



---

# MANUAL FOR MINDFUL EDUCATORS

---

**A handbook for Teachers offering Tools for Cultivating Mindfulness and Social  
Emotional Learning**

**Mindful Educators Sri Lanka**



## Manual for Mindful Educators

A handbook for Teachers written in Sinhala, Tamil and English

This manual offers a variety of practices and tools that teachers can use to nurture mindfulness, develop values and ethical behaviour , navigate complex emotions, and enhance well-being for themselves and their students within harmonious academic environments

**Mindful Educators Sri Lanka**

<https://mindfuleducators.lk/>

[mindfuleducatorssl@gmail.com](mailto:mindfuleducatorssl@gmail.com)

2021

MINDFUL EDUCATORS

<https://mindfuleducators.lk/>

## Table of Contents

Preface .....	4
Introduction and Overview .....	5
Why Mindfulness and values? .....	7
How can you use this Manual? .....	7
How long should we practice?.....	7
Module One .....	9
Mindfulness and Values Framework .....	9
Introduction .....	9
Let's begin with a simple Pause: Bringing Attention to your Body .....	11
What is Mindfulness? .....	12
The benefits of Mindfulness .....	12
Let's take a look at the <i>Mind Jar</i> .....	13
A Core Mindfulness Practice: Breath as an Anchor .....	14
Practice attention to our senses 5-4-3-2-1 .....	15
The Values Framework .....	16
Defining our core values .....	17
The Secret to your Success .....	18
Module Two: .....	19
Mindfulness practices, the Brain and the Value of Gratitude .....	19
The Brain .....	20
The Brain and Mindfulness .....	21
Introducing the Brain and How the Brain works .....	21
Mindfulness Practices to help us to slow down .....	23
Mindfulness of Body Sensations.....	23
Walk as if ' <i>you are kissing the earth with your feet</i> ' .....	23
Gratitude as a value .....	24
A word - A thought - A question .....	25
Gratitude Meditation.....	25
A Note for Practice.....	26
Module Three: .....	27
Mindfulness practices with kindness, empathy and forgiveness:.....	27
Mindfulness of thoughts.....	28

Mind-wandering: Default Mode Network .....	28
Mindfulness of Thoughts: Leaves on a Stream .....	30
Mindful Listening .....	31
Mindful Eating.....	32
Being Mindful of our Emotions.....	33
Hot Cross Buns .....	34
Values.....	34
Kindness .....	34
Forgiveness .....	35
Note of practice .....	35
Module Four .....	36
Emotions, Resilience, Social Emotional Learning & Values like Respect & Integrity .....	36
Brain and Well-being .....	37
Stress.....	38
What is your Stress? What is your coping mechanism?.....	38
Resilience .....	40
Respect.....	40
Anxiety, Concentration and Connection .....	41
Addressing Anxiety and Mental Well-being .....	42
Purpose and Guidelines .....	42
Classroom Rules and Integrity .....	42
Dealing with Colleagues.....	43
Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning.....	44
Authors .....	46

## Preface

The *Manual for Mindful Educators* is a hand-book for teachers and all educators who wish to introduce mindfulness with values, kindness and ethical behavior to their students.

Using a systematic approach, the Manual takes the reader from simple mindfulness practices to the more complex, and gradually weaves in the connection of mindfulness with developing values like kindness, respectful behavior, integrity and ethical practices. The Manual incorporates important information that'll be useful for teachers and refers to the function of the brain and neuroscience as and where necessary.

The reader will be able to use the guided mindfulness instructions to learn the practices him/herself and also to share with students. Eventually, together with the students, educators can use these practices and teachings in classrooms, schools, universities and all educational institutions, to foster a more harmonious and enriching academic environment.

The *Manual for Mindful Educators* was compiled by Tara de Mel, Dinusha Wickremesekera and Niluka Gunawardena. They have used their individual experiences and understanding on the topic, as well as references from internationally reputed sources to design the Modules, so that an educator can be guided on how to incorporate these practices into their own lives and into the lives of their students.

This Manual, in Sinhala, Tamil and English will be initially published on the *Mindful Educators Sri Lanka* website and will be accessible to anyone freely.

The authors greatly appreciate the contributions from venerable Tenzin Lekdron, Muthu Sivagnanam, Chamila Jayawardhana, Harsha Gunasena, S. Muralitharan, S. Sivagurunathan, and Yureshya Perera.

Educators are welcome to email us on [mindfuleducatorssl@gmail.com](mailto:mindfuleducatorssl@gmail.com) for any clarifications and for any further instruction based on the teachings given.

# Introduction and Overview

Welcome to the *Manual for Mindful Educators*.

We are happy that you have decided to take this four-Module Course meant for all educators. We hope that by following this Course you would improve your own mindfulness practice, and will be able to incorporate values like kindness, respect, and ethical behavior with integrity. We hope you can introduce these practices to your students and that these would enhance your understanding of social-emotional learning (SEL).

Research studies on well-being, happiness and successful living have shown that the ability to develop and maintain healthy social connections is important. Education systems which prepare students for life, would benefit enormously from practices like mindfulness with values, and social emotional learning.

Traditionally, education promotes academic achievement facilitating respectable employment, but has placed little emphasis on SEL. The latter is critical to managing our own emotions and behaviours and for fostering healthy relationships, both in and out of school. Research has shown that mindfulness practice supports this process. The most successful and well-researched programs show that both mindfulness and SEL should be combined at age-appropriate levels in schools, to help children develop critical life skills.

For the above reasons education systems around that world are now changing their approach to include SEL and mindfulness into the mainstream curriculum. Sri Lanka too is turning in this direction. It is easy for Sri Lanka to turn to this ancient practice of mindfulness due to its culture and association with the Buddha's teachings, since it was the Buddha who first described mindfulness 2600 years ago in India. Later this was included into the practices of all major religions. All of these will help students to manage challenging and stressful school environments which are driven by academic achievement.

**Mindful Educators Sri Lanka** prepared this Manual on *Mindfulness with Values, Kindness and Ethical Behaviour for Educators*, which serves as a guide for educators to practice mindfulness in class. We hope these guidelines will assist teachers to face multiple challenges in school.

Teachers and students alike, will gradually develop core values such as tolerance, patience, respect, empathy, compassion, kindness, forgiveness and emotional resilience. We believe that a classroom environment that develops these values will nurture students who will have invaluable life-skills, leading towards happiness and success.

The modules were developed using the experience of the writers, and augmented by research on mindfulness and social emotional learning. Mindfulness activities described in these modules have been used by teachers in Sri Lanka with success. *Mindful Educators Sri Lanka* conducted workshops for primary school teachers in 2018-2019, and their experiences are described on the website ([www.mindfuleducators.lk](http://www.mindfuleducators.lk)). We hope that you too can use these modules to nurture positive learning environments for your students.

Before you begin this Course please take a moment to answer the following questions:

1. Would you like to feel more relaxed, calm and centred during your day, no matter how challenging the days might seem?  
 IF Yes – *The practice of mindfulness enables you to navigate personal and professional relationships skillfully.*  
 IF No – *the practice of mindfulness might help you and your students to understand these situations better.*
2. Would you like to know how to pay attention to your own emotional needs and the emotions of your students in the classroom?
3. Would you like to cultivate compassion and empathy towards yourself and others?
4. Would you like to understand the mind, its negative biases and its positive potential?
5. Would you like to learn mindful practices which will help in managing your classroom efficiently?
6. Would you like your students to be helpful, accepting and respectful of diversity and to understand the uniqueness of individuals without prejudice or judgement?
7. Would you like your students to have a strong foundation of mindfulness-based values and ethics to guide them as they mature?

If you *answered YES* to most of the above questions, you are beginning to establish reasons for:

1. Following this Manual effectively
2. To begin, or continue and deepen your mindfulness practice.

**Before you commence this training, you should be clear why you are doing this, in other words, what is your intention? It will help you to stay on track with your practice.**

**Even if you miss a day of practice remember it is more important to see this with non-judgmental awareness and return to your practice.**

It would be good if you would begin a journal to write your experiences and reflections on your practice. *'My Mindful Journal'*.

The first entry in your Journal would be to answer the following questions:

Why am I doing this course?

How much time and when can I allocate towards the practice of mindfulness and my well-being?

- Suggestion: begin with five minutes of practice and increase the time of practice as you go along.
- Practice can be in the morning and evening.

What changes would I like to see in the students in my classroom?

## Why Mindfulness and values?

Molecular Biologist and now Tibetan Buddhist monk, Dr Matthieu Ricard is famously known as the ‘world’s happiest man’ and he stated: *“Understand that, just as a bird needs two wings to fly, you must develop wisdom and compassion simultaneously”*

In this Manual, we try to support your practice and your innate and natural capacity by giving you these two wings: the practices of mindfulness and an understanding of Social Emotional Learning with values, will help you develop wisdom & compassion. Once you have clarity on this you can take it to your students in the classroom and guide them to become mindful with kindness towards themselves and others.

## How can you use this Manual?

1. Read and understand each Module, thoroughly. Completely understand Module One before proceeding to the second. We encourage you to access the links that we have provided to further deepen your understanding. You could use these resources in the classroom.
2. Self-practice is very important. You will notice the effects in yourself gradually, and that would be a motivation for your students to also continue with the practices.
3. Reflecting on your experience is very important – you are strengthening your capacity to be aware. Reflection will help you to understand your experience.
4. In the classroom, make sure that all practices are age-appropriate and clearly understood before introducing the practice. Schedule different times for the practice within class.
5. Practice with students
6. Reflect with students
7. Assess the usefulness of these practices.
8. Journal your experience

## How long should we practice?

Start with few minutes a day and build up week by week so that you have a formal sitting practice of a minimum of 20 minutes by the end of the eight weeks. You can also do the same with informal practices like mindful eating, mindful listening. Ideally, encourage your students to start the day with 5-10 minutes of mindful sitting before the first class period commences. Similarly try to introduce five minutes of sitting quietly, calming the mind when they return to class after recess.

You can discuss with peers any obstacles to these practices, and how you can overcome these.

If you miss the practice one day, just continue the next day. Be kind but firm with your practice. If you do them, you will experience the benefits. Don’t judge yourself or your students, instead be kind to yourself and them, and pick up the practice.

Mindfulness is a strong and reliable practice but it is not an answer to all problems. So be kind to yourself, and seek advice from those with more experience than you, when needed.

This Manual is designed for all teachers and educators. Therefore, we have included theory and practice in order to understand and strengthen their practice of mindfulness and values, as well as activities

through which teachers can introduce mindfulness practice to their students. However, even if you are not a teacher you can still use this to commence or continue your personal mindfulness practice.

When you introduce this to your students we understand that you could be the only teacher in the school doing this, or you could be doing this with a group of teachers, or in exceptional situations the whole school could be practicing mindfulness and SEL. Whichever way, the practices have shown to be a catalyst for change in the classroom. We hope it will be the same for you.

# Module One

## Mindfulness and Values Framework

Welcome to Module One. We are glad that you are embarking on your mindfulness journey with us and we hope that you will benefit from these lessons and improve your mindfulness practice.

Besides your own practice, we hope that you will take this timeless practice to your students and peers, and that you will transform learning environments into pleasant ones. Your personal practice would be able to change spaces that have increasingly become stressful and anxious, to ones that generate calmness and joy, and also will support a student's readiness to learn in a harmonious manner.

By the end of this first Modules you should have an understanding of:

- What is mindfulness
- What are the benefits of mindfulness
- How to begin establishing a practice of mindfulness
- How to discuss mindfulness with your students
- Understand the Mindfulness for Educators values framework

We hope that you have read the introduction to the course and established an intention for yourself in doing this course.

### Introduction

Mindfulness was originally introduced by the Buddha about 2600 years ago in India. The practice of mindfulness derives its origins from the core-teachings of *the Satipatthana Sutta* (Ref: Buddhist scriptures, the Pali Canon, Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya) and continues to be practiced widely, by Buddhist meditation practitioners and mindfulness teachers, globally.

Mindfulness and its scientific basis was introduced more recently by Professor Jon Kabat-Zinn, Professor of Medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, who is world-renowned for introducing Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (1979). He described the ability to be aware of one's body and mind, and to experience the effects of stress and anxiety, and on how mindfulness can reduce stress. Today, mindfulness practices have evolved widely and is known as a method (and practice) that anyone can be used to support physical, mental and spiritual well-being, both as a preventive, and therapeutic or healing tool. Mindfulness practices are increasingly incorporated into the school curricula in countries around the world to improve students' well-being, to develop emotional intelligence and for social-emotional-learning.

Mindfulness practices are evident in all the major religions of the world. The following links will help you to understand this.



#### WATCH

---

- How to be a Mindful Muslim:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1GDJ-PvxZ8>
  - The Mindful Christian:  
[https://www.themindfulchristian.com/guides\\_for\\_practice.html](https://www.themindfulchristian.com/guides_for_practice.html)
  - A Journey Towards Jewish Mindfulness:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdZvLV3u3hc>
  - Mindful Meditation Hindu Academy Jay Lakhahi:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mX4DLIUhiQ>
  - History of Mindfulness: From East to West and Religion to Science:  
<https://positivepsychology.com/history-of-mindfulness/>
- 

Please read the following quotations of famous religious and spiritual leaders:

*‘Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment’*  
The Buddha.

*‘The wise man lets go of all results whether good or bad, and is focused on the action alone’*  
Sage Vyasa, the Bhagavad Gita.

*‘Be happy in the moment, that’s enough. Each moment is all we need, not more’*  
Saint Mother Teresa

*‘Verily, Allah has enjoined (Ihsan) mindfulness to everything’*  
The Prophet Muhammad

*‘When our mind is calm, we’re better able to find peace of mind and live a joyful life’*  
His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama

The practice of mindfulness is an exercise for strengthening the ‘mental muscles’ of the mind, and is equivalent to physically exercising the muscles of the body.

Mindfulness or being ‘present in the moment’ has an effect not only on the quality of your own experience of a particular moment, but also has an effect on those around you as well. Your calm and balanced

presence will have an effect on those around you. Eventually they may respond with the same calmness and balance. The secret is to practice and practice, frequently and continuously.

## Let's begin with a simple Pause: Bringing Attention to your Body

### Let's Practice

Sit comfortably. Take a few moments to silently experience the sitting posture. Be gentle and be kind to your body, be non-judgmental and be totally relaxed.

Simply note that you are sitting.

After a few moments, try to bring your attention to your breath and notice that you are breathing. Just note that you are breathing naturally for a few moments.

Don't force anything just allow the breathing to happen. Gradually note the character of your breathing – is your breath short or is it long? Just keep observing your breath and take a moment to be with yourself.

Spend a few moments in this moment.

After this pause, go back to what you were doing. Try to take regular pauses during your day, to come back 'home' within yourself at regular intervals. Your mind may want to use a reminder – say for example the school bell would remind you to take a breath and pause before you return what you were doing. Or you may use the gong of a 'singing bowl' or any other device as a reminder.

This practice will help you to slow down



**Tip**

*For your personal practice you might want to select times during the day to do this.*

*In your classroom you could use this when you begin of the day and end of the day and also when returning to class from interval to help students to settle down.*

## What is Mindfulness?

For the purpose of this course we will use the following definition of mindfulness:

*“Mindfulness is the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”*

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1979).

You will notice the key components in the above definitions:

- Purposeful
- Paying attention
- Present-moment
- Awareness
- Non-judgmental

Mindfulness practice helps each of us to be more aware of what’s happening around us.

- Being mindful means that we are aware of the biases we have when we view the world and its people or situations – so we try to move towards trying to be more understanding of the nature of reality without judgement and prejudice.
- Being mindful means that we are more focused on what we are doing, improving the quality of our attention to the present moment and therefore we are fully engaged
- Being mindful helps us to pause, assess a situation before reacting, thus allowing us to respond with kindness towards ourselves and others

## The benefits of Mindfulness

When we develop our awareness in this manner, we are:

1. Improving our attention-span and focus, both of which are essential for academic performance. You will understand how this happens in the subsequent Modules.
2. More competent to manage our natural, sudden, fight-flight-freeze (FFF) reactions. Our natural responses to stress (I.e the FFF mechanism) when overused, leads us to rapid, knee-jerk reactions to various situations that could get us into trouble. When we become able to manage our reactions, then we begin to respond with a greater degree of understanding and kindness. This will be described further.
3. Improving our skills of emotional intelligence. This technique also supports our capacity for kindness and compassion towards ourselves, towards all human beings, animals and the entire planet. You will understand this better later.

The benefits of mindfulness are better experienced than explained. A main benefit is emotional balance that comes from being aware of your sensations, thoughts, feelings and emotions as opposed to being controlled by them. As you develop your own practice, and as your students develop their practice you will want to reflect on your (and your students) experiences.

Maintain a regular practice and record your experiences in your Journal. The activities that follow will also help you to do this. Allow yourself time and space to progress, and don't rush into anything. We hope that you will persevere in your practice as much as you will encourage your students to do the same.



#### WATCH

---

- Why Mindfulness is a Superpower:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4&list=RDLVP2SqvqcQ\\_o&index=7](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4&list=RDLVP2SqvqcQ_o&index=7)
- 

## Let's take a look at the *Mind Jar*

To help students to understand the benefits of mindfulness, you can introduce the mind jar. The 'mind jar' can be used as an age-appropriate practice whether you are 3 years or 90 years old.

For the Mind Jar you will need an empty glass or plastic bottle (like an empty Jam bottle), some water and some glitter. Sometimes the glitter can stick together so make sure to get a very fine quality glitter.

To make the Mind Jar you can put the water and the glitter inside the bottle and close the lid.

The following video will guide you on how to make a Mind Jar:



#### WATCH

---

- Let's make a Mind Jar:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r8xhHu2Gpo>
- 

The following video explains the how the Mind Jar relates to two states of mind.

The first state is when we are stressed, agitated, excited, and angry – when we have no control over our emotions or thoughts. When you shake the mind jar the glitter is representative of all the commotion in our mind that disturbs us and doesn't allow clear thinking.

The second state is when we are calm. When you stop shaking the jar and leave it aside, the glitter begins to settle to the bottom of the jar, and the water clears. This is what happens to your mind when you pause. It settles down the commotion and clutter in your mind.

The following videos show how the Mind Jar works as a way to explain how mind and mindfulness works, and you may share these with your students.



## WATCH

---

- Mind in a Jar - Planting the Seeds of Mindfulness:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNmMH6tqiMc&list=RDLVP2SqvqcQ\\_o&start\\_radio=1&rv=P2SqvqcQ\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNmMH6tqiMc&list=RDLVP2SqvqcQ_o&start_radio=1&rv=P2SqvqcQ_o)
  - 'Mind Jar' & mindfulness (English) :  
[https://youtu.be/P2SqvqcQ\\_o](https://youtu.be/P2SqvqcQ_o)
  - Calming the mind with Mind-Jar meditation (English):  
<https://youtu.be/u6mVqyNPAo>
  - How to make a 'Mind Jar' (English):  
<https://youtu.be/sT2WjQxuEnE>
- 



### Tip

The Mind Jar is a good way to introduce mindfulness to your students. It is also a practice because as students watch the glitter settle in the jar they are giving themselves an opportunity to pause, and to quieten the chatter in their own minds. As a teacher, once you have introduced the Mind Jar in your class you can regularly use it to help children to settle down. See for yourself if the children enjoy this and ask them for feedback.

## A Core Mindfulness Practice: Breath as an Anchor

This will be your core mindfulness practice or our 'signature practice'.



### Tip

It is recommended that you practice this every morning and at night before you go to sleep.

With your students you can practice at the beginning of the school day and at the end of the school day.

## Let's Practice

1. Sit comfortably and relaxed, either on a chair or sit cross-legged on the floor. Make sure your back is straight and upright but not too rigid. Place your hands on your lap and gently close your eyes.
2. Notice the body – its shape, weight, the sensations and any tension or tightness in your body.
3. After a while, shift your attention to the natural flow of your breath. There is no need for any special effort. Just notice the breath flow in and out of the nostrils. Notice where you feel the breath rise and fall. Perhaps it is at the nostril or the abdomen or chest or throat. Tune in to the sensation of the breath – one breath at a time.
4. If your mind wanders and drifts away in thought, acknowledge that your attention has wandered – this in itself is a mark of mindfulness. You can silently identify mind-wandering, and then gently bring your attention back to the breath. Approach this activity with a sense of curiosity and kindness. Keep bringing your attention back to the breath whenever you notice that the mind has drifted, but do so with patience and kindness to yourself.
5. Maintain this practice for 5-10 minutes, starting at 5 minutes initially and then extending the time.
6. Slowly bring your attention and awareness to the entire body.
7. Appreciate yourself for doing the practice and gently open your eyes with a sense of gratitude and acceptance.



Each time you practice spend a few moments reflecting on the experience.

Ask your students what their experience was like, and how they found concentrating on their breath? What kind of thoughts came to mind and how they could bring back their attention to their breath.

## Practice attention to our senses 5-4-3-2-1

We use our senses in mindfulness practices to focus attention to our experiences. Usually much of what we see and hear goes unnoticed by us. This practice draw attention to the sensory experiences of your students.

The counting of sensory inputs disrupts the flow of thoughts by giving you a point of focus. The focusing and grounding effect of this activity are especially helpful during moments of nervousness or anxiousness.

## Let's Practice

5-4-3-2-1

Sit comfortably with your palms on your lap. Focus on your senses:

Identify 5 things you can see

Identify 4 things you can hear

Identify 3 things you can feel/ sense

Identify 2 things you can smell

Identify 1 thing you can taste



At the end of the practice you can ask the students what they focused on.



**Tip**

You can use this practice whenever you during the school day. It is a good way to bring attention back when energy in the classroom is high.

## The Values Framework

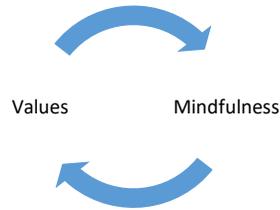
Mindfulness supports our capacity for kindness, compassion, empathy and gratitude. These values support the practice of mindfulness. Yes, they feed each other.

Values are basic and fundamental beliefs that guide our attitudes and behaviors. We learn this without really knowing that we are learning it. We learn values by imitating behaviors. We learn values from the stories we hear. We learn of values in a classroom.

Over the course of developing mindfulness we will make a conscious effort to understand what are the core beliefs that we value or which guide our behaviors, and reflect on the extent to which they do

influence our actions in our daily life. With understanding and reflection, we can be more aware of how our thoughts and actions affect ourselves, others and the planet.

VISUAL of mindfulness and values



During this Course we will consider the following core values of this program:

- Gratitude
- Appreciation
- Self-respect
- Respecting others
- Kindness (loving kindness or friendliness)
- Compassion
- Empathy

As we reflect on our values, we will reflect on how these values affect our thoughts, words and actions towards ourselves, others and planet.

## Defining our core values

This activity will take a little time, so allocate about 20 minutes at least for this. You can divide the class into groups of 5 – 6 students. Students should understand the concept of the crest or flag and how they are representations of the values of the group.

You can explain this by using the school crest or flag.

- Students must create a flag and or a crest for the classroom
- What values will they include? Before they start drawing you will need to discuss an example or two just so they understand, thereafter let them represent their values on paper.
- Once they are done, each group should present to class what they think is the defining value of the classroom.

Behaviour in the classroom can now be guided by these values. Spending some time with this initially, will make it easier to manage the classroom later. Each week you can look at different ways of discussing a value and see how it can guide behaviours in the classroom, amongst students, and between students and teachers.

## The Secret to your Success

Is Practice. Start with a short mindfulness practice like five minutes for one week. And increase to 5-10 minutes in the second week. Twenty minutes in the third. Start in the morning as soon as you wake up, and at night just before you go to sleep. Make this a regular, healthy habit. Reflect on your experience. Whatever it is, no matter is going on, take the commitment to practice and stick to it. If you skip a practice once, it would be easier to skip again. The more you practice you will begin to notice a difference in yourself.

## Module Two:

# Mindfulness practices, the Brain and the Value of Gratitude

Welcome to Module Two.

When you begin this Module we encourage you to continue your mindful sitting practice, and to gradually increase the duration of your practice in the morning and evening. Whenever possible include mindfulness practices during the day.

In the classroom, you would have introduced the *Mind Jar* and talked about values, and how values influence our behaviours. You would have also done a mindful sitting practice, drawing attention to the breath. Students would have been advised to become aware when they have lost their attention on the breath, and how to bring back awareness to the breath each time they lose it, without remorse or regret. You would have also drawn the attention of your students to their senses using the 5-4-3-2-1 practice. These practices should be continued.

In this module, we will try to understand the effect of **mindfulness on the brain**, and we will also introduce **Mindful Walking & Mindfulness of Body Sensations**. We will also explore the important value of **gratitude**. The activities we suggest are appropriate for children of all ages but you must also use your discretion when introducing the concepts and practices in a way that the children can relate to.

Meanwhile we would like to invite you to reflect on your experiences over the last weeks.

- Have you maintained the frequency of your personal practice?
- Have you maintained the frequency of the practice in the classroom?
- How have your students responded to the practice?
- What changes if any, are you noticing: in yourself and in them?

These questions will also help you to check-in with students on their experience after each practice.

By the end of Module Two you will be able to:

1. Understand the flight-fight-freeze mechanism in the brain, and how to introduce the effects of mindfulness on the brain to your students.
2. Deepen your mindfulness practice with the introduction of Mindfulness of body sensations and Mindful Walking
3. Practice 'gratitude' in the classroom

## The Brain

The central nervous system consists of the brain and the spinal cord. The brain is a complex organ that controls every aspect of the functioning of our body. The brain controls the heart beat and breathing. Both happen automatically without our conscious awareness. It also controls sensory perception, emotions, memories, thoughts, movements, hunger and a variety of experiences, which we are usually aware of. To understand the effects of mindfulness, we need to understand how the brain functions. Then we can also see how we can form new habits and how we can change old habits. We can then decide: do our habitual patterns control us or do we control our habits?

The autonomic nervous system in our brain has two aspects: the parasympathetic nervous system and the sympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is our protector. It has what is known as the fight-flight-freeze response. This response is very important for our survival, especially when we are in a hostile environment. For example, if we see a snake the faster we move away, the better it is for safety. Because it keeps us safe, the sympathetic nervous system reacts very fast. This reaction is controlled in a part of the brain known as the **amygdala**. The amygdala is faster to react than other parts of the brain. The **prefrontal cortex (PFC)** enables rational thinking, sensible judgements, better learning and responsible decision-making. It's the area of the brain that's responsible for higher cognitive skills and problem solving. The PFC takes a longer time to develop. In fact scientists say it takes more than 18 years to develop into full maturity. Whilst the amygdala is not able to make the distinction between hostility and non-hostility in the environment, the PFC can do that for us.

Today although we live in less dangerous environments than centuries ago, the amygdala detects modern-day stressors, and it reacts through the fight-flight-freeze mode, when facing stress and anxiety. The amygdala is the *brain's radar for stress detection*, so it enjoys a privileged role! It connects strongly to brain circuitry for intense emotions. That's why we react through fear, excitement and anger, sometimes even without understanding the circumstances correctly.

This does not mean that this is the only way the brain will work. We can train our brains to work differently. Like learning to write. Practice helps us to hold the pen better and form the shapes that make letters better, and when we learn how to use letters we can convey our ideas in writing.

Mindfulness is a practice that helps us to manage our emotions and to give ourselves a 'pause' that would allow the rational part of the brain, (i.e. the pre-frontal cortex) to respond responsibly to the stress-induced-reactions of the amygdala. Neuroscientists have found that regular mindfulness practices makes the amygdala smaller and less active, thus reducing its impact. We will then be less reactive to stress. We will rest and relax more, which is easier on the body and mind. Usually, when something worries us the mind keeps wandering over the issue repeatedly, thus worsening the stress. Mindfulness calms the mind and prevents such repetitive mind-wandering.

Mindfulness also has an impact on an important part of the brain called the **Hippocampus**. This area of the brain is responsible for memory, and it helps to store information and retrieve when necessary. It also helps in emotional regulation. Regular mindfulness practice increases function and activity of the hippocampus.

The following are useful resources to read about brain function and research, on the effects of mindfulness on the brain.



#### WATCH

---

- Brain anatomy and How the Brain works  
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/anatomy-of-the-brain>
  - How does mindfulness affect the Brain  
<https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/mindfulness-my-brain>
  - Mindfulness and the brain: What does Research and Neuroscience Say:  
<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-brain-research-neuroscience/>
  - How mindfulness changes the emotional life of our brain:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7CBfCW67xT8>
- 

## The Brain and Mindfulness

Mindfulness practice results in positive changes in the brain, according to research by neuroscientists

- The brain changes in size and structure, in response to regular practice of mindfulness. This is called *neuroplasticity*.
- Mindfulness facilitates creation of new neurons and this is called *neurogenesis*. This means that we have the capacity to grow new neurons as a result of mindfulness practice, and this can lead to cultivating new habits and behaviors.
- New nerve cells are generated in parts of the brain associated with logical thinking, attention and memory – which means that our brain becomes ready to learn new things
- Brains of meditators often appear younger than those of non-meditators of the same age. This points towards ‘reversing of aging’. A healthier brain-mind connection develops, despite increasing age.

A deep sense of appreciation for the present moment is cultivated in our mind by the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness strengthens our capacity for focusing on one particular subject at a given time. We will multi-task less. If a teacher is talking to a student, it is not possible to also mark exam papers at the same time, and give your best to both. Being in the present moment allows you to give your best to the present moment, irrespective of what you are doing.

### Introducing the Brain and How the Brain works

Just as we explained the mind, we can introduce the brain to children with an illustration. This time we will use our hands. There is a video you are advised to watch, and show your students to help them to understand better. It is important the students do it along with you.



#### WATCH

---

- Brain anatomy and How the Brain works

<https://www.thebehaviorhub.com/blog/2020/10/12/the-brain-in-the-palm-of-your-hand-dan-siegels-hand-model>

If you were to hold your hand up, you will notice how the index, middle, ring and little finger point upwards while your thumb points to the side. Your thumb will be representative of the amygdala and the four fingers will be representative of your pre-frontal cortex.



When you fold your thumb into your palm this is representative of your amygdala in active mode or in fight-flight-freeze mode. When you fold your four fingers you will notice how the fingers hold the thumb representing an active prefrontal cortex, which is now in control of the amygdala. You could discuss with your students common stressors they experience and how they'd respond, and make the connection with different parts of the brain that get activated.

Mindfulness practice enables, us to 'pause', slowing down, to allow the prefrontal cortex to take care of us, instead of allowing the amygdala to act in a reactive, knee-jerk manner.

The following resources will help you to understand the Brain in the Palm of your hand model better.



**Tip**

The first of the following links is a very good example of how to introduce the Brain hand to little children. Make sure you do this exercise to suit the maturity of your students



**WATCH**

- The Brain in the Palm of Your Hand: The Dan Siegel Hand Model  
<https://www.thebehaviorhub.com/blog/2020/10/12/the-brain-in-the-palm-of-your-hand-dan-siegels-hand-model>
- Mindfulness in Schools: Mindfulness and the Brain for Children  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a\\_hPelcPRTg&list=RDLVP2SqvcQ\\_o&index=15](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_hPelcPRTg&list=RDLVP2SqvcQ_o&index=15)
- How to Teach the Brain in the Palm of the Hand to Kids  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOBYs-LN5bY>

In Module One we also said that mindfulness practice helps us to keep our behavior aligned to our values. The moral judgements we make are controlled by the prefrontal cortex of the brain, and the more space we give ourselves, the better we become at aligning our actions to our values.

## Mindfulness Practices to help us to slow down

The following Mindfulness practice on body sensations can be used in the classroom when you want to settle students down, particularly if they are hyper-active after play or sports.

### Mindfulness of Body Sensations

#### Let's Practice

##### Mindfulness of Body Sensations

Sit in a comfortable position, either in a straight-backed chair, on a cushion or on meditation stool. If you are sitting on a chair, make sure that your back is straight and self-supporting and that your feet are uncrossed and firmly planted on the ground. It is important that you are alert and awake, fully. If sitting is difficult, you can lie down on a mat with your legs uncrossed, your feet placed away from each other and your arms lying along the sides of your body. Once you become comfortable, gently close your eyes.

1. Bring your attention to the points of contact between your body and where you are seated. Notice the posture and if there are points of contact with the floor.
2. Take your attention to your feet: the top, bottom, soles and ankles until you are fully aware of the sensations in both feet. See how sensations arise and pass away. If you cannot feel any sensations, simply register that. Just be in the present moment.
3. Observe yourself and note the sensations you experience. You may feel pain in your arm or itchiness in your face. Bring your attention to the sensation and observe it for a moment.
4. Recognise the sensation (for example: hardness or warmth or discomfort), then acknowledge it, name it and let it go.
5. Similarly, keep observing your body for other sensations. Again, simply note and let go. Don't stay with the sensations and keep thinking about them.
6. Within the course of few minutes you may observe several sensations. Give the same attention to each sensation with full mindfulness, and then let go.

Make sure that you spend enough time on each part of the body to fully immerse yourself in the experience. It is possible that you may not have strong sensations in all parts of the body. Notice this as well and gently focus your attention without expectations, for any specific experience or outcome

Walk as if *'you are kissing the earth with your feet'*

You may use the following resources to understand mindful walking better:



## WATCH

- Mindful Walking (Sati Pasala website)  
<https://youtu.be/H2R5k0ijPMg>
- Mindful Walking Meditation  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09EO9IJgOil>
- Headspace  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwbRERlzt6c>
- Mindful Walking Thich Nhat Hanh  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90Pzn6NK4VQ>

## Gratitude as a value

In this module, we will be working with Gratitude. Gratitude is a value that every religion and culture expresses. Every language has a word for “Thank you”. We teach our children to say “Thank you”. Behind the ‘thank you’, is a recognition and appreciation for what another person has done for you or given you or the fortune you’ve had to receive. Regardless of how big or how small we have all received help from

## Let's Practice

### Mindful Walking

1. Find a suitable walking path of about 20-30 feet, where you can walk freely.
2. Choose a starting point and stand with both feet planted firmly on the ground. Clasp your hands in front or at the back. Do not allow your arms to swing. Be aware that you are standing.
3. Become aware of your body being supported by your legs and spine. Notice your posture and the subtle movements that are keeping you balanced and upright.
4. Take a few deep breaths and become aware of the present moment.
5. Focus on one point ahead about 2-3 meters in front of you and start walking, at a normal pace.
6. After a few minutes of such regular, normal walking, you can become aware of the movement of the feet when you are walking.
7. Gradually notice how one foot rises as the other foot is placed on the ground.
8. Keep your attention on your foot and the physical act of walking. With a gentle smile note the intention of ‘kissing the earth with your feet’, each time you take a step. This is how the famous Vietnamese meditation master Thich Nhat Hanh described mindful walking so eloquently.
9. Your mind will wander, you will see sights, hear sounds and feel sensations on your skin. This will happen over and over again. Note all those experiences but bring your mind back to the movement of your feet. At the end of the walking path, pause and note that you are standing. Then resume mindful walking along the same path.
10. After about 20-30 minutes you could gently stop, and stand where you are and bring your attention to the standing posture: ‘I am standing’.
11. After completing the mindful walking session you could go for a mindful sitting session or resume your activities.

others. Expressing gratitude is a way in which we acknowledge and appreciate this. Gratitude helps us to appreciate what we have. It also encourages us to 'give back' to others.

Keeping this in mind the next activity will help you to deepen the discussion into values and how values could influence our actions to positively impact our world.

### A word - A thought - A question

You could also include another value of your choice or from the values selected by your students and do the same exercise and see how it works.

The **word** would be the value. In this case **Gratitude**.

Now let us explore a **thought around Gratitude**.

For this, you could use either a quotation:

- "Thankfulness is the beginning of gratitude. Gratitude is the completion of thankfulness. Thankfulness may consist merely of words. Gratitude is shown in acts." Henri Frederic Amiel.

Or a definition:

- Gratitude is the quality of being thankful. The readiness to show appreciation & kindness.

For the **Question**, it is best to ask something that provokes action. For example:

- Who are the people I must be thankful for?
- How can we show gratitude towards my parents, my teachers, friends?

This should take you about 10 or 15 minutes. But it will help you to guide your students on how to think about values and how values affect our behaviour. You could also use the following meditation on gratitude to help the students experience the power of gratitude.

### Gratitude Meditation

The purpose of this meditation is to experience thankfulness and gratitude towards everyone and everything that supports our day to day life.

## Let's Practice

### Gratitude Meditation

- Sit comfortably, either on the floor or on a chair. Regardless of how you sit ensure that you keep your spine straight and that you are relaxed.
- Take a few long deep breaths to prepare yourself for this meditation.
- Recall three people who have helped you that you would like to thank, but have not taken the opportunity to do so.
- Place your hand on your heart.
- Visualize the first person that you have chosen to thank in your heart.
- As you visualize the person in your heart silently say "I thank you for your kindness, love, compassion in all the things that you do for me." Take a moment to let the sense of thankfulness linger.
- Next visualize the second person and repeat "I thank you for your kindness, love, compassion in all the things that you do for me."
- Do the same for the third person.
- Take some time to enjoy this feeling of gratitude and gently open your eyes when you are ready.

### A Note for Practice

Continue your own personal practice and encourage your students' practice. Introduce Mindful Walking once a day, ideally before mindful sitting. Include body sensations meditation once a day, while sitting.

Remember to reflect on gratitude and what we are thankful for.

## Module Three:

### Mindfulness practices with kindness, empathy and forgiveness:

As you begin this module we encourage you to continue your regular mindful sitting and mindful walking practices, as well as practicing being mindful of body sensations. We hope that you are reflecting on these practices and tracking any changes within yourself.

In your classroom, you would have introduced the concepts of the *Mind Jar*, the *Brain in the Palm of your hand* and also mindful walking.

In this module, we will introduce **Mindful Eating**, **Mindful Listening** and **Meditations on forgiveness**, and focus on **kindness and empathy**. Most importantly we are going to bring awareness to our thoughts, feelings and emotions. The activities described are appropriate for children of all ages but please use your discretion when introducing concepts and practices in a way that children can relate to.

Let us invite you to reflect on your experience over the last two weeks.

- Have you maintained the frequency of your practice?
- Have you maintained the frequency of the practice in the classroom?
- How have your students responded to the practice?
- What changes are you noticing, in yourself and in your students?
- What have been the challenges to your practice?

We encourage you to not miss your daily practice because, if you keep missing sessions, it will become easier to miss another session, and so on. Now you are in the process of becoming aware of yourself and cultivating good habits, so stay with these as best as you can. If you miss a practice session or you are having a hard time focusing, don't worry or be regretful. Always be understanding and kind to yourself, and go back to mindfulness practices as soon as possible.

At the end of Module three you will:

1. Be able understand the nature of your thoughts and emotions
2. Notice when the mind wanders
3. Understand and practice mindful eating and mindful listening
4. Be able to understand values like forgiveness and kindness.

## Mindfulness of thoughts

Regular mindfulness practice develops our capacity to become aware of what is happening in our minds in the present moment. This awareness allows us to respond from the logical part of our brain, the prefrontal cortex, thus overcoming the amygdala-induced spontaneous reaction.

Scientists estimate that on any given day, an individual experiences thousands and thousands of thoughts. Every waking hour, we have a flood of thoughts coming to mind. Even when we are doing something, thoughts are running through our minds, in the most disorganized and chaotic manner. Sometimes we tend to follow a thought, which swiftly gets entangled with another thought, and another, distracting us from what we are doing. At other times we could be doing something without thinking about it, as if a pilot whose role it is to fly a plane or control the plane, hands over control to autopilot to smoothly sail through, so that the pilot can relax. This is similar to thoughts that come to mind. The mind will follow thoughts like a monkey, jumping from thought to thought, without any control. When you are mindful of your posture or breath, you are training this 'monkey-mind' to stop jumping for a moment, by giving it an anchor to steady itself - or we give it a simple task, like watching the breath. Then, instead of jumping or being scattered in various directions, the mind will learn to stay focused on one object.

## Mind-wandering: Default Mode Network

The practice of mindfulness helps us to disallow the default-mode-network to kick-in.

What is the mind's default-mode-network ?

The default mode network means that when the mind is not focused on anything in particular (eg, like when a surgeon is operating or when a banker is counting notes or when a yogi is mindfully meditating), the mind keeps wandering. Because from the time we were born (and maybe before that), the mind only knows how to keep jumping from the past to the future, or from person to person, or from event to event in a most disorganized, untidy manner. There are parts of the brain that are responsible for activating the default-mode-network, and there are also parts of the brain that deactivate it.

Please read below if you are keen to understand this better.



READ

---

- *'Science of Meditation by Daniel Goleman & Richard Davidson – Penguin Random House UK'*

---

The majority of thoughts have two characteristics:

- Negative thoughts based on irritation, anger, jealousy, selfishness, greed, arrogance, pride

- Rumination about the past or the future, with regrets or remorse

Mindfulness is a practice that brings attention to our thoughts and helps us to develop awareness of what we are thinking. When we are on a thought-spree, if we notice it through mindfulness, we can pause, step away from the default-mode and tune into the present.

There is a tendency for us to understand thoughts as real, even though these are actually mind-made. When we become aware of this it is easier not to get drawn into the drama created by thoughts. The following resources are also useful:



#### WATCH

---

- Understanding the 'Monkey Mind' with Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-JiQubfMPg>
  - Mindfulness explained in Sinhala – Sinhala Positive Thinking  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZo9mMLJlb0>
  - Mental Health Week: Thoughts as Thoughts  
<https://www.mindfulnessstudies.com/mhw-2019-thoughts-as-thoughts/#:~:text=Experts%20estimate%20that%20the%20mind,clouds%20floating%20across%20the%20sky.>
  - The Brain's Default Mode: What Is it and Why Meditation is the Antidote  
<https://medium.com/swlh/the-brains-default-mode-what-is-it-and-why-meditation-is-the-antidote-d0408ab989d6>
-

## Mindfulness of Thoughts: Leaves on a Stream

### Let's Practice

#### Gratitude Meditation

- Sit in a comfortable meditative position. Bring awareness to your posture and make sure that your body is straight, relaxed and comfortable.
- Bring your attention to your breath. Observe the breath: inhalation & exhalation. Bring your attention to where you feel your breath. Is it in the nostril or the stomach? If it's the nostril just be aware of how the breath moves in at out, just like a gate keeper would stand at the door and watch people coming in & going out from a room. A gatekeeper doesn't examine details of each visitors, he just observes only. If it's the abdomen just watch how the abdomen moves up & down with each breath.
- As you focus on your breath, thoughts will come and go. Just observe the thoughts, and simply let them go. Do not analyze thoughts, and their origins. Just note and let go.
- Having noted the thought, just like a leaf which flows down a river, observe it as it flows away. Now, return to your breath. Every time a thought comes to mind, acknowledge by naming it and let it go like the leaf flowing downstream.
- Continue this practice for a few minutes.
- To end the practice, take a deep breath and relax. Gently open your eyes.

**Tip**

You can include this segment briefly into your regular practice with students in class.

This will help to develop awareness of your thoughts, and to build awareness around you, or meta-awareness. Notice that you are not judgmental or critical about thoughts coming in. You are only redirecting the attention back to the breath, after noting the thoughts. This is a very good mind-training, on reverting back to the present moment.

## Mindful Listening

### Let's Practice

#### Mindful listening

- Sit in a comfortable posture. Bring awareness to your posture and make sure that your body is straight, comfortable and relaxed
- Bring your attention to your breath and notice breath movements, for a few minutes. Observe the inhalation and exhalation. In silence.
- Now listen to sounds occurring around you. (Keep listening for 30 – 40 seconds )
- Now listen to sounds that are far away (30 – 40 seconds in silence)
- Gradually start listening to sounds that are closer to you (30 – 40 seconds in silence).
- To end the practice, take a deep breath and relax. Gently open your eyes.

Mindful listening is a practice that helps us to pay attention to sounds, purposefully.



At the end of the practice reflect on the sounds that they have heard. Each student gets a chance to say what they heard.

You may also refer to the resources below:



WATCH

- Mindful Listening (English)  
<https://youtu.be/5d66ViTvGNY>
- Mindful Listening with Singing Bowl (English)  
[https://youtu.be/TIYv\\_btG4oc](https://youtu.be/TIYv_btG4oc)

## Mindful Eating

This activity will slow the pace of a routine daily activity and will help us to further develop awareness of our experience.

### Let's Practice

#### Mindful eating

1. Place a few raisins in front of you.
2. Pick up a raisin and carefully examine it.
3. Feel the texture and grooves of the raisin.
4. How does the raisin feel like between your fingers? Is it squishy, hard, grainy or soft?
5. Look at the raisin carefully. What is the colour of the raisin? Is it the same colour in all parts? What does it look like when you hold it up to the light?
6. Hold the raisin up to your nose and smell it. What does it smell like?
7. Place the raisin on the lower lip – what does it feel like?
8. Touch the raisin with the tip of your tongue – what does it feel like?
9. Put the raisin in your mouth and feel the flavours and textures of the raisin WITHOUT chewing it.
10. Now, slowly chew the raisin and become aware of the parts of the mouth the flavor spreads through. Keep chewing slowly, but don't swallow the raisin. .
11. Now slowly swallow the raisin. What does it feel like when you swallow the raisin?
12. Become aware of any after-taste that might remain in the mouth.



Once the activity is complete you could reflect on the experience of the students. Consider the many people who were involved in getting this raisin to you, as it is with all the meals we eat daily. We can express our gratitude towards everyone in the process. You may also refer to the resources below.



#### WATCH

- Mindful Eating (English)  
Raisin exercise <https://youtu.be/z2Eo56BLMjM>
- Mindful Eating with raisins (English)  
<https://youtu.be/5YkjoXuCfWY>
-

## Being Mindful of our Emotions

Mindful observation of emotions helps us to experience and understand a range of emotions. Emotions are a complex mental-experience, triggered by a preceding sensory transaction. For example, if we see a disturbing image we may feel sad, angry, hurt. The latter are strong emotions we experience based on that particular visual image or eye-sensation.

Similarly a sound or a taste, may lead to pleasant emotions, like happiness, joy, or excitement. Mindfulness enables us to fully experience emotions without ignoring or suppressing them. At the same time mindfulness helps us to be non-judgmental or non-remorseful. Mindfulness, through its impact on the brain (eg. amygdala & pre frontal cortex) will help in improving our coping skills when facing emotions and also in developing patience, tolerance and understanding, with respect for others.

Mindfully knowing our own emotions, will help us to understand another person's emotions – and this is called emotional intelligence. Being able to understand our emotions well (emotional literacy or emotional quotient) is critical to social and emotional development. Developing social and emotional intelligence will help us to be more kind, empathetic, and forgiving towards ourselves and others.

To further understand your emotions and its impact, you can refer the following resources:



READ

---

- *Emotional Intelligence*: a book by Daniel Goleman
  - The Power of Emotions  
<https://mindfulnessexercises.com/mindfulness-of-emotions/>
  - How Mindfulness can grow Emotional Intelligence  
<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-emotional-intelligence/>
  - Why Mindfulness Strengthens Social and Emotional Development and Academic Achievement  
<https://www.waterford.org/education/mindfulness-in-schools/>
-

If you can help your students to manage their emotions better, you are helping them to handle stressors in the environment better. When they can handle stressors better, they are more ready to learn.

The following activity will help you understand the nature of experience and how strong emotions can be managed.

## Hot Cross Buns

Hot Cross Buns is an activity that helps to breakdown an experience, by separating the:

- Body sensations
- Thoughts
- Feelings and
- Behavior

When we learn to separate these four aspects of experience, we are also better able to understand how each of these influences and aggravates that other independent of the stimulus. For example, when we experience angry (emotions) it has an impact on our breathing (body sensation), and also our thoughts and how we behave. When we understand this relationship it is easier to take a step back and decide on whether we want to repeat habitual patterns in handling situations and relationships.



READ

---

- Five Mindfulness Activities that Foster Social and Emotional learning  
<https://betterkids.education/blog/5-mindfulness-activities-that-foster-social-emotional-learning>
- 

The above resource will give you more activities that you can do. Please make sure the activities you select are age-appropriate.

## Values

This module will allow you to explore two values with your students: *Kindness* and *Forgiveness*.

### Kindness

To explore kindness you can ask students for examples of kindness, a kindness they experienced and when they were kind to someone else. Reflect on how it made them feel.

You can send them a task to keep a track of good deeds that they do as well as kindness shown to them. You could also ask them to actively engage in random acts of kindness. Kindness keeps us together and keeps us well as we depend on everyone to get so many things done. You can

then also say 'thank you' mentally to every human being who has contributed towards making their lifestyle comfortable.

### Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a critical decision that we make. Forgiveness is also a sign of letting go of attachment to an unfulfilled expectation.

Forgiveness is never easy, as strong emotions can wash over the peace of forgiveness. The following prayer, the lines of a *Ho'oponopono* means to bring things back to balance and is a Hawaiian practice of forgiveness.

The *Ho'oponopono* is a simple poem that you keep repeating to yourself for a few minutes each day:

'I am sorry  
Please forgive me  
Thank you  
I love you '

If there is anyone you would like to forgive you could also visualize them as you do this practice.

### Note of practice

Continue. If you miss a day pick it up again. Be kind to yourself.

*In the final Module of this Course, we will discuss situations in class and staffrooms in school, and also in daily life when you can experience challenges and how mindfulness with values can be applied.*

## Module Four

# Emotions, Resilience, Social Emotional Learning & Values like Respect & Integrity

Welcome to the Final or Module Four.

We trust that you are maintaining your own mindfulness practice as well as guiding students in the classroom. Continuing this practice will improve your awareness of your actions, behavior, thoughts and emotions, and will give you the opportunity to pause before you respond in situations that could invoke a stress-reaction both in and out of class. With you, the teacher as a role model, your students will be gradually become the same. We hope that you have been doing the exercises we mentioned in the previous Modules, and that you are discussing with students about values, and how these values can be applied in real-life settings. Eventually you and your students will develop tools, enabling you to be able to recognize and manage feelings, thoughts, emotions and behaviors both in and out of school.

In this module, we will try to bring all this together. The practice of mindfulness is a good foundation to improve **social-emotional learning (SEL)**. The more we are aware of, and have empathy and compassion towards another, the more likely we are to engage in ethical behaviors. The foundation that we will build on, is the awareness and understanding that when we behave with kindness and compassion towards ourselves and others, we will feel happy and they will feel happy. Taking care of others is another way of taking care of ourselves.

In this Module we will focus on applying the skills we learnt, to real-life situations and discuss our reactions and responses - both behavioral and emotional, in the classroom and school environment.

Let us start with an invitation to reflect on your experience over the last two weeks.

- Have you maintained consistency in your own practice, preferably every day of the week, at a given time for at least 10-20 minutes daily? This should be increasing with time.
- Have you maintained consistency of the practice in the classroom?
- How have your students responded to the practice?
- What changes are you noticing, in yourself and your students?
- What have been the challenges to your practice?

We encourage you to not miss your daily practice because, and to have energy and determination to integrate mindfulness practice into your daily routine. But don't be remorseful and regret if you miss sessions, just keep picking up and continuing.

By the end of Module three you would have:

1. Understood how mindfulness can be applied in the classroom
2. Understood the causes of different behavior of students, and learnt how to manage classroom behavior
3. Learnt how to deepen your own mindfulness practice, systematically
4. Explored core-values and reflected on and how it translates in classroom behaviors.

We give below, some ideas for different conversation with your students. You can engage with students in an age-appropriate manner using your own discretion.

You can use this understanding to explore these topics at different times with your students, as and when appropriate. Discussions are meaningless unless it follows with actions. These conversations are designed to help with classroom management.

## Brain and Well-being

The effects of mindfulness and meditation is one of the most researched topics in neuroscience and psychology in recent times. In the last session we recalled that the Tibetan Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard was identified as the happiest man in the world because of how his brain was functioning during meditation. You may study the link below for details on how his brain changed.

*‘..a 69-year-old monk who scientist call the “world’s happiest man” says the secret to being happy takes just 15 minutes a day’*



READ

<https://www.businessinsider.com/how-to-be-happier-according-to-matthieu-ricard-the-worlds-happiest-man-2016-1..>

Matthieu Ricard has been meditating for many years, but there is also good news for those like you and I, who are struggling to maintain few minutes of practice a day! Scientists have found that even after two weeks of mediation the brain changes its volume and structure. Most notably:

1. The density and size of grey matter increases, in the areas of the brain that deal with memory, regulating of emotions, noting sensory experience and decision-making
2. The amygdala decreases in volume. The amygdala you will remember is our radar for stress-detection: triggering reactions to fear, anxiety and stress.

If you go back to the Hand Brain, we looked at in Module 1 – you will see that what is happening is that it is getting increasingly easy to control emotions and thoughts in times of stress. It is not only a change in the brain structure, but the participants also reported feeling less stressed, and being able to cope better.

Research in positive psychology has shown that indicators future success and satisfaction in later life, are the result of the connections that we nurture.

We can read the following for details:



READ

---

- How meditation changes the Brain  
<https://psychcentral.com/blog/how-meditation-changes-the-brain#how-it-affects-the-brain>
  - What makes a good life: lessons from the longest study on happiness  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/robert\\_waldinger\\_what\\_makes\\_a\\_good\\_life\\_lessons\\_from\\_the\\_longest\\_study\\_on\\_happiness?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness?language=en)
- 

One exercise you can do with your class is to list and discuss:

1. All the things we can control in our lives
2. All the things that we can't control

We would like teachers and students to have increased levels of well-being, and to be the best version of themselves. Challenging and difficult situations are inevitable in our lives. We are not able to control most things in our lives. For instance we can never control what others think of us, and other people's reactions to what we do. What we CAN control or manage is, how we deal with such situations.

## Stress

It is important to understand what stress is, and what stress can do to us, our relationships and how stress affects our life. What we call 'stress' is the experience of being overwhelmed or the lack of ability to cope with a situation. There are varying degrees of stress – let us look at speaking in front of a group. This is a common source of stress. For some people the stress is so overwhelming that they become stuck with words, and they freeze. For others it is very overwhelming, but they use different techniques to cope. Some people use humor for example. For some others this is 'eustress' or a positive stress, and it helps them to work harder and be better. The experience of being overwhelmed can be handled through multiple coping mechanisms.

The danger is that when we are stressed our fight-flight-freeze reaction gets activated, and unless we are mindful and fully aware, we may say or do things that could hurt ourselves or others.

## What is your Stress? What is your coping mechanism?



This is a good discussion to have with yourself, and with your students in the classroom. You can start by explaining stress and eustress and how it manifests in the body (eg, sweating, palpitations, rapid breathing) and in the mind (eg, difficulty to focus, racing thoughts).

The following questions will help to lead the discussion.

**What type of stimulus negatively stresses you?** Maybe anticipation of exams, the science or math class, or intervals/recess because you don't know who will play with you, or maybe it is being pulled up in front of a group. There are so many examples that different students will come up with.

**What happens in the body when you feel stressed?** Ensure the sensory and body experience is covered – for example be fully aware that the breath is faster, that you are sweating, the fast heartbeat, feeling the heat in the skin etc.

**What happens in the mind?** Racing thoughts, inability to focus.

**Consider the nature of thoughts?** You can see how much are real thoughts, how much are imaginary and how much is related to the past or projections for the future.

Maybe you will use different questions as appropriate to your own class, but what you are trying to do is to develop awareness on the stress experience, by unpacking it and breaking it down, so that see insightfully the experience and the response. When the body begins to increase the pace of activities like the breath and heartbeat – so will the mind, with thoughts and feelings making it difficult to focus. But once we understand this and apply mindfulness squarely on each experience, thus disaggregating the entire episode, we can begin to develop an effective coping mechanism with maturity.

During the course of these conversations, the individual students in the class would understand how others in the class also experience stress the same way that they do. This is also through empathetic behavior and understanding.

Next you can ask about coping mechanisms.

How do you cope when you feel stressed? What things do you do? How do they make you feel?

You could also discuss the importance about talking and sharing their experiences, honestly.

During the Covid 19 multiple lockdowns, responding to stress and developing coping mechanisms became very important. Sometimes when we don't have effective coping mechanisms our behaviors may place ourselves and those around us in even more stressful situations. It is important that we have effective coping mechanisms to help us to:

1. Know and process our experience so that we know we are going through
2. Understand the difference between feelings and thoughts consequent to what actually happened
3. Acknowledge emotions and feelings, and respond positively.

A note here on the word *positively*. This does not mean that no negatives are allowed – negative is a term that describes difficulty in handling situations. Negatives and positives are all part of life, and we should recognize these as such. A life without challenges would be rather dull. Looking for the positive in everything is also very stressful. This is where mindfulness with non-judgmental awareness is going to support you.

## Resilience

Resilience is our ability to adapt to situations, to pick ourselves up and move on. Resilience is something that we should aim to develop, and it is built when we have confidence of our tools to face a variety of situations. You can think of resilience like a flower. A flowering plant has the ability to bloom flowers. However, if the plant doesn't get the sunlight, water and other means of nourishment it is not going to be able to bloom. But the plant stays knowing all of this. Resilience is defined as: *'the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties'*. The quicker we recover from adversity, the greater our resilience.



### READ

---

- Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers  
<https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers>
  - How to promote resilience in your students  
<https://thehighlyeffectiveteacher.com/how-to-promote-resilience-in-your-students/>
- 



### Tip

To explore kindness and resilience you can also use stories in the classroom. For example, you could use Charlie Mackesy's story "The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse".



### WATCH

---

- Listen to the story  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81b4i9jQhck>
- 



Once you have listened to it together with your students, you can discuss it with them. You can ask them what they thought about the story and also if there was a part that particularly caught their attention or that they identified with. You could also discuss the message that each of the characters gives us. Stories are a powerful method to start discussions.

## Respect

Respect can be founded on strong social bonds: eg, fostering a classroom environment of respect through acknowledging each individual – not only by you as the teacher, but also from students in the class. This is a way to promote respect. You could have a conversation in class about respect and what it means to be respected and how to respect another. Having these discussions would help students to understand situations from another person's perspective. We tend to see our own experiences and the experiences

of others differently, even though the situation would be the same – so the experiences of others will help to understand and rectify this type of thinking. Respect helps one to become more empathetic towards others, making others feel positively about us. This also makes us develop closer friendships.

Respect is also given when you listen. Listen patiently to what they are saying. If two students are fighting listen to both sides. Don't take sides, assuming that one is right and one is wrong. They could both have valid points. When students feel that they are being heard – and by this it means that they are allowed to express hurt, anger, happiness, anxiety etc., they feel validated and feel more secure. You could say, to look at the bright side – and the bright side is great but not the reality right now.

When we train in mindfulness and non-judgmental awareness, it is important to know that feelings of anger isn't something negative. Anger is a normal emotion that we have all feel. This is why it is important that we become aware of all emotions we are experiencing with full mindfulness, non-judgmentally.

Physical expression and behavior are manifestations of what we are experiencing in our minds. This is important when we understand the mind-body connection. Because of anger a student could very well hit another student. Because of anger a student could also blame someone just to have the person punished. Because of anger a student could also express that he or she is angry and ask for a moment to settle down. The type of students we have in class vary, and their behaviors will depend on the type of skills we nurture. When we know how to address each other, when we know how to express ourselves without hurting another – at the very least it presents us with a choice. This is what our practice is designed to do – when we mindfully pause – we are able to make this choice from a reasoned and empathetic or compassionate angle, as opposed to a reactive manner.

As a teacher, your presence will be an example and guide for your students. This is why your own practice is so important. Patience in a classroom could go a long way – but patience is also very challenging in a classroom – and patience can provide us an opportunity to practice.

## Anxiety, Concentration and Connection

The practice of mindfulness is not only about strengthening our emotional intelligence and emotional literacy. Mindfulness is also known to improve our ability to focus a cluttered mind, de-clutter it and improve concentration.

Anxiety can interfere with concentration, and could prevent you from noting situations that led to anxiety.

Anxiety is normal, and we all experience it. However, if we don't note anxiety when it occurs and cope with it sensibly, anxiety can slowly invade our lives. Understanding the physical experience of anxiety can help us to understand it and developing an effective coping mechanism can help in managing it. Anxiety can affect well-being, our family and social relationships, and academic performance.

Anxiety isn't the only mental state that affects academic performance and classroom behavior in children. Sometimes what lies behind disruptive behavior, or distracted behavior, could very well be the expression of underlying anxiety or sadness or depression, or even an undiagnosed learning disability that if understood can easily be addressed. Educators should be very mindful of these situations empathetically.

## Addressing Anxiety and Mental Well-being

In Module 3 we highlighted the importance of compassionate empathy and how it helps us to feel happier. You can also begin a daily practice of random acts of kindness where students do little things to show kindness towards others. Every month or each school term involve students in a social-service project would be good. Use such events to reinforce teachings on mindfulness with values. Gardening is also a very good activity to engage in. Create spaces in classrooms or in the school yard for planting pots if no garden space is available. Involve students to engage in work that they feel proud of is very beneficial.

## Purpose and Guidelines

What if we were to base our behaviors on the core belief: **when we take care of others we take care of ourselves.**

If we respect the environment it will take care of us. If we respect each other we will have a nurturing social environment.

To do this we need to talk of gratitude, patience, tolerance. You can use the activity “a word, a thought and action”.

The actions on each of the values that have been discussed in this manner could become a guideline for behavior.

## Classroom Rules and Integrity

Students need to engage actively in the rules that need to be followed in a classroom. You might want to do this with your students. After all the discussions we’ve had on values and the practices on mindfulness, this is a good time to discuss with the class what would the values and guidelines for behaviors be for the class. The importance of honesty and integrity can be included in your discussions. You could ask students how they perceive being honest and what they see as integrity. They could be invited to write on the board and discuss with the students. In addition, you should also discuss what should be done when rules are broken. Make sure that you are consistent and fair when and if discipline is ensured.

Once you have prepared an environment of respect, where students understand that they are valued and will not be judged, you have reached a place where behavioral problems in classrooms like bullying, fighting and prejudicial behavior can be addressed. There will be still occasions where it will be difficult to reach consensus of cooperation. This is where you have to manage your own emotional reactions and use your own wisdom to address such disruptive behaviors.

Most important:

1. Remember that students are not their behaviors – a disruptive behavior doesn’t make this a disruptive student. Don’t take this personally. Take a step back. Pause. Stay calm. Reflect non-judgmentally. Always watch any ‘drama’ from a position of detached observation. Don’t get involved in the ‘drama’, just be a wise spectator only.
2. What are the causes of different behaviors, understand these. It is beneficial to ensure you have made the effort to assess what happened. For example, a disruptive behavior could be due to a condition like Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. Let everyone have an opportunity to express themselves and be listened to, and talk frankly.

3. It is important to understand that with the pressures of school work, extensive syllabi to complete and large numbers of students in a class, it is not easy to pause mindfully and assess situations. All these could prevent productive teaching-learning efforts. How you behave, and your response to multiple challenges will be an example to your students. Major concerns like fighting, insults, bullying in class could add to your challenges, together with perhaps some personal issues. Whatever you decide to do, make sure that you explain why you are doing it because students need to know this. When you commit to fostering a classroom of tolerance and respect it is important you explain your reasons, patiently and mindfully.
4. Forgiveness and apologizing are very necessary, and will help in nurturing respect, tolerance and acceptance in a student community. These values help in developing humility. .
5. Be kind to yourself and others. Be patient with yourself. Be very clear about boundaries. You are their teacher and not their friend. Don't let kindness be seen as weakness or inconsistency. Let your wisdom and compassion take the lead.

Every situation requires different responses. The following article has some interesting approaches that you might want to try. Make sure it is age appropriate and culture appropriate.



READ

---

- Dealing with Disruptive Behavior  
<https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/1353>
- 

At the heart of this are young students who are struggling to connect and build relationships and develop their self-esteem. One teacher can make a positive difference in their life. Let that teacher be you.

## Dealing with Colleagues

Teaching means you have to work with peers, your fellow teachers. These relationships are not easy. We hope that your mindfulness practice will help you to navigate challenging relationships with kindness. The less you react, and the more you let go of hurt experienced in the staffroom or school – the better able you will be to focus on yourself and your students.

In these Modules we have tried to give you two tools:

1. Mindfulness practice to increase awareness, focus and concentration. Awareness of posture, movements, senses, and bodily reactions to thoughts, emotions and feelings,
2. Recognizing, understanding, accepting and articulating emotional experiences

Two wings to help us manage ourselves, build positive connections with each other to help us to achieve our greatest potential. We hope that you have been benefited by this course.

*We sincerely hope that you enjoyed working through these four modules just as much as we did.*

# Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning

Dr Tara de Mel

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is described as **the process of developing and using social and emotional skills**<sup>1</sup>. People with strong social-emotional skills are better equipped to manage daily challenges, build positive relationships, and to make informed decisions. SEL helps students and adults thrive in school and in life.

SEL is now a recognized and accepted theme within school curricula, globally, and is generally considered to include the following components:

- Developing self-awareness
- Self-control, management of emotions
- Healthy, interpersonal skills
- Empathy, kindness, resilience
- Responsible decision-making

These components are usually included into school curricula within a variety of themes like *Civic Education, Behavioral Sciences, Citizenship skills* and others. These components are taught using practice-based interventions or by using traditional methods like instructional notes in textbooks subject to rote learning, and tested at formative or summative assessments. The latter is how most subjects are taught in Sri Lankan schools. Subjects taught in such a regimental manner and tested at exams, are often forgotten no sooner the child leaves the class or school. It's worth examining if long-term durability of SEL skillsets, and behavioral or transformational changes can be expected in students if SEL is taught in the traditional manner described above, or if innovative and practice-oriented methods will have more impact.

Developing self-awareness is a key component of SEL. Let's look at how mindfulness can be used as a base for developing self-awareness and other SEL skill sets in the above context.

Reputed neuroscientists, psychologists, and others have studied the impact of mindfulness and meditation on the brain, mind and body for decades. In their studies they used modern tools of neuroscience, brain-scanning, radio imaging, genomic studies and similar methods. Their findings are documented in reputed journals and books<sup>2</sup>.

- The areas of the brain that have consistently shown change and growth due to mindfulness and meditation are : the prefrontal cortex (PFC), the amygdala, hippocampus and insula. Certain other areas like the anterior & posterior cingulate cortex, dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex, the nucleus accumbens have also been studied in relation to mind-wandering and emotional mediation. Density of grey matter of the brain (the areas needed for cognitive function) has also been studied and usually decrease with age. Regular mindfulness meditation slows the speed of decreasing density, resulting in having 'younger brains' in comparison to the chronological age of the person.
- The science of epigenetics (a frontier of genomic studies) is a more recent discovery demonstrating how meditation affects gene-expression. The influence of mindfulness on the behavior of genes are remarkable new findings. Maintaining cellular-health, slowing down cellular-aging and the role of meditation on the enzyme telomerase which influences telomeres degeneration are all fascinating findings.

- Immune responses and antibodies - Improvement of immunity and less inflammatory responses are seen in meditators. These are relatively new discoveries, found to occur due to measurable decreases in expression of genes responsible for inflammation.

The main changes in mindfulness meditators that are commonly documented:

1. Certain areas of brain will change in shape and size (neuroplasticity) and become either more or less functional. Growth of new neurones (neurogenesis) is well established. PFC is the most privileged, executive centre of the brain capable of complex cognitive function, informed and responsible decision making, preventing thought-rumination and being emotionally hijacked. PFC grows in strength and function in meditators.
2. Amygdala is the radar for threat detection, and reacts instantaneously when facing stress, dangerous situations or anxious moments. Mindfulness meditation decreases amygdala activity and reduces its size – thus, preventing knee-jerk reactions. The amygdala therefore enhances self-control. The PFC manages, regulates and modulates amygdala reactivity. PFC functionality, which increases with mindfulness and meditation - promotes resilience, the ability to cope with challenges, and develops capacity to swiftly recover from stress.
3. Limbic system of the mid-brain and its emotional centres directly connect to emotional-response-generating circuitry, which include the PFC, amygdala and hippocampus. These dictate how emotions drive our actions and thoughts. Emotional intelligence/emotional literacy helps to understand our responses and pre-empt hasty decisions. Mindfulness affects all these areas and helps us to take active control, and be responsible and sensible in our behavior, and subsequently develop healthy interpersonal relationships.

The above understanding aims to establish a connection between mindfulness and key elements of SEL. Mindfulness practice can indeed be a foundation on which SEL can be built and can be referred to as the core of SEL. Due to the proven brain changes and neuronal generation, it could be said that regular mindfulness practice will enable sustainable development of SEL skills.



#### READ

---

1. <https://www.understood.org/articles/en/social-emotional-learning-what-you-need-to-know>
  2. Science of Meditation: Richard Davidson & Daniel Goleman – Penguin, Random House
-

## Authors

**Dr Tara de Mel**, is a medical doctor, university academic and former Secretary, Ministry of Education. She has been practicing Buddhist meditation since 2007. Her practice is largely focused on the four foundations of mindfulness and is based on the Buddha's discourses in the Pali Canon. Her foremost teachers are venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva and venerable Panadure Chandaratana - the Abbot & Deputy Abbot, respectively, at Nissarana Vanaya forest monastery in Mithirigala, Sri Lanka.

**Dinusha Wickremesekera** is a Yoga Instructor and Lifestyle Counsellor. She is reading for a Master of Science in Applied Psychology and is training to be Mindfulness Trainer for children with Mindfulness for Children Australia. She follows the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. She co-developed and delivered mindfulness programs for primary teachers through the Ministry of Education and the Open University.

**Niluka Gunawardena** is a certified .b mindfulness trainer and is registered with the Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP), UK. She co-developed and delivered a mindfulness programs for primary teachers through the Ministry of Education and the Open University of Sri Lanka. She is dedicated to promoting mindfulness among children and young adults to foster compassionate and inclusive communities.