

Mindfulness: mindfulness for Mental Health

<p>Aim: To introduce mindfulness.</p> <p>To introduce the concept of acknowledging and letting go of thoughts.</p> <p>I can explain what mindfulness is.</p>	<p>The Big Question: What is mindfulness? Is it easy or difficult to pay attention? What happens when we do not pay attention?</p>	<p>Resources: Lesson Pack</p>
<p>Success Criteria: I can recognise when my mind wanders.</p> <p>I can label my thoughts.</p>	<p>Key/New Words: Mindfulness, focus, scattered mind, mind wandering, concentration, attention, direct experience, happiness, sad, stress, stressed, settled, unsettled, mental health, anxiety, stress, emotions.</p>	<p>Preparation: Thought Clouds Activity Sheet - as required</p>
<p>Delivering: This session introduces mindfulness as a practice and discipline, but also as an important part of helping people maintain good mental health. The idea is introduced by explaining that we all experience difficult and challenging emotions. How these can affect our mood, behaviour and mental health is explored. The concept of the busy/scattered mind and how it contributes to our mood and behaviour is presented in a non-judgemental way and its impact is shown to be key in helping us develop happiness, contentment and sound mental health. There is an introductory meditation practice that introduces the children to settling the mind and responding skilfully to thoughts and mental reactivity. It ends with a chance for the children to explore their experiences together.</p>		

Learning Sequence

	<p>Reconnecting - Stressed, Sad, Anxious or Angry: Mindfulness and Mental Health: Share the Big Questions with the children, inviting them to briefly share their thoughts with a partner and then feed back to the class. Highlight that there are no 'right' answers and that they are just exploring what they know about the subject. Using the Lesson Presentation, introduce mindfulness as a new and different kind of subject, one based on direct experience that helps us understand our feelings. Emphasise that the practice of mindfulness can also help us feel more settled and calm and help us manage the more difficult and challenging emotions that we experience. Highlight how it is perfectly OK to feel these difficult feelings and emotions, but that feelings of sadness, stress and anxiety can sometimes overwhelm us, affecting our happiness and long-term mental health. Explain that mindfulness can help us deal with difficult emotions, making us happier and more content.</p>	
	<p>Exploring - What is Mindfulness? Use the Lesson Presentation to explain that mindfulness is a form of mind training based around paying attention to our experience and noticing when our mind wanders. Describe how mindfulness is a practice where we focus on our experience, including our thoughts, feelings and sensations, and learn how these things affect our mood and behaviour. Highlight that focusing is not always easy and that we spend up to 50% of our time not focused or paying attention.</p>	
	<p>Exploring - The Scattered Mind: Ask the children to briefly close their eyes and imagine themselves enjoying their favourite activity. Then, as they think about it, attempt to distract them by mentioning other activities, such as homework or chores. Ask them to notice if they are able to stay focused. After, invite the children to briefly share how they found this. Using the Lesson Presentation, re-emphasise that our minds will wander a lot and that we will often be distracted. Highlight that this is not a criticism, that it is quite normal, but that a lack of focus impacts on mood. Further explain that psychologists have discovered that a lack of focus over long periods of time can make people more stressed, anxious, sad or angry as they are more likely to be caught up in thinking and worrying. Explain that mindfulness can help settle the mind, training us to be more focused and to help us feel calmer and happier. Finish here by explaining that the children will now practise settling the mind and letting go of thoughts.</p>	
	<p>Guided Practice - Breathing and Thinking: Ask the children to sit comfortably and then read through the Breathing and Thinking Guided Meditation Script. This guided meditation encourages children to explore the scattered mind.</p>	
	<p>Reflecting - Sharing Our Experiences: Use the Lesson Presentation to guide the children through a group discussion of their experience of the practice. Emphasise throughout that there are no right or wrong answers in mindfulness and that they are simply investigating whatever arises. Conclude by revisiting the Big Questions, asking children what they consider to be the most important thing they have learnt today.</p>	
	<p>Consolidating - Thought Clouds: <i>This is an optional activity, to fit between the Exploring and Reflecting activities if there is time available.</i> If you want to further explore mindfulness of thoughts, you can use the additional activity practice, the Thought Clouds Activity Sheet. This activity further explores the idea of recognising thoughts as thoughts and letting them go. Read the information on the Lesson Presentation inviting children to stop and focus for a moment. Each time they notice a thought, they write it on a 'Thought Cloud' and let it go, let the thought drift away on a cloud. This gives experiential teaching of the idea of letting thoughts go, encouraging children not to suppress thoughts but to acknowledge them, and allow them to pass.</p>	

Home Practice:

To follow this session there are a number of extra activities that explore practices that aid mental health through mindfulness. There are the [Bedtime Gratitude Reminder Cards](#) that encourage children to be more aware of positive aspects of their day. Purposely exploring gratitude has been linked to feeling happier and contented and as a positive bulwark against negative mind states.

There is also the [Calm Jars Activity Sheet](#), an activity to help children make their own mindfulness aid, something physical that allows them to focus and settle a busy mind when they feel stressed, anxious, sad or angry.