with young people. And just see what happens.

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE:

- *Begin each school day or counseling session with a mindfulness activity.
- *Place cards into a basket and randomly choose one or two for Brain Breaks.
- *Invite students who are feeling distracted or stressed to experiment with one of the activities.
- *Help students to re-center themselves using one or two activities during transition times.
- *Experiment with different activities when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed. Experiment when you are feeling relaxed and calm too.

MINDFUL LISTENING

Sitting comfortably, closing your eyes, pay attention to the sounds that surround you. Notice what you hear. *Voices? Machines? A phone ringing? Birds singing?* Zooming your attention to the sound of your breathing, just listen for a while.



5 FINGER BREATHING

Slowly trace your left hand with your right finger, starting where your hand and wrist meet. As you trace each finger breathe-in as your finger climbs up and breathe-out as your finger slides down. Then switch hands.



BALLOON BREATHING

Imagine your belly is like a balloon. Breathing in, notice how the balloon gets bigger as it inflates. Breathing out, notice how the balloon gets smaller as it deflates.



BELLY BREATHING

Placing your hands on your belly, notice how they gently rise and fall as you breathe-in and breathe-out. Like waves in the ocean.



THE GIFT FROM ANGER

Noticing the felt sensations of anger, take a moment to just witness how your body feels. Breathing-in, breathing-out, *where do you feel the anger? What color is it? Temperature? Shape? Texture?* Now imagine that anger is your good friend. *What is it telling you you need?*



NATURE GRATITUDE

Quietly, to yourself, name three things in nature for which you are grateful. As you recall these things, send them a thank you. For example:
*Thank you, trees.
Thank you, rain.
Thank you, ladybugs.*



MINDFULNESS PRACTICE CARDS



JOYFUL MEMORY

Closing your eyes, remember a time when you felt filled with joy. *Where were you? Who were you with? What sounds, tastes, colors, and smells do you remember? What sensations did your body feel?*



BODY SCAN

Sitting or laying down comfortably, with eyes closed, zoom your attention to your feet and toes. Notice how they feel. Zooming up, focus on your legs. Now move your attention to your belly. Your chest. And back. How do these parts feel? Now zoom to your shoulders, then arms, hands, and fingers. Move up to your head, paying attention to how it feels.

LIKE THE MOUNTAIN

Stand tall, feet forward with legs hip-width apart. Straighten your arms alongside your body. Imagine you are a mountain, strong & stable.

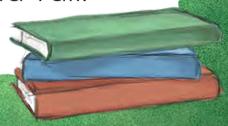


FLOWER BREATHING

With eyes closed, imagine smelling a beautiful flower. Breathing in slowly, fill your body with freshness. Breathing out slowly, notice how your body feels.

OBJECT BREATHING

Laying down on your back, place a small object (like a book, stuffed animal, or pebble) on your belly. As you breathe in and out slowly and deeply, observe the object rise and fall.



ROOM AWARENESS

Walking around slowly, in silence, look around the room and try to find at least three things you have never noticed before.

OBJECT AWARENESS

Placing a small object in your hand, like a pencil, stone, or eraser, close your eyes and really notice how it feels to your touch. Focus on how heavy or light it is, on its texture, shape, and temperature. Spend a few moments placing your full attention on this experience.



BUTTERFLY HUG



Crossing your arms in front of you, hold the left shoulder with your right hand and your right shoulder with your left hand. Breathe in and out for 5 slow breaths. Now pretend that your hands are butterfly wings, and gently flap them against your shoulders for a minute or so, noticing how you feel.

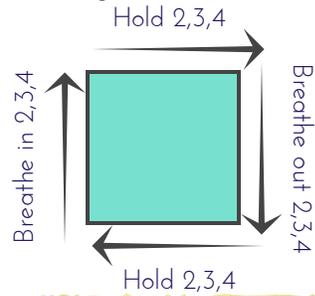
THOUGHT AWARENESS



Sitting or laying down, in silence, notice all the thoughts that are passing through your mind. Pay attention to those thoughts, without judgment. Imagine the thoughts are like clouds passing through the blue sky.

SQUARE BREATHING

Drawing a pretend square in the air with your finger or tracing a square printed on paper, follow the guide below.



BALLOON RIDE



Imagine you are traveling in a hot air balloon, slowly floating over your favorite place outdoors. Maybe over the mountains, lake, beach, or park. What do you see down below?

LIKE A TREE

Standing on one leg, rest the other foot on the standing leg, below or above the knee. Imagine that your standing leg is a tree trunk rooted into the ground. Try extending your arms like tree branches. Switch legs now.

