

Mindfulness Basic

Now that school is back in full swing, the honeymoon phase of the first few weeks back has worn off. Students are starting to test new boundaries, and teachers are already breaking out their classroom management strategies. This might be a good time to introduce some mindfulness basics for the classroom to create a calmer and more focused learning environment.

Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present and aware of what we are doing in the current moment. Over the past two decades, research has confirmed that mindfulness-based interventions can improve academic performance while supporting social, emotional, and behavioral development. These practices can enhance executive functioning, making it easier to concentrate on lessons and increase performance on tasks.

Mindfulness also helps students regulate their emotions and behaviors, which can reduce anxiety, stress, and the number of meltdowns. When repeatedly practiced, mindfulness supports youth development of social-emotional skills and interpersonal relationships. Classrooms with positive learning environments and students with strong emotional regulation skills can improve their teachers' well-being and help reduce burnout.

Classroom techniques can be completed rather quickly. Let's look at some common techniques.

Kindergarten through 2nd Grade

Pinwheel Breathing (3-5 minutes)

Give each student a pinwheel and guide them through several types of breathing.

- First, ask students to blow on the pinwheel using a normal breath. What happens to the pinwheel? How does their body feel?
- Next, have them use short, quick breaths. What changes? Does their heartbeat feel faster or slower?
- Finally, ask them to use long, deep breaths. How does the pinwheel move? Do they feel calmer or more relaxed? Does their heartbeat feel slower?

5-4-3-2-1 Senses Exercise (3-5 minutes)

Students identify:

- Five things they can see
- Four things they can feel
- Three things they can hear
- Two things they can smell
- One thing they can taste

3rd through 5th grade

Square Breathing (2–5 minutes)

Using a printed square or an imaginary one, students trace each side while following this pattern:

- Inhale for four seconds.
- Hold for four seconds.
- Exhale for four seconds.
- Hold again for four seconds.

Repeat the pattern for two to five minutes.

Five-Finger Breathing (2–5 minutes)

Students trace the outline of one hand with the index finger of the opposite hand, inhaling as they trace up each finger and exhaling as they trace down. Continue for two to five minutes.

6th through 12th Grade

Mindful Journaling (3–5 minutes)

Provide reflection prompts that encourage students to explore their thoughts, emotions, and experiences.

Example prompts:

- When you make a mistake, what's the first thing you think? Was this thought helpful or unhelpful?
- What is something you worked hard at and are now good at? How did you keep practicing?
- What was one failure you've had? What did you learn from that failure?
- Think about a project or subject that was hard. How did you overcome that challenge?
- Think about a disagreement you've had with a friend. How did you do? Would you change anything?

Body Scan Meditation (15- 30 minutes, used only if time allows)

Using a prerecorded video, guide students through a brief body scan.

Gratitude List (2–5 minutes)

Ask students to write down three to five things they are grateful for. Encourage them to reflect on why each item is meaningful.

These mindfulness techniques can be used both in school settings and at home. Research supports that mindfulness techniques benefit students with low self-regulation skills and students living with ADHD, anxiety, and conduct behaviors. With only a few minutes, daily mindfulness practices can support academic success, stress reduction, and prosocial emotional learning.