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Mindfulness – it starts with us teachers



School teachers often say to me 'we have to sort out Mindfulness for the kids—they are so stressed!' Yet these teachers are often themselves stressed, strung out and full to the brim. Now a teacher's workload isn't easily solved, but can we alleviate the pressures we add on ourselves? I'm talking about our thought patterns, our ruminations and our inner-critic—something that we all experience. Difficult times in our lives may be unavoidable but do we heap additional pressures on top of the inevitable?

'Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional' ~Haruki Murakami.
Mindfulness training can help.

So what really is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is best described as learning to live life more fully in the present moment. It's about building awareness and becoming 'the observer' of your own thoughts and feelings. When we train ourselves to watch our thoughts and feelings as they ebb and flow, we are no longer captured and submerged by them.

"Mindfulness is paying attention to what's happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness."

~ **Mindful Nation UK, All Party Parliamentary Group for Mindfulness**

However, it is a long-term practice—something we can train on and build over time.

What are the myths?

There is a lot of incorrect information written (and spoken) about Mindfulness, so here's a few to dispel straight away!

Myth number 1 – Mindfulness is about relaxing

Mindfulness is not about relaxing – it may be a welcome by-product, but that also may not be the experience and that is ok – nothing has gone wrong. It is more about 'being with' our experience just the way it is and adopting a friendly curiosity and non-judgemental approach.

Myth number 2 – Mindfulness is about clearing the mind of all thoughts

Mindfulness is actually about noticing thoughts and choosing whether to engage with them: allowing yourself to come back to a point of focus.

Myth number 3 – Mindfulness is passive

It is certainly not! Mindfulness is not about giving in or being weak and airy fairy, it's about learning to respond rather than react, to act skilfully yet compassionately.

Can you give me something practical I can do?

Yes! What would it be like to press pause, to breathe, to make space? In our ever-demanding world, there is a danger that we simply squeeze more in and do things faster.

By doing one thing after another after another, we can find that the energy from one task continues onto the next task, gathering steam as we charge through our day. Consequently, by the end of the day, we can be exhausted, scattered and strung out.

By allowing pauses, we can come back to where we are, check in with our bodies and our minds and allow the dust to settle.

Would you like to pause with me?

- If you'd like to pause with me right now then sit upright, with your back away from the back of the chair if you can.
- Feel the weight of your body coming down – feel your feet on the floor as they connect with the ground.
- Check in with your body – ask yourself how you are feeling.
- Gently, bring your attention to your breath down in your abdomen.
- Without trying to change the breath, allow the breath to breathe itself.
- Feel the full sensations of each breath.
- If your mind wanders, just gently bring it back to your breath in your abdomen.
- Focus on the inbreath for a few breaths.
- And now the outbreath.
- And pulling the two together, perhaps for 5 breaths, breathing with the full sensation of each inbreath and each outbreath.
- Widening your attention now and taking it out to your whole body as if your whole body was breathing.
- Breathing through the pores of your skin.
- Connecting again with the weight of your body as we come back.
- Taking a moment to check in, to just rest in awareness.

So why is looking after ourselves so important?

It's the old adage – 'put on your own oxygen mask before helping others'. By training in a restorative practice such as this, we can ultimately have more to give to pupils, friends and family.

'Compassion for others begins with kindness to ourselves' ~ Pema Chödrön •

Mindful Pathway offer Mindfulness training for staff and employees as well as the public – helping people find their own way to more happiness and balance in their lives. We are based in St Albans in Hertfordshire but travel nationwide for training.

More information can be found at www.mindfulpathway.co.uk