

Mindfulness: A Few Examples of Applications

Mindfulness is a form of meditation. It stresses intense awareness of current sensations, thoughts, and feelings without interpreting or judging them. Practices include breathing exercises, guided imagery, and other methods intended to relax one's body and mind and reduce stress. Such practices are being used for by therapists and in schools.

The Essence of Mindfulness

An awareness arising from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, without judgement. Jon Kabat-Zinn

Three components:

Intention - choosing to cultivate your awareness.

Attention - to the present moment, sensations, and thoughts.

Attitude - being kind, curious, and non-judgmental.

About Mindfulness Use with Students: What Do Researchers Say?

Based on their research, Ager and colleagues (2015) state that “Findings suggest that mindfulness enhances student wellbeing and helps children develop a greater awareness of their body, mind and emotions.”

Weare and colleagues (2019) stress mindfulness supports psychological and social health and well being, helps with anxiety and stress, and strengthens self-regulation. Teachers also have reported that mindfulness practice can have "transformative effects" in classrooms by creating a greater sense of authentic presence and empathy; therefore deepening the relationship between student and teacher.

Gabriely and colleagues (2020) note that guided meditation practice has been found to help students that struggle with anxiety calm the inside chatter that often causes anxiety, and focus on an outside voice.

King (2019) cautions that: “Mindfulness has potential downsides that are often ignored. For some people, mindfulness practices could increase the stress response, negative emotions, dissociation, and even inhibit sleep. As with any intervention, before we recommend mindfulness we must understand its potential risks.”

About Mindfulness Use in Schools

See the Center resource [Mindfulness and Schools](#) for a general discussion about use in schools. In general, schools that adopt mindfulness practices do so for varied reasons (e.g., to reduce stress and anxiety, foster empathy and promote better peer and teacher relationships, improve classroom behavior). It may be used in regular and special education classrooms and with diagnosed students.

Since there is considerable interest in use of mindfulness practices with students diagnosed with ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder, we offer the following brief notes on some of the research.

*The material in this document builds on work done by Zoe Rhodes as a participant with the national Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA in 2023.

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Effects of Mindfulness on ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder

Children diagnosed as ADHD often are highly active and seem to have trouble focusing, paying attention, and controlling impulses. Currently, a primary form of treatment for individuals with ADHD is medication. Early studies have suggested mindfulness has some promise. For example, Zylowska and colleagues (2008) conducted a ADHD study with diagnosed adolescents (at least 15 years of age) and adults who participated weekly in 2.5 hour mindfulness sessions and daily at home practice for 8 weeks. 78% completed and reported high satisfaction the training.

“Pre-post improvements in self-reported ADHD symptoms and test performance on tasks measuring attention and cognitive inhibition were noted. Improvements in anxiety and depressive symptoms were also observed.” In their review of 36 adult and child studies, Oliva and colleagues (2021) report that mindfulness based interventions (MBIs) improved ADHD symptoms. However, none of the children studies were active-controlled. They conclude that “Even if further studies with a better methodology are needed, we can suggest the MBIs may be useful as complementation and not as replacement of other active interventions.”

Children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often experience sensory stimuli as overwhelming, making their interactions with others and their environment difficult. Researchers using mindfulness interventions have reported success in reducing aggressive and non-compliant behavior, and improving social communication in children and adolescents with high functioning ASD (Bostic et al, 2015 Singh et al. 2006, 2011, 2014). Hartley, Dorstyn, and Due (2019) reviewed 10 independent studies (a pooled sample of 233 children and adults with ASD and 241 caregivers). They state that “Caregivers, children and adults who received mindfulness all reported significant gains in subjective wellbeing immediately post-intervention. Available data indicated intervention effects were maintained at 3-month follow-up.” They conclude that “Mindfulness presents a promising intervention strategy in ASD populations, however more controlled research is required to determine its precise efficacy for affected families and subgroups.”

Concluding Comments

The current research on mindfulness interventions for use in schools suggests potential positive outcomes; some critics have raised cautions about potential downsides. And it has been stressed that effectiveness with children is related to use at home and school.

Decision about use at school depends on answers to such fundamental questions as:

- (1) How much will the proposed mindfulness program contribute to efforts to enhance the school’s improvement agenda with respect to ensuring equal opportunity for all students to succeed at school?
- (2) Where does the proposed program fit into that agenda?
- (3) In adopting the program, will a school have to give up something important?
- (4) Will the program help coalesce or interfere with efforts to develop a unified, comprehensive, systemic, and equitable approach to enhancing healthy development and addressing a full range of overlapping learning, behavior, and emotional problems?

Advocates asking schools to adopt mindfulness programs need to consider all this.

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