

REFRESHING RECESS EXPANSION PROGRAM NEWSLETTER #9:

Mindfulness

● Mindfulness

Teaching mindfulness to students develops their awareness of inner and outer experiences, helping them understand how different emotions manifest in their bodies (Beach, 2017). Mindfulness exercises can have a powerful impact on emotional regulation and cognitive focus. When teaching mindfulness is accepted and embraced in a classroom, or throughout the school, the entire mood and tone of the environment changes.

“Mindfulness is a powerful tool that supports children in calming themselves, focusing their attention, and interacting effectively with others, all critical skills for functioning well in school and in life. Incorporating mindfulness into education has been linked to improving academic and social and emotional learning. Also, mindfulness strengthens some underlying development processes — such as focus, resilience, and self-soothing — that will help kids in the long run.”

~ **Amy Saltzman, M.D.**, Director of the Association for Mindfulness in Education

● Why Teach Mindfulness? (Gerszberg, 2017)

- The prevalence of mental health challenges in youth continues to increase.
 - 1 out of every 5 children suffers from a mental health or learning disorder, and 80% of chronic mental disorders begin in childhood (Child Mind Institute)
 - 1 in 8 children in the United States suffers from anxiety disorders (National Institutes of Health)
 - An estimated 247 billion dollars are spent on childhood mental disorders each year (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019)
- Studied show that the benefits of mindfulness may include:
 - Increased focus, attention, self-control, classroom participation, compassion
 - Improved academic performance, ability to resolve conflict, well-being
 - Decreased levels of stress, depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior



● Suggestions for Introducing Mindfulness:

- **Listen to the bell:** This is a simple exercise that allows children to start by channeling their focus into what they hear. Use a bell, chimes, or even a phone app to play a peaceful, rhythmical sound. Instruct the child to focus on the sound, listening carefully each time until they can no longer hear it.
- **Deep breathing:** Throughout this program, the students have been introduced to various deep breathing exercises. Have the child pick one of their favorite exercises to practice. Instruct them to really focus on their breathing, listening to their breath and feeling their lungs expand/deflate.
- **Make your walks mindful:** Go on a walk with the child, *taking in* all the senses in your environment. Facilitate the experience by instructing the child to pay attention to the sounds he/she can hear, feel the wind against their body, notice the smells, point out what he/she can see, etc.
- **Establish a gratitude practice:** Help the child take a moment to focus on something that he/she is thankful for. Reflect on the week, day, or particular experience and identify something that had a strong impact on him/her. How did it make them feel? Why are they thankful for that experience?
- **Meditation:** There are many guided meditation scripts online that you can read, or even videos that you can play to facilitate mindfulness. These experiences typically involve closing your eyes and relaxing as someone walks you through an imaginative meditation experience.
- **Make a Mind Jar:** This can be any craft activity that involves shaking something up or flipping it upside down and watching what's inside settle (like a snow globe). When you shake it up, it is like a storm – particles swimming around frantically, moving all over the place. However, eventually the storm calms, and it all settles down – as do our minds.
- **Mindful eating:** This exercise involves taking your time to eat a food item, being particularly mindful of the way it looks, feels, smells, and tastes. A fun version of this activity involves using a cracker. Have the child chew the cracker very slowly and allow it to dissolve in their mouth. Eventually, it should start to taste sweet. This is actually the body breaking down the carbohydrates into sugars.



Beach, S. R. (2017). 8 Ways to teach mindfulness to kids. Retrieved from https://www.huffpost.com/entry/8-ways-to-teach-mindfulness-to-kids_b_5611721

Gerszberg, C. O. (2017). Best practices for bringing mindfulness into schools. Retrieved from <https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-in-education/>

