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Introduction to Mindfulness: SEND, Outcomes and the Local Offer

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Introduction to Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a form of mental training - for children, adolescents and adults - that can improve the effectiveness of the neural networks required for controlling and regulating attention and emotions. Mindfulness training makes it easier to step back from old patterns and habits of reactivity, building resilience to stress and maintaining emotional balance.

Mindfulness is an awareness that arises from opening up to and turning towards moment-by-moment experiences in an open-hearted, kindly, non-judgmental way [1]. It is developed through formal practices done sitting, moving or lying down and informal ones that can be integrated into everyday life.

Experiences are felt as being either positive, negative or neutral. As experiences arise and pass away, habitual tendencies or reactions are evoked. This includes:

- Grasping at the ‘positive’ experiences
- Moving away from or pushing away the ‘negative’ and
- Becoming ‘spaced out’ or bored in relation to the ‘neutral’ ones.

Research shows that regularly practicing mindfulness gives greater freedom to respond, rather than react, to make wiser choices in actions. This enhances mental health and well-being, improves attention and concentration and alleviates related difficulties.

Why would we use it?

There is good evidence from neuroscience and brain imaging studies with adults that regularly practicing mindfulness meditation can reliably and profoundly alter the structure and function of the brain, improving the quality of thought and feeling and bringing a wide range of benefits, including improved mental and physical health, wellbeing learning, cognition and social and emotional skills.

Research on mindfulness with school-age children has included all age ranges of children both with and without mental and physical health problems. Studies have taken place in school, clinical and community contexts. Training in mindfulness for young people is easy to implement, fits into a wide range of contexts, is enjoyed by both students and teachers, and does no harm.

The benefits include:

- Improved mental, emotional, social and physical health and wellbeing [2].
- Reduced stress [3], anxiety [4] and symptoms of depression or low mood.
- Reduced reactivity and improved ability to manage behaviour [5] and emotions [4].
- Improved sleep, calmness, self-esteem, self-awareness and empathy.
- The development of cognitive and performance skills and executive function [6], including to improve working memory [7], planning, problem-solving and reasoning skills.
- Greater attention [8], focus and ability to think in more innovative ways.

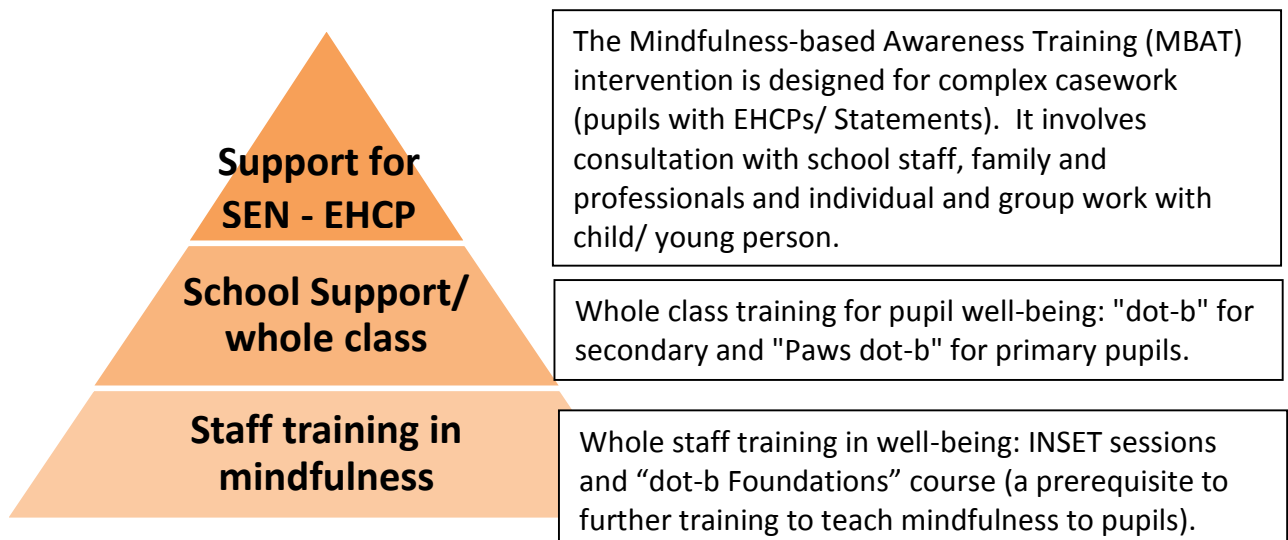
How do you practice mindfulness?

Mindfulness needs to be practiced regularly – even for 10 or 15 minutes a day - for the benefits to grow. Regular practice helps the underlying neural pathways to develop. Practice can be done during a certain time of day (formal practice) or as part of everyday life. The key is to:

- Start by making an intention to give it a go.
- Practice by focusing the attention on an ‘anchor’, something happening in the present moment. This could be the breathing or body sensations.
- Foster a kindly, encouraging approach that is kind, friendly and open.
- Notice the flow of thoughts, feelings and body sensations – this reduces being caught up in them.
- Make ‘wise’ choices – ones that arise from deeper values and which nourish us in the longer term.

Local Offer: Mindfulness Training

Mindfulness training is provided by HLT’s Educational Psychology Service. There are three levels of training/ intervention depending on the needs of the child/ young person, family and school setting. This follows the [Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework](#):



The MBAT intervention was developed through doctoral research and the Dot-b, Paws Dot-b and Dot-b Foundations programmes were developed by the Mindfulness in Schools Project.

Strategies for using mindfulness in the classroom

- **Mindfulness sitting practice**
 1. **Posture** - Place your feet flat on the floor. Keep your back upright.
 2. **Body**- Be aware of your body with an open and friendly attitude. Relax
 3. **Breathe** - Notice your breathing, the movement of your chest or tummy
 4. **Mind and feelings** - With friendly awareness, notice feelings and thoughts.
 5. **Whole experience** - Be aware of the whole experience of being present – the contact with the ground, movements of the breath, thoughts, feelings, sounds and the space around.
- **Practice a Bodyscan** – This helps to relax the body, thereby making it easier to develop awareness and attention. The aim is to focus on physical sensations. The children lie down and are invited to:
 - Focus on their breathing, developing kindly awareness.
 - Take this kindly attention to various parts of their body, noticing physical sensations as they arise. Starting with the feet and moving the attention around the body.
 - End the practice on the sensations of breathing – the movement of the tummy.
- **Ring the “Mindfulness” Bell or play some calming music** at times during the class, at your discretion, signal the transition from "doing" mode to "being" mode. This can be used to calm down a discussion that has become heated.
 - Invite all to pause and listen.
 - Notice the physical sensations in the body, such movements of the breath.
- **Take a “Breathing Space”/“Wait Time”** - this is a short awareness practice in which we:
 - Notice our body, feel the floor beneath our feet, and relax.
 - Notice our emotional state – and settled into a calmer and settled state.
 - Make a silent connection between ourselves and others.
- **Send ourselves friendly wishes** – to cultivate positive emotional states. It helps the children do develop kindly feelings towards themselves and each other:
 - Send yourselves well wishes, perhaps wishing "May I be well. May I be happy".
 - Send well wishes to others in the class, thinking up positive wishes for all of them.
 - Send well-wishes to yourselves and others, sharing well-wishes with all.
- **Use visual aids to encourage pausing and reflecting.** Encourage children to pause, from time to time, and become aware of their breathing, or the soles of their feet. This helps them to:
 - Develop their awareness of internal physical sensations (interoception)
 - Improve their ability to manage their feelings by noticing body sensations earlier when there is more time to respond rather than react.
 - Develop concentration skills - they repeatedly notice where their attention is and with kindness and gentleness, bring the attention back to the focus (e.g. movements of the breath).

Mindfulness to support better outcomes for pupils with SEN

Mindfulness can be part of the provision for pupils with SEN, including those with attentional difficulties, such as ADHD [9]. IT can also be adapted for those with ASD [10, 11], anxiety [12] and conduct disorder [5]. Here are some examples of fictional children with different needs.

Following the New Code of Practice (2015) [13], outcomes are be developed in consultation with school staff, family and other professionals working with a child. They need to be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART).

Outcome: To develop attention skills and reduce distractibility.

Background SEN: This child struggles to focus and pay attention. He is easily distracted, but motivated to try to focus on class. He has attentional difficulties and is going for an assessment for ADHD.

Steps towards the outcome	What needs to happen?	Who will support this?	When and how often will this happen?	Resources required (for example, programs)	How will I know the actions are helping?
To be able to develop attentional control and sustained attention.	Regular practice times for developing skills for re-focusing on body and breath.	LSA, class teacher, Senco, EP	This needs to happen daily, and after transition times. Individually and with the whole class.	Symbols for the mindfulness practices. Training for school staff to ensure it is working.	I will be able to pause and control my attention, so that I develop better focus over time.
To be able to develop kindly qualities to attention	Regular time to practice labelling body sensations – positive, negative, neutral.	As above. Also with class during carpet time and at transitions.	This needs to happen daily – particularly in the morning on arrival to school, to help settle for the day.	Pens, paper, staff member skills in leading a short mindfulness practice. Can be done in small group.	I will be able to notice difficult emotions and sooth them, leaving more space for learning.
To be able to reflect on levels of attention and monitor this.	Staff to support with monitoring levels of attention	LSA, class teacher, family.	Daily at the end of each session, morning and afternoon.	Monitoring sheet for different activities and a rating scale.	I will be able to identify what helps me to pay better attention and strategies to help myself.

Outcome: To be able to manage difficult feelings and improve relationships with peers.

Background SEN: This child has difficulties with emotional regulation, particularly with angry and upset feelings. He struggles to identify and express any emotions/ feelings and show empathy. He also can become upset with peers and lash out. When staff try to get him to reflect on his actions (including having hurt another pupil) he becomes even more upset. He needs time to calm down and support to reflect on and learn from behavior – a range of strategies can be used as well as those outlined:

Steps towards the outcome	What needs to happen?	Who will support this?	When and how often will this happen?	Resources required (for example, programs)	How will I know the actions are helping?
To be able to attend to body sensations – to notice feelings arising early.	Regular practice times for developing skills for attentional control	LSA, class teacher, Senco, EP	This needs to happen daily, and after transition times. Individually and with the whole class.	Symbols for the mindfulness practices. Training for school staff to ensure it is working.	I will be able to pause and control my attention, so that I develop better focus over time.
To be able to develop kindly qualities to myself (body sensations)	Regular time to notice body sensations (esp positive ones) and develop kindly feelings.	As above. Also with class during Circle Time. And with peer support.	Daily in morning on arrival to school, to help settle for the day. Weekly well-wishes letter to self and others.	Pens, paper, staff member skilled in the well-wishes practice. Can be done with class as a whole.	I will be able to notice difficult emotions and soothe them, leaving more space for learning.
To be able to use strategies to calm down after being upset.	Teaching and regular practice of calming strategies. Restorative approach.	LSA, EP – teaching Breathing Space to LSA.	Daily at set times. Before challenging time (e.g. before play time) and after any potential incidents.	Time and space to practice the Breathing Space. Reward system for using strategies. Link to rewards at home.	I will be able to adjust emotional levels to cultivate calmer states, including after being upset.

Outcome: To be able to manage anxiety in unfamiliar situations

Background SEN: This child has a diagnosis of ASD. He gets very anxious when there is a change to his routine and rocks and can start to push others if upset. He struggles to identify emotions/ feelings and express them appropriately. He can use a visual time table and has reading skills. He needs help predicting change and managing anxiety around this.

Steps towards the outcome	What needs to happen?	Who will support this?	When and how often will this happen?	Resources required (for example, programs)	How will I know the actions are helping?
To be able to direct attention to neutral part (soles of the feet).	Regular practice times for developing skills for attentional control	LSA, class teacher, Senco, EP	This needs to happen prior to any anticipated change.	Visual support, script for the Soles of the Feet practice. Training for school staff.	I will be able to pause and redirect attention when I need to regulate. Reduced levels of distress.
To be able to predict change	Change to be communicated in advance	LSA, Class Teacher, family	In advance as far as possible.	Visual timetable – written script for new activity.	I will be calmer during changes to my routine.

How to find out more

Contact Dr Bernadette Carelse (Educational Psychologist): bernadette.carelse@learningtrust.co.uk or visit the HLT [Services for Schools page on Mindfulness in Schools](#)

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