



Schools Tree Day – The Nature of Mindfulness – 2 minute activities – Secondary

Teacher preparation

Overarching learning goal: The aim of these activities is to create enhanced focus, emotional regulation, empathy and happiness through connection with nature. Students are given the opportunity to cultivate present moment awareness so that calm, considered and conscious choices can begin to replace impulsive, unconscious reactions. Finally students are given hands-on direct contact with the natural world.



Teacher background information:

The benefits of mindfulness

We are a culture increasingly becoming addicted to instant communication and ever-changing technologies. While technologies such as mobile phones bring wonderful opportunities, children are spending more and more time being passively engaged in these technologies rather than actively engaging in the world around them. This includes the natural world and our environment. There is growing concern about the lack of time young people spend in nature and the consequences of this disconnect.

The practices of mindfulness and meditation offer people of all ages an effective path to develop healthy responses to the chaotic world around them and often inside of them. The key benefit of meditation and mindfulness is developing self knowledge, or learning about what's



going on inside. This positively influences student wellbeing, emotional intelligence and resilience. Other benefits include improved concentration, sharpened focusing abilities and simply being calm and still.

It is important to clarify the differences between relaxation and mindfulness:

- **Relaxation.** Activities such as reading a book, eating an ice-cream or lying in the shade can be considered relaxation activities.
- **Mindfulness.** These same relaxation activities can become mindful activities by becoming more aware. Learning to observe the self and bringing attention fully to the present moment is key to mindful activities. Mindfulness requires practice (although some would argue that the same could be said of relaxation!)

Find out more by reading:

- [Benefits of spending time in nature fact sheet.](#)
- [The benefits of mindfulness Infographic](#)
- [Tips for getting your class outside](#)

Hot tips:

- Have a go at these practices and feel the benefits for yourself.
- These activities are presented as a 'script'. Read the script to your students, taking time to pause whenever you see "..."
- Where possible complete these activities outside in nature and encourage the whole school to take part during Schools Tree Day.
- When it comes to taking classes outside, support is key. For best results team up with fellow teachers and share ideas and materials.

Teaching sequence



Explain to students the purpose of mindfulness:

'Paying attention to what's going on right here, right now inside of us or outside of us' - Debra Burdick.

The ability to pay attention creates a mind that works better. A focused mind is what we need to be healthy, happy and to choose well in life. These activities are ways to practice alert attention, kindness and build a stronger mind.

Nature provides limitless pleasurable anchor points for our minds and always reminds us that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. This helps put things into perspective.

Use these practices as mindful preparation for focused attention in your classroom. You can complete these activities at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a lesson. You can complete 1 or all 5 activities with your students. Alternatively, complete one a day for a period of a week. Where possible complete these activities outside.

Activity 1. Mindful Standing

Script:

"Bring attention to your feet ... notice the space between them and finding the best space ... and place ... for your feet to be, to hold all of you ... so they feel like a strong base supporting your body ... just like the base of a young, strong tree ... with the roots reaching far down below the surface.

Let your feet be still ... and feel 'planted' to the floor.



Bringing your attention to your head now ... and letting it feel light ... just like a cloud ... floating over your body Imagine there is a breeze moving around you ... and with the feet anchored and still ... just letting the body gently sway to one side ... to the other side ... rocking forward ... and then tilting backward ... and just like a tree when the wind eases ... easing your body back to the centre letting your whole body settle and centre in perfect alignment over your feet ... letting your whole body return to stillness and strength."

Extra resource: Use the [The Nature of Mindfulness Guided Meditation 1](#) sound file to conduct this activity. Share it with your students so they can put it on their iPods and use it daily.

Activity 2. Mindful Stretching (Standing Practice)

Script:

"If you have a pet cat, dog, or even a bird, you will notice that they know how to care for their body by stretching.

Begin with 'finding your feet' ... create just enough space between them to feel stable and balanced. Bring attention to your hands.

Breathing in ... stretch your arms out to the front and open your hands wide ... just like a starfish ... breathing out ... letting go all through your fingers ... like a jellyfish.

Now, stretching your arms way up, above your head ... muscles tight, hands tight ... breathing out and letting go, as your arms return to your side ... just like the wings of a bird.

Bring attention to your shoulders now ... breathing in and letting them rise up ... feeling like a penguin with no neck! ... Breathing out and letting them sink back down ... breathing in ... and rolling them up ... and breathing out ...and letting them sink back down.



With your head floating and feet anchored ... breathing in ... swing your arms around to one side for a gentle twist and breathing out ... return to the centre ... now to the other side ... breathing in ... swing your arms to the other side ... breathing out ... returning to the centre.

Finish with a shake ... through legs ... arms and body.

Pause ... to notice how you are feeling now."

Activity 3. Mindful Breathing (Standing or Sitting Practice)

Script:

"Bring awareness to your body ... find your alignment with a strong, straight spine, feeling stable and settled, either seated in the chair or standing on the floor.

Bring awareness to the hands ... letting all your fingers lightly touch in the space in front of your heart. Imagine your fingers are just like the quills of a sea anemone ... opening and closing through the water. As you breath in ... let your fingers part and slowly, smoothly open with the breath ... as you gently let a big wave of breath roll up through you ... opening your hands with this wave ... breathing out ... letting your hands smoothly, softly return to touch with the out breath, as the wave of the breath rolls out Moving your hands fluidly and smoothly with the breath ... flowing in and out ... back and forth. Opening your hands to the count of four... (pause for 2) ... Closing (4) ... Pausing (2) ... Opening (4)... Pausing (2) ... Closing (4) ... Pause (2). Now ... just let your breath return to its own natural rhythm.

Pause to notice sensations and feelings in your body in this moment."

Activity 4. Mindful Movement (Standing)

Synchronize this activity with music. Play the video clip below or select your own music to use. (e.g [Saint-Saens' Aquarium](#), [Ken Davis' Early Morning in the Rain Forest](#), etc.)



[Vivaldi's Four Seasons](https://vimeo.com/110472348) (<https://vimeo.com/110472348>)

Script:

"Bring awareness to the feet ... let the feet settle in the space beneath you.

Pause to notice the beat and rhythm of the music. Feel it move through your body.

Imagining an animal that moves slowly and gracefully, like a giraffe, a koala, or an elephant ... and let your body move in this way... breathing in and lifting one foot ... breathing out and lowering it to the floor. Breathing in and lifting the other foot ... breathing out and lowering it to the floor. Then moving your hips with your legs ... tipping to one side ... tipping to the other. Letting the movement flow to your hands and arms now ... as they rise and fall with the feet. As if you are a strong, gracious animal ... moving in perfect synchronicity with the music (repeat movement silently for 30 seconds ... then fade the volume of music) ... as the music fades ... let the movement through your body slow down ... slowing down ... until your return to stillness.

Pause ... to notice how you are feeling now."

Activity 5. Mindful Sitting (at Desk)

Script:

"Take up your position stand in front of your chair.

Bring awareness to your feet ... placing them wider than your hips and lining your body up in front of your chair ... feeling the chair touching the back of your knees. Imagine that your head is light ... like a cloud



floating over your body. With every out breath, let that feeling of lightness spread ... down your neck, through your shoulders and down your arms ... the lightness flowing down your spine and into your chest ... so your whole upper body feels light. Notice the strength below ... through your feet, legs, hips and buttocks. Using the strength in these muscles, slowly, gracefully lower yourself down into your seat ... just like a bird landing on a branch or on the water. Pausing in your chair ... lining up your feet under your knees ... settling your back against the chair ... and letting your head align over your body ...

Pause to notice sensations and feelings in your body now."

Reflection

Conduct a class discuss about how students felt before, during and after the activities.

- Did their attention wander?
- Did they feel a certain way?
- Did they feel comfortable?

Extension

Encourage and remind students to practice these activities each day, if possible. Discuss some techniques they might use to ensure they commit to daily practice. Part of this conversation may include suggestions for students to ensure they get daily nature time.