



Research Summary

Current Youth Mental Health Challenges

The US Surgeon General's Office [issued a youth mental health advisory](#) in response to rising rates in depression, anxiety, and mental health-related hospital visits in youth, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, a CDC study of high school students during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed:

- **37%** of high school students reported experiencing poor mental health; **55%** reported experiencing emotional abuse by a parent or other adult in the home; **44%** reported persistently feeling sad or hopeless during the past year.

The study revealed a sense of being cared for, supported, and belonging at school — called “school connectedness” — had an important effect on students during a time of severe disruption. Youth who felt connected to adults and peers at school were significantly less likely (than those who did not) to:

- Report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness (**35% vs. 53%**); Seriously consider attempting suicide (**14% vs. 26%**); Attempt suicide (**6% vs. 12%**)

However, fewer than half (47%) of youth reported feeling close to people at school during the pandemic.

Evidence-Based and Upstream Approaches to Support Youth Behavioral Health:

- A sample of over 14,000 students from 49 schools were studied during the first 3 months of COVID-19 in the United States and factors that mitigated mental health challenges were assessed. **Care-giver support was determined to be the factor that most buffered children from the mental health challenge(s) of the pandemic.**
- “There must be ongoing institutional mental health support for teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff. Many of these adults have provided critical safety nets for youth since the start of the pandemic and are themselves at high risk for burnout. In conclusion, findings clearly show that *if a central societal goal is to maximize resilience among youth through the continuing pandemic-related challenges, we will have to deliberately prioritize an “upstream” approach, ensuring ongoing support for the adults who take care of them in their everyday lives.*” (Luthar et al. Social Policy Report)
- A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions for mental health in schools found that outside facilitators who taught mindfulness had greater success in immediately alleviating mental health challenges in schools **BUT sustained successes was only found when mindfulness training was delivered by trained teachers.** (Source: Carsley, Khoury & Heath, Mindfulness 2018).



Whole-School Mindfulness Strategies for Youth Behavioral Health

[Mindful Schools programs](#) take an integrated approach to foster mental health and well-being in schools by investing in: Educator Well-Being & Empowerment; Schoolwide Culture & Leading Mindfully; and Inclusive, Trauma-Sensitive, & Mindful Classrooms. Research that supports our approach:

- Trauma researcher and pediatrician, Dr Nadine Burke Harris, undertook a groundbreaking study with the CDC which demonstrated that the impacts of childhood trauma can be prevented by regulating the body's response to stress. *"Educators can deliver the daily doses of healing interactions that truly are the antidote to toxic stress. And just as the science shows that it's the cumulative dose of early adversity that's most harmful, it also shows that the cumulative dose of healing nurturing interactions is most healing."*
- [Preparing Schools to Meet the Needs of Students Coping with Trauma and Toxic Stress](#), reveals that whole-school strategies for addressing trauma tend to be more effective than strategies that focus only on identifying individual students for secondary intervention, and that simultaneous investments in staff mental health can improve outcomes for both students and staff members.
- [Structural Supports to Promote Teacher Well-Being](#), demonstrates that a culture of mutual trust, respect, and open communication among teachers and school leaders allows them to work together to improve practices and solve problems. In particular, a districtwide commitment to social and racial justice and to affirming educators' identities can help counter the forces that contribute to high rates of burnout and turnover for teachers of color - and lead to greater satisfaction and retention.

Our Impact:

Outcomes from Mindful Schools programs demonstrate our ability to positively impact school environments. In an October 2021 session (737 respondents) of 201: Mindfulness in the Classroom for educators revealed:

- 98% report having effective strategies to build and strengthen relationships with students
- 99% report having effective strategies to build a positive classroom climate
- 96% report having developed strategies to support their own well-being
- 84% report having effective strategies to support students who have experienced trauma
- 60% noticed improved emotional regulation in students after eight weeks of programming

Mindful Schools' impact stories demonstrate how our program encourages educators to make choices that support all students to thrive.

- A teacher participant no longer uses "pop" quizzes after realizing that unexpected events can put students who have experienced trauma into "flight, fight, or freeze" mode
- A school counselor noticed her nervousness caused her to disengage with students and when she shifted to giving her full attention, her students began to open up and her sessions became more fruitful
- An assistant principal invited all staff, including security guards, to participate in Mindful Schools' training and noticed it positively shifted the relationships, climate, and culture of the school