

Mastering Mindfulness

Fostering a Mindfulness Culture in Children

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With the constant barrage of social media, and the plethora of children's apps, political correctness and being respectful to one another have become less important in today's culture, or so it seems.

Teachers, librarians, and childcare providers are trying their best to arrest the slide. Recognizing the problem, many teachers and public librarians are creating mindfulness programs for children. During professional-development workshops, presentations are given on the personal benefits of mindfulness, as well as guidance on how to introduce these activities to students. Follow-up activities include participants registering for online or summer college courses, leading to a mindfulness certificate, or watching TED talks or mindfulness videos, individually or as a group, and discussing important aspects.

As a junior high school library teacher, I initiated (and have continued) a two-week series of mindfulness activities with sixth-grade students. I started with read-aloud "Meditate With Me" (2017), and the students listened avidly and engaged in the activities, including viewing YouTube videos. Some students created and shared their own mindful mantras.

An awesome read-aloud that emphasizes empathy and kindness is *Who Is My Neighbor?* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Flyaway, 2019). Children learn what it means to be a good neighbor. A neighbor is not necessarily someone who lives nearby, but rather a person who offers help, regardless of race, beliefs, or economic standing. Librarians, teachers, and caregivers can involve students in discussions on how they can become a better neighbor or friend to schoolmates, family members, or even to those living in their own neighborhoods.

Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons by Amy Krouse Rosenthal (HarperCollins, 2006) cleverly depicts the meaning of several good conduct words. Similarly, the 1946 classic *How to Behave and Why*, written by Munro Leaf, instructs children on being honest, strong, fair, and wise.

The nonfiction book *Caring* by Robin S. Doak (Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 2002) features many wonderful suggestions on how students can be loving and caring—for example, writing thank-you letters to firefighters or police officers, letting them know you appreciate their service; helping a senior neighbor with chores; or standing up for a friend when they are being made fun of.

Some activities that schools are engaging in to inspire students to be more thoughtful and kind are the bucket-filling activities based on the books by Carol McCloud. This is where students brainstorm ideas on how they can be bucket fillers on a daily basis, such as by being kind and respectful to their classmates, others at their school, and everyone they come in contact with. Sometimes students recite the bucket fillers' pledge or send friendly notes or cards to friends and family members.

Bucket filling can also encompass Random Acts of Kindness Week. Started in 1995, it is an annual global event with the



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aim of uniting people through kindness. In 2020, it will be observed February 16–23. Likewise, World Kindness Day, introduced in 1998, is another fantastic event, celebrated in several different countries on November 13. On these two occasions, adults encourage children to take a break from their personal devices and do something positive for someone else. This may consist of engaging in projects that make a difference in their communities, like painting a community center or planting flowers.

Being involved in character education principles and social and emotional learning at all levels offers students many chances to be caring, ethical, intentional, and responsible in their thoughts, words, and deeds. A helpful curriculum called Social Emotional Learning (SEL) that focuses on five core competencies (self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, responsible decision-making, and social awareness) is available online at www.eanesisd.net/academics/services/sel.

Students are introduced to different aspects of the SEL curriculum and read, listen to stories, complete worksheets, create posters and storyboards, conduct role-play, and write poems or skits. Building-wide activities at schools involve placing large posters in cafeterias, auditoriums, and hallways as well as having assembly programs and visits by authors and other motivational speakers. Expanded activities may include the rededication or renaming of school corridors and entrances with visual reminders like Caring Street, Citizenship Way, Diligence Drive, Positivity Plaza, Respect Highway, Responsibility Road, and Trustworthiness Boulevard.

In the upper-grades (9–12), students are more aware of how their behavior affects others. They learn and practice how to be responsible, make good decisions and better choices, and develop healthier relationships with peers and adults.

Meditation and mindfulness are relatively new phenomena in schools but are quickly becoming the buzzwords of our time. Mindfulness is seen as a way to regulate students' behavior and to focus on learning. It emphasizes slow intentional breathing and awareness. Students engage in self-aware activities focusing on the present moment, their thoughts, and their surroundings. Students will be calmer, more mindful, and engaged after practicing the breathing techniques. &

Recommended Mindfulness Titles

- Binkow, Howard, and Reverend Ana. *Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns We Can All Get Along*. Illus. by Mike Ferrin. We Do Listen, 2014. 32p.
- Doak, Robin S. *Caring*. Photo research by Yvette Reyes. Raintree Steck-Vaughn, 2002. 32p.
- Dyer, Wayne H., with Kristina Tracy. *No Excuses! How What You Say Can Get in Your Way*. Illus. by Stacy Halder Bodnick. Hay House, 2009. 32p.
- Gates, Mariam. *Meditate with Me. A Step-by-Step Mindfulness Journey*. Illus. by Margarita Surnaite. Penguin, 2017. 40p.
- Graves, Sue. *Not Fair, Won't Share*. Illus. by Desideria Guicciardini. Free Spirit, 2011. 28p.
- Leaf, Munro. *How to Behave and Why*. Illus. by the author. Universe Pub., 1946. 48p.
- Levine, Amy-Jill, and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso. *Who Is My Neighbor?* Illus. by Denise Turu. Flyaway Books, 2019. 32p.
- McCloud, Carol, and Katherine Martin. *Fill a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Young Children*. Illus. by David Messing. Bucket Fillosophy, 2018. 24p.
- McCloud, Carol. *Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids*. Illus. by David Messing. Bucket Fillosophy, 2015. 32p.
- Ortner, Nick, and Alison Taylor. *My Magic Breath: Finding Calm through Mindful Breathing*. Illus. by Michelle Polizzi. Harper Collins, 2018. 32p.
- Pryor, Kimberley Jane. *Kindness*. Photo Research by Naomi Parker and Legend Images. Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2008. 32p.
- Robinson-Peete, Holly, and Ryan Elizabeth Peete. *My Brother Charlie*. Illus. by Shane Evans. Scholastic, 2010. 40p.
- *Room to Breathe: Teaching Mindfulness in the Classroom*, DVD. Kindred Media, 2012, 72 minutes.
- Rosenthal, Amy Krouse. *Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons*. Illus. by Jane Dyer. Harper Collins, 2006. 40p.
- Smith, Bryan. *Kindness Counts: A Story for Teaching Random Acts of Kindness*. Illus. by Brian Martin. Boys Town Press, 2016. 32p.
- Stewart, Whitney. *Mindful Kids: 50 Mindfulness Activities for Kindness, Focus and Calm*. Barefoot Books: Box Cards Ed., 2017. 50p.
- *Storyland Yoga*. DVD. Playful Planet, 2016, 53 minutes.
- *Yoga for Kids: 20 Playful Kid-Style Poses*. DVD. ABC's, 2015, 35 minutes.