

*Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and our freedom.*

—Viktor Frankl



EMPOWERING EDUCATION

Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning

Mindful Body

Level: Upper Elementary (3-5)

Timeframe: 20-30 minutes

Concepts:

- Mindful Body
- Mindfulness
- Paying Attention



Big Ideas For This Lesson

Feeling stressed? Overwhelmed? Classroom out of control? Consider the benefits of [cultivating a mindful classroom](#).⁵

Mindfulness can be a big concept for your students to grasp. Simply stated, mindfulness means **paying attention**. It is a practice that supports students in noticing and accepting what is happening inside themselves and outside themselves right now.¹ The practice of mindfulness involves active, nonjudgmental attention resulting in increased awareness and acceptance of the present moment.

A large component of our SEL lessons this year will center on mindfulness. While we tend to focus on teaching mindfulness to our students, a [new wave of research](#)^{3,6} suggests that students experience greater benefits from teachers who practice mindfulness regularly. So, as you prepare to teach mindfulness to your students, you are encouraged to begin a personal practice of your own. This can be as simple as dedicating 2 minutes every day to sit quietly and pay attention to your breathing. Whatever your level of personal practice may be, know that you don't have to be an expert to teach mindfulness. In fact, it can be an empowering experience for students to see that you are not the "expert" and that you are working and learning alongside them.

There are many resources available to help you start your own practice. [The Greater Good Science Center](#) provides personal and classroom resources. You can also find free [guided meditations](#) online and teacher training programs like [Mindful Schools](#). These are just a few of the plethora of resources available online and in your community – you are encouraged to do your own research. All it takes is a few minutes a day!



Essential Vocabulary

Mindful Body
Mindful Listening
Mindfulness
Paying Attention
Posture
Practice
Relaxed vs. Tense



Preparation

Before teaching this lesson, review the script and spend at least two minutes practicing mindful body on your own.



Teaching Script

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)

If this is your first lesson on mindfulness, you will need to spend some time providing students with some context and getting them hooked on a personal level. One way to do this is to simply pose the question:

| *How many times during a single day have you been told to pay attention by adults?*

Allow students to share guesses. You will probably receive guesses anywhere between 10 and 1,000. Proceed to ask them:

- | • *How many times a week?*
- | • *How many times in a year?*
- | • *How many times in your whole life?*

By now students will be getting the picture that they have been told to pay attention many, many times. Summarize for students how many times they have been told to pay attention and then ask:

| *Wow! So you have been **told** to pay attention thousands of times, but how many times has anyone **taught** you how to pay attention?*

Again, allow students to share guesses. This time most numbers will likely be between 0 - 10.

| *Does anyone else think that's weird? You are **told** to pay attention all of the time, but no one has really **taught** you how to pay attention? Well, today we are going to spend some time learning how to pay attention using something called **mindfulness**. It turns out that mindfulness is also a good way to help you feel happier, calmer, less angry, and less stressed. Let's stop talking about it and actually see what it's all about.*



GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

*The first thing we are going to practice is called **Mindful Body**. This is the foundation of mindfulness and will be important every time we practice mindfulness.*

Without moving, everyone take a moment to notice how you are sitting in your chair right now.

Pause to allow students to take note of their body and posture.

Some of you are sitting up straight, some of you are relaxed, and some of you are falling asleep on your desks. Let's see if we can notice how our body affects our mood and our ability to pay attention.

I am going to show you what a mindful body looks like. The first step is to move your chair away from your desk so that you are not touching your desk or anyone else.

Pause and instruct students to move their chairs slightly away from their desks.

Teaching Note: It is important to make this distinction so that students see mindfulness as unique and different from the rest of their school day. Ultimately we hope that students can integrate mindfulness practices throughout their day, though it is helpful to distinguish it as something “different” when they are first learning. You may even have students turn their chairs to face the back of the classroom.

A mindful body is relaxed and focused at the same time. Scoot to the edge of the chair so you are not leaning back.

Pause to demonstrate this.

Next, put your feet flat on the floor, or just let them hang still if they do not reach.

Pause again to demonstrate and allow students to follow along.

Now, put your hands on your lap, straighten your spine, and relax your shoulders.

Pause again.

This is called a mindful body. Take a moment now to notice how this is different than how you normally sit.

Do you feel any different? Any more awake or alert? Is it easier or harder to pay attention like this? Use your eyes to look around the room, noticing all of the little details.

Demonstrate this with exaggerated movements.

Look up to the ceiling...look side-to-side...look down at the floor. Did you notice anything you would not normally notice?

Good job. Now relax!

Let out an exaggerated sigh and slouch way back in your chair.

Relax and just let your body go limp. Notice what this feels like. Is it easier or harder to pay attention? Are you more or less awake? How does it feel different?



REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

Now, let's try a mindful body again. Sit up straight. Feet flat on the floor. Hands on your lap. Straighten your back and relax your shoulders. Notice how this is different. Notice if you can focus more or less; notice if you are more or less awake. For most of us, a mindful body is the easiest way to help us pay attention. We will use this mindful body whenever we practice mindfulness and you can also use it whenever you want to pay more attention.

Teaching Note: Consider extending the practice time to 2 -5 minutes of silent mindful body practice. Setting it up as a challenge often motivates students to engage more fully in the practice (e.g., *“Do you think we could all silently practice mindful body for two minutes? I will set a timer and see if we are up for the challenge!”*).

Make it a goal as a class to practice mindful body for at least two minutes every day this week.

As time allows, facilitate a group reflection or provide time for students to reflect in their journals using the *Reflect it* questions listed below.

Teaching Note: During discussion and reflection, you are encouraged to demonstrate how mindful body could be used to improve academic performance (e.g., *“Imagine trying to solve a difficult math problem without a mindful body. How well can you focus and pay attention? Now imagine trying to solve the same problem with a mindful body. Does using a mindful body change your ability to pay attention?”*).



EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

Reflect on it

- *What differences did you notice between your “normal body” and your “mindful body”?*
- *Was there anything you noticed in your mind or body that was challenging or distracting during mindfulness practice?*
- *What did you notice while you were practicing mindfulness? What happened in the room? What happened to your mood?*

Journal it

- Describe what happens inside your body when you practice mindfulness.
- Draw a picture in your journal about how you felt before and after mindfulness practice.



EXTENSIONS

Classroom

- Students thrive on routines and predictability in the classroom. Practice mindfulness in the classroom 1 - 2 minutes at the same time every day.²
- Mindfulness practice is especially useful to help students regain focus before or after transitions such as returning to class from recess or lunch, or in preparing for a test, or performance, or competition.⁴

School-wide

- Avoid associating a mindfulness practice with disciplinary interventions.² Mindfulness ought to be viewed as a practice of unconditional acceptance and not as something punitive.
- Practice mindful body and other mindfulness techniques as a whole school during assemblies.
- Walk the walk; try starting teacher and administrative meetings with a few minutes of mindfulness practice.



REFERENCES

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