



# Mindfulness Teacher Manual

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# I. Using the Curriculum

## Making it Your Own

The Mindful Schools K-5 curriculum had been used successfully by kids and teachers in thousands of classrooms around the world. It's a great tool, and you'll want to make it your own. Students respond best to authenticity and naturalness; you are what makes this program successful!

In the beginning, you may want to rely on the scripts more heavily as you get familiar with the lessons and the flow of the curriculum. Over time, though, you'll want to bring in your own style and ideas. There is great beauty in bringing your individual gifts to teaching. So use the curriculum, but let your own creativity and wisdom shine through. Be well grounded in your own mindfulness practice, lead with mindful presence and good intentions, and then go with the flow.

The first sections of this manual offer general suggestions and helpful tips for engaging K-5 classes. The last section deals with younger age students preK-2<sup>nd</sup> grade (ages 4-8).

## Greetings

Whether you are teaching mindfulness as an outsider provider or in your own classroom, how you interact with the students, faculty, and administrators at your school matters.

- **With Students:** Establish a personal connection at the beginning of each lesson. One way of doing this is to let them know how you feel. One teacher greets his classes, "I'm so happy to be here/see you today." Another starts, "I'm really excited to have the chance to talk to you today about..." Sharing your own inner experience and intentions sets a tone of warmth, friendship and safety. Youth are very responsive to love and kindness. This kind of greeting often disarms all ages!
- **With Adults:** As an outside provider, be sure to introduce yourselves to teachers, faculty, and others. Continue to acknowledge them as you arrive each day, which encourages a sense of partnership. If you're teaching your own classroom, share what you're doing with colleagues in the break room or at faculty meetings.

## Preparing Lessons

Being well-prepared for a lesson can make a huge difference in how things go. When we are internally clear about what we're teaching and how we want to do it, we often feel more relaxed and confident. Here are a few tips and suggestions you may find useful.

- Write bullets or talking points on a few index cards. Even if you end up not using them, the process of doing this often helps clarify the flow of a lesson.
- Think about each class and consider how you can best connect with the students. How can you reach them? What matters to them that this lesson could help with?
- Visualize yourself teaching the lesson or practice it out loud. If you walk through the steps in your mind, it will flow more naturally when you teach.

Have a lesson plan for each day. If students take things way off topic, don't be afraid to bring them back. However, if something significant happens in class, if there a disruption or crises, *don't miss the teachable moment*. Surprises and unplanned incidents are a great way to teach applying mindfulness to the wider scope of their daily experience.

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## II. The First Lessons

The first few lessons of the curriculum are incredibly important. Not only do they lay foundational material (What is mindfulness? Why are we doing this?), but they establish the relationship with your students and set the tone for the class's experience of mindfulness. As such, we encourage you to give particular emphasis to creating a strong connection, a clear container, and establishing a routine for your lessons early on.

### Mindful Bodies

Encourage students and adults alike to have a straight back without being rigid. An upright spine is conducive to mindfulness and is a by-product of stillness and quiet. Useful images include a flower that is watered, not wilted, or a tree is that is well rooted and reaching for the sun. Be sure that the students understand and can practice being in a "mindful body" on day one. Don't move on without this.

If students are at their desks, have them move their chairs away from their desks and

turn them toward the front of the room. Explain that they can do this each time you come in, and remind them until it is a habit.

We often tell adults to put their feet on the ground, but remember that many students' feet won't reach the ground! With young ones sitting on the floor, some teachers use the directive "criss-cross applesauce" to have the students sit cross legged. We recommend that you avoid using this and instead create a different association with the posture by calling it "mindful bodies" or "mindful posture."

## **Eyes Open or Closed**

Ideally, students will all close their eyes during formal mindfulness practice. However, don't force this. Some students will not feel safe with their eyes closed. Find a balance between encouraging or even challenging everyone to have their eyes closed and trusting that students are doing what is safe and comfortable for themselves. To avoid distraction, encourage students whose eyes are open to look down at the floor in front of them with their eyes relaxed, perhaps half-closed.

It's important that you demonstrate eyes-closed, but don't keep them closed the whole time if students are doing a minute or more of mindfulness. Start with the students and then periodically open your eyes to see how they are doing. It's important that you be able to monitor the room so students "peeking" know that you are watching!

## **Creating a Routine**

We recommend that you start and end each class the same way, every day. This creates a routine for the students that they will recognize and (hopefully) learn to enjoy!

Begin with a check in and a short practice (the bell, breathing). You can vary which you do first. Ask if anyone has used mindfulness in last couple days. Inquire specifically about the most recent lesson they learned and/or any "homework" of mindfulness challenges you may have given them. Let a couple or few students share. This is useful for the other kids to hear and often insightful for you.

The bulk of the time will be spent offering your lesson and engaging the students in the day's practice and discussion. End each lesson in the same manner. Have them get back into their mindful bodies, ring the bell, and do a few moments of mindful listening.

## **Mindful Sequence: “Keep it Up”**

Over time, you can develop a sequence of mindful listening, moving and breathing at the beginning of each class. They raise their hand when they can no longer hear the bell, and then mindfully bring their hand to an anchor spot. This sequence can become quite long for classes that have really settled in. The sequence is:

1. Mindful bodies
2. Mindful listening
3. Raising hand (mindfully, once they’ve learned mindful movement)
4. Mindfully bringing the hand to the belly or anchor spot
5. Mindful breathing

## **Journals**

After you finish, have them take five minutes or more to write, draw, or otherwise reflect on the lesson in their journals. The journal questions are intended for grade 2 and up. (K-1 can draw pictures). Spanish speaking/ESL students can journal in their native language if appropriate. Have them keep the word “mindfulness” in English.

## **Classroom Dynamics**

If the first day or two was hard, try changing the dynamic in the room by having them turn their chairs toward the front or bringing them to the floor. A circle will often cause distractions because they are looking at each other, but it can also be a great way to create intimacy. If a circle causes silliness, have them all face forward so they only see the backs of each other. Review the basics and be sure that the students are able to get into their “mindful bodies” and let the room grow still and quiet. Celebrate any success and encourage their sense of agency by pointing out that *they did that!*

## **Visitors, Holidays and Breaks**

It’s common to have someone else visit the class when you are teaching mindfulness — a faculty member, administrator, parent, or even a fellow mindfulness teacher.

Introducing visitors makes the kids comfortable and limits curiosity. Often you can make the visitor part of the class. Tell the students that your friend doesn’t know how to do mindfulness (if that’s true) and you need the kids help to explain and demonstrate.

After a holiday or break, start by checking if they remembered mindfulness over the break. Remind them of the things they’ve learned so far.

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## III. Hone Your Teaching

### Building Trust

A good deal of our work in mindfulness with children and youth is about developing relationships in which the children feel safe enough to explore their inner experience and share openly. As educators and mindfulness instructors, this depends a lot on our ability to create an atmosphere conducive to such safety. This includes the quality of presence and clarity of intention we bring to teaching; our willingness to share openly and appropriately about our own inner experience; our facilitation skills; and our ability to build genuine and meaningful relationships with students.

One key to this process is engaging the kids in dialogue. Depending on the age and classroom culture, it can take time to build enough rapport and trust with the group to invite open, honest sharing. You can vary the kinds of questions you ask to engage the students in ways that feel safe and comfortable, slowly inviting them to stretch and share more over time.

### Creating Dialogue

A low-stakes way for the students to share is to invite nonverbal communication such as raising hands or doing a “thumb test.” Begin with simple “polling” questions, such as:

- How many people noticed ... X? (E.g., their mind wander? Their breathing slow?)
- Raise your hand if you feel more calm or relaxed.
- Raise your hand if you felt sleepy.

Silent ways of communicating are a great way to get feedback from the class, without everyone talking at once.

- **Thumbs up/Thumbs down:** Use thumbs up/down for “yes” and “no”. A sideways thumb can be “maybe” or “kind- of”.
- **Mindful Hello/Good-Bye:** Once students know you, they will likely be very excited to see you, even in the halls and on the playground. For that reason, and also to encourage mindfulness, you can develop a “Mindful Hello and Good-Bye” with them. A quiet wave with a hand or just a finger is great.

You can build on nonverbal feedback with simple “yes/no” questions, then short answer questions, and eventually more open-ended questions like, “What did you notice?” Or, “What was fun / hard / challenging / interesting about that for you?”

## **Sharing**

When answering open-ended questions, sometimes kids will say, “It felt funny.” You can comment that sometimes when we are noticing something new it is hard to explain, so it might seem funny. Offer some possible ways to explain what they are noticing. At first, keep it simple: “Was it a good feeling or a bad feeling?” “Did you like it or not?” Depending on their age, you can also offer a short “menu” of options. For example, “Did it feel calm, sleepy, excited, or agitated?”

## **Normalizing**

Remember that there’s no right or wrong, no good or bad in mindfulness practice. Our main job is to notice our experience or emotions. When students share, it’s important to affirm and normalize their experience, whatever that may be. Some useful phrases are:

- “Yes, that’s okay.”
- “Yes, that happens sometimes”
- “And was that okay for you?”

## **Word Choice**

One of the skills you will want to develop in your mindfulness teaching is how you use language to give instructions and to support students in their exploration of mindfulness. Here are a few things we recommend paying attention to.

### **Active vs Passive Voice**

The way we give instructions can have a strong influence on how kids respond. To support a sense of choice and autonomy, use a passive voice rather than an active voice:

- “Let your eyes close” vs. “Close your eyes.”
- “Let your bodies be still” vs. “Be still.”
- “Let’s get our mindful bodies on” vs. “Put on / Get into your mindful bodies.”

### **Clear Instructions**

Be sure to keep your actual instructions for the mindfulness practice simple, clear and detailed. Before you begin, ask if anyone is confused or if the instructions are unclear.



(Framing the question in the negative, rather than “Does everyone understand?” makes it easier for those struggling to let you know).

When you give them reminders during the practice itself, keep them short and specific. Speak slowly. Be sure to leave enough space between each suggestion so the kids have the time to experiment with or imagine your suggestion.

### **Choose Words They Understand**

Be sure you are choosing your words carefully and using a vocabulary that will make sense to them. When teaching adults, mindfulness instructors often use words or phrases that are more figurative, such as:

- “Tap into”
- “Intense”
- “Work with”
- “What was that like?”
- “Honor”
- “How was that?”
- “Feel into”
- “In-touch with emotions”

These ways of speaking can be too vague or abstract for children. Use words that they use, or make sure they know what you’re asking for by giving them an example.

### **Building Mindfulness**

As you teach your group or class, you’ll want to support their ability to recognize and strengthen their own capacity for mindful awareness.

#### **I Noticed...**

As you practice together, comment on what *you* notice. This is being mindful for them. “I noticed some of you stayed quiet even when something was funny, loud...” etc. If there are giggles during silence, just acknowledge the silence that had occurred and moved in that direction. “What I really liked is that you stayed quiet even after the bell.”

#### **Let Quiet Moments Last**

If things get quiet, let that linger. Don’t move on quickly. Point this out to the class: “Do you notice how it feels in here right now? I really feel how quiet and still this class is.” This helps them to notice and savor the results of their mindfulness practice.

#### **Mindful Challenges**

One way to help students expand their capacity for mindfulness is to challenge them. If they were able to sit mindfully for one minute, suggest a time-challenge of two minutes.

Use your discernment to pick an amount of time that will require them to work a little, but that's still doable. It's important that they feel a sense of accomplishment, yet don't be afraid to set the bar high. They are often capable of more than we might think!

Between lessons, challenge them to use mindfulness in relation to the lesson you've just taught. Invite them to remember to do mindful breathing (or listening, or seeing, or...) at least two or three times between lessons. When you return, find out who remembered the challenge and ask them for the specifics of what they did.

## **Flexible Teaching**

As we've mentioned, a lesson plan is only a plan. It's important that we stay attuned to what's happening with the kids and be willing to respond to their needs in the moment. There's never any reason to rush. If you don't get through the lesson, don't worry. Teach to the moment: if something arises, teach to that.

## **Difficult Situations**

There may be time when a class is dealing with a difficult situation. There may have been an argument, a loss in someone's family, or a sad story from the community or the news. This is a good time to let go of that day's lesson plan and send kind thoughts instead. Make it relate to the situation at hand. You can expand the phrases for self, the class, and beyond. Involve them by encouraging them to come up with wishes.

## **When in Doubt**

The ultimate goal of each day is simply to increase the number of moments of awareness. If you accomplish just two minutes of mindfulness, that's a lot. Know that there will be days or classes that don't seem to go well. Trust that they are benefiting.

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## **III. Behavior and Classroom Management**

An inevitable part of our role as educators is handling behavior issues and managing the dynamics of 20 to 30 children, or more. In addition to our own practice, whatever facilitation skills or communication training we have, it can be helpful to have a few tricks to use. (See our article "Working with Resistance" for more suggestions).

## **Sleepiness**

When kids comment that they are sleepy, explain that this is normal and can even be a

sign that they have some mindfulness. “When we’re mindful we often get calm and relaxed—sometimes TOO calm!” This is why we have mindful bodies. When our body is straight, our mind has to work a little harder and we won’t become sleepy so easily. You can also have them experiment with slouching and trying to breath, and then sitting up and trying to breath. They will notice which is easier.

## **Restlessness**

The opposite problem is having too much energy and feeling restless. This is equally common. Comment on what you notice. “Wow, I’m noticing a lot of energy in the room today. Does anyone else notice that?” Rather than trying to force the children to be quiet or change what’s happening, see if you can work with their internal state and use it to build mindfulness. We want students to learn how to be mindful in any situation, especially when they are restless or activated.

## **Fidgeting**

Students often don’t realize that they are bouncing a leg, or knocking on their desk, or rustling paper. You can make them aware without singling them out by suggesting to the entire class, “Let your whole body become very still. Notice how your feet feel and let them become still. Notice how your hands and fingers feel, and let them become still.”

Also, periodically emphasize the importance of remaining quiet even if they don’t want to do the exercise, so those who do can really focus. Note that kids that move *may be just as engaged as the others*. They just sincerely might not be able to sit still. There’s no need to demand stillness. Often, over time, restlessness will lessen in students.

## **Mindful Movement**

When the whole class is having trouble settling, try harnessing that energy by doing some mindful movement. You could do some simple yoga or movement, coordinating their breathing with arm movements. Or, play a game like a “slow race” to see who can move the slowest. With younger students, playing Simon Says can be especially useful. For example, if you have lost their attention, say, “Everyone put one hand in the air, now both hands, put one hand on your belly, one hand on your heart, close your eyes, open your eyes, close your eyes, take one breath, take a longer breath...” etc. You will likely have all their attention again.

You can also have them take their mindful bodies on and off a few times. This can be a fun and silly way to be mindful and release some of their excess energy. Invite them to wiggle around a little in their seats. Then have them put their mindful bodies on — which means total stillness and quiet. Demonstrate this. Move between “on” and “off” a couple of times. This is also teaching them how to regulate their own body.

If a class has a few tough kids, you can comment indirectly. “Notice if you might be disrupting others who are trying to focus. What can you do to support now to support your classmates?”

## **Transitions**

Sometimes students will be rowdy or have trouble settling down after transitions. You can encourage the classroom teacher to use these moments to do some mindful breathing or listening with the kids when you’re not there. It’s also sometimes useful to remind students: “There are times in our day for everything. There’s time for playing, learning, laughing, creating, sharing, reading, eating, sleeping. And there is time for mindfulness. What time is it right now? Ok, since it’s time for mindfulness right now, let’s put our mindful bodies on.”

## **When to Leave**

Sometimes when the room is rowdy and not settling down regardless of what you try, you can say, “You know, today just might not be a day for mindfulness. You all are having a hard time settling down, so I’m going to leave today. Maybe next time it will be easier.” Be mindful that you are in a place of acceptance and feeling neutral rather than frustrated or angry. It’s important that they understand your departure as a way of supporting them rather than a punishment. It’s no fun for anyone to try to do mindfulness when the conditions aren’t there. When you return say, “I know last time we had a hard time.” Assess if you need to give any reminders or if they’re ready again.

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## **IV. Tips for Little Ones (preK-2)**

Teaching little ones in pre-K to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (ages 4-8) can be incredibly rewarding. Younger children are capable of learning and practicing mindfulness if we present things in ways that they can understand. This often means modulating how we talk about mindfulness and deliver

our lessons. This section provides a few suggestions for such modifications to your teaching. It is not complete or exhaustive, but rather is meant to give you a framework to get started so that you can develop your own creative style for working with this age group.

## Teaching Mindfulness

The younger the child the less explanation they need about *why* to practice mindfulness, and the more they need bite-sized, detailed, specific instructions about *how* to practice. Most children preK-2 are content to try something new just for the sake of its novelty! In presenting a lesson, it's sometimes enough to simply say, "Do you want to learn something new today?" You've got their attention! Of course, as you go, you'll want to help them make connections for how mindfulness can be useful in their classroom or at home.

### Go Slowly, One Thing at a Time

Little ones can't take in too much information at once. One sentence at a time of instruction is about what they can retain. If you rattle off an instruction with three parts you will have lost them. For example, when giving instructions for Mindful Bodies:

1. Ask for a still body. Practice that.
2. Once that has happened, ask for a quiet body.
3. Once that's happened, try it with eyes closed.

For Mindful Listening of the bell:

1. First just listen.
2. Then ask them to listen through to the end of the sound.
3. Next have them listen *and* raise their hand at the end
4. Last, ask them to listen and raise hand at the end *with their eyes closed*.

### Keep it Simple

Don't explain too much. Children age preK-2 take things very literally. Let your vocabulary be simple and your words clear and concise. Ask for help from the teacher if you're not sure how to phrase something in a way they understand. Repeat simple phrases and instructions several times. Emphasize the silence. Let there be pregnant pauses where they are waiting in suspense for what you are about to say.

### Use Repetition

Sometimes all they need to learn is how to return again and again. If you spend an

entire class “bringing them back” to what you are doing, you are helping them learn *how* to come back. Don’t feel that a class has been wasted if all you did was get their attention to ring the bell, only to have them get distracted again. Think about your own practice: *we all have a 5 year old mind sometimes!*

### **“Think About It”**

Often Kindergarteners will just raise their hand without having a real answer. This can result in long pauses of waiting for a response, or they just repeat what has already been said by their classmates. Asking them to *think first* allows them to come up with something to say from their own experience. When you ask them a question, follow it by saying “Think about it for a minute,” or just “think about it.” You may even want to point to your head giving them a visual of thinking.

## **Hone Your Teaching**

### **Presence**

Your warm presence and understanding demeanor are very important at these ages. The more friendly and open-hearted you are, the more they will respond and the more you will enjoy your time with them.

### **Use Your Voice**

Changing the tone or volume of your voice can be very captivating. Modulating your voice in this way makes them think that some important information is coming. When you speak in a whisper they have to work harder to hear you and that can bring a quiet over the group. You could even try teaching a lesson in a whisper if you think they are distracted or over excited. When you change your tone to excited, serious or amazed you capture their interest and imagination.

### **Pausing**

Pauses are another great way of getting their attention. If you are suddenly very quiet they will notice and be waiting for that next piece of instruction or information.

### **Use Affect**

Another key in teaching little ones is to be aware of how you use emotion. Be sure to show affect in your face (and your voice). Be animated and dynamic, which will captivate their attention. There is an element of performance in teaching.

## **Use Images**

Little ones often respond better to metaphor and image. (You'll notice their descriptions of their inner experience tend to be more poetic.) When teaching, use images to demonstrate what you are trying to convey. "Be still as a mountain. Be tall like a redwood tree. Let your body reach for the sun like a flower."

## **Use Story-Telling, Music and Art**

Get creative and incorporate other forms of teaching and play. Stories are captivating. Tell a story that demonstrates that day's lesson. Incorporate music into a lesson. There are some great songs about mindfulness on YouTube (search for "Belly Breathe"). Artist Betsy Rose also has some wonderful songs. Learn a few to use spontaneously.

## **What to Expect**

### **Attention Span**

Younger children have very short attention spans and are easy to lose (even in 15 minutes). When you see them mentally wandering off say "Eyes on me" or "all eyes on me so I know you're listening." This often brings them back quickly.

### **Movement**

These are wiggly age groups, so don't worry if they aren't completely still. Kids age preK-2 years old also tend to be fidgety and wiggle around a lot. They often don't even know they are moving! It's unrealistic (and unnecessary) to expect them to keep still for longer periods.

With that said, don't be afraid to hold them at a high standard. These grades can be very responsive and keep their attention when they are given gentle reminders to do so.

To keep their attention and promote stiller bodies, you can cue them by reminding them "Hands in lap." Demonstrate this each time by clasping your hands together and putting them still on your lap. After several visits, you should be able to silently show them 'hands in lap' with the physical cue and have them follow your lead.

### **Crossed Legs**

Another silent way to engage their bodies is to use a gesture to remind students to cross their legs or get back into a mindful position for practice. You can simply hold out your pointer finger and middle finger, and cross one over the other. Soon students will

know this is a signal from you that you want them to cross their legs.

### **Adult Demonstration**

It's also important to have the teacher and aids sit with the students and participate along with them. These age groups are very impressionable and learn by mimicking. The more adult examples the better.

### **Don't Panic**

The scariest thing can be a Kindergarten class that is out of control! Sometimes our reaction when we think we are losing them is to panic and either start talking more, or to be demanding. It's actually the perfect time to settle back into your own mindfulness practice and notice how you feel. Often our own shift towards more mindfulness can affect their state of being and the activity in the room. If not, it will still give you the spaciousness to make a skillful suggestion or adaptation.

### **Be Willing to Scrap the Lesson**

If something isn't working in your Kindergarten class the same way it did in the 5th grade class, try something different! Remember that your lesson plan is just a plan. Stay present to what's happening, and responsive to what's actually needed in the moment.

### **Be Patient**

We can create guidelines and expectations through our instructions of a Mindful Body, but we must also remember with young ones that they are still learning. Their attention span, level of stillness and quiet, all come and go much more quickly. Be patient with their lack of attention, movement or lack of quiet. While you can direct them back to Mindful Bodies when practice, make sure it's not becoming rigid or demanding. It's important to give them time to just relax and be as they are.

### **Be Five Years Old**

To reach a five-year-old, you need to enter their world. It's a world of more magic, more awe, and more imagination. Play. Remember (or try to remember) what it was like to feel excitement and wonder about the rain, a cupcake, or a train. Join them in their world and your ability to teach them effectively will multiply exponentially.