



Guidelines for Secular Teaching of Mindfulness

Mindful Schools arose from a simple experience: a few mindfulness practitioners sharing their love of the practice with students in several Oakland schools. When we founded the organization, we sought to articulate the practices in the most inclusive way possible. We wanted everyone to feel equally welcome in our community, regardless of religious orientation.

Our enduring commitment to secularity reflects the fundamental value of inclusivity. Only a thoroughly secular articulation of mindfulness avoids excluding people who might otherwise be interested in the practice. To fully honor the autonomy of students and our community members, the secularity of mindfulness is of paramount concern.

The *Mindful Schools* network continues to expand with thousands of graduates teaching mindfulness practices. We want to provide the support and clarity our graduates need to teach mindfulness in a secular manner.

As educators sharing mindfulness, it is first important to clarify and affirm our intentions. When we share mindfulness, we are not attempting to impose a comprehensive belief system. Nor are we attempting to advance or inhibit any religious commitments that students or educators may hold. Our objective is simple: to support the well-being of students and educators by sharing simple practices and psychoeducation, and to develop an attitude of inquiry around how the mind works.

In this spirit, we wanted to offer some recommendations to support secular teaching:

1. Mindfulness practices should be articulated in the primary instructional language or languages (in the case of bilingual education).
2. No classroom can be conducted in a completely value-neutral manner and it is reasonable to affirm humanistic values such as kindness, cooperation, empathy or concentration. However, mindfulness is not an attempt to teach a comprehensive ethical system.
3. Teach the practices in a direct, experiential manner whereby practitioners can examine the validity of the claims within their own subjective experience (e.g. when doing seated mindfulness practice, students can directly perceive the attention wandering away from the mindfulness anchor). The spirit is one of encouraging curiosity as if conducting an experiment with one's own mind and body.
4. Do not assert or intimate claims about metaphysics (e.g. 'the nature of the universe is love'). If such questions or comments arise from students, support their curiosity while clarifying the scope of mindfulness practice and redirect the conversation to the subjective or empirical realm.
5. Frame mindfulness as a practice about subjective experiences rather than about overarching truths of the universe.
6. Do not include symbols or artifacts closely linked to a particular religious tradition (e.g. making particular gestures with one's hands, bowing, using religious props, etc.).
7. Do not substantiate the practices on the basis of religious figures or texts. At the same time, take care not to denigrate religious practices or texts.
8. Teach in a manner consistent with current scientific understandings of human biology and behavior.

We hope these guidelines support you in your teaching. We are *sincerely grateful* for all the work you do and trust that your efforts will bring benefits to many.