



Mindfulness

Becoming a more compassionate District.

Mindfulness is the practice of intentional awareness to be in the present moment, as best we can, in a non-judgmental way. It is not a trend or a “fix” for certain behaviors. It is part of a healthy lifestyle—a neuroscientific proven method that allows us to intentionally notice, pay attention to what is happening right now, and identify how we feel by naming our emotion in the moment. Practice enables us to pause and respond to what’s going on around us in a more thoughtful, skillful manner.

Mindfulness training started at Pittsburgh Public Schools in 2013 with third, fourth and fifth grade students learning to be more mindful. Over the years there have been documented improvements in focus, concentration, academic performance and overall well-being. Since then, it has expanded to include all grade levels, as well as teachers, administrators, nurses, counselors, psychologists and support personnel.

A certified Mindfulness instructor visits classrooms in schools across the District and helps students and adults learn mindfulness techniques that are appropriate for their age and grade levels. She also works with teachers and principals to model and organically incorporate mindfulness practices throughout the day. The goal is to create a more compassionate culture through the words and actions of the children and adults throughout the District.



Emotions continually change throughout the day. When students take a moment to be mindful, they can better focus on their school work.

Mindfulness techniques.

Students and adults are asked to face forward, sit cross-legged on the floor or in a chair with feet flat on the floor, hands gently on the lap, and spine straight but comfortable, yet alert. With the option to close eyes or lower the gaze to the floor, everyone is still and quiet in this posture, as they begin to carefully listen for sounds happening around them. Their awareness is heightened as they pay attention to sounds that are occurring that they typically do not realize. The impact can include sustained focused attention and concentration that becomes stronger with ongoing practice.

A focus on breath.

People typically do not pay attention to their breath, though it is with us all the time. If we pay attention, we notice our breath through the movement of our chest or belly, or the air we feel on our lip when we exhale through the nose. With the mindful posture, described above, we ask students and adults to take two deep breaths while thinking the words “breathing in, breathing out.” We follow that with three naturally paced breaths. If you feel your mind wander, we kindly suggest you start over, with the goal of taking five mindful breaths, silently coaching “breathing in, breathing out.”

Reduce reactivity— be mindful!

What happens when a child experiences anger on the playground? Without mindfulness training, the student’s emotions may cause him or her to kick, scream or even run away. These types of reactions only escalate the situation.

But when students notice the emotion through mindfulness practices, they are able to take an intentional pause and respond more thoughtfully, more skillfully.

Instead of reacting to their anger, they can address the emotion from a different, more thoughtful perspective. It is a powerful way to be aware of and respond to emotions.


**Expect
great
things.**



Benefits of Mindfulness

Mindfulness results in an improved environment in which teachers can teach and students can learn. In classrooms where students and adults naturally weave-in mindfulness practices, there are fewer outbursts and improved academic performance.

Many teachers find an increase in instruction time. Here's why:

- There are fewer distractions in the classroom.
- Students are more focused on learning.
- There is an increase in self-regulation.
- Students and adults become less reactive.
- Students and teacher experience heightened awareness, making learning more enjoyable and meaningful.

Mindfulness practice increases frequency for students to “come back” to the present when they realize the mind and thoughts are elsewhere. By recognizing they are off-task, pausing and responding to presence, they will be more open to receive classroom instruction.

The ripple effect of Mindfulness.

When students and teachers are both trained in mindfulness, there is a positive ripple effect. Many schools begin the school day with a mindfulness exercise. It only takes a few minutes for students to take several mindful breaths with a still, quiet, comfortable posture, to focus on clearing the mind for the present task of learning. Some teachers start and end their lessons with a brief mindfulness practice.

By pausing and learning to recognize and be with emotions, we become less reactive and more compassionate, kinder and more inclusive because of our commonality. The lessons and practices of mindfulness spill over from the classroom to the playground, to home and the community.



**Practice mindfulness at home.
Allow your child to show you how to
use mindfulness to reduce chaos and
frustration in your family life.**

**The intentional pause and paying
attention to the present moment have
been associated with helping to reduce
anxiety and stress, improving sleep
quality, reducing pain, and improving
performances in academics,
sports and at work.**

**It also results in an overall,
enhanced sense of well-being, with
increased insight and clarity, improved
quality of relationships, level of
engagement—and even lower
blood pressure!**

Need more information?

Contact sel@pghschools.org.

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