



The Nature of Mindfulness – 5 minute activities – Primary

Teacher Preparation

Overarching learning goals:

The aim of these 5 minute activities is to amplify sensory connection in the present moment for students. Teachers are provided with tools to support children to be curious, attentive and delighted in being present in the fullness of each moment.

Teacher's background information:

Video: Mindfulness in Schools: Richard Burnett (https://youtu.be/6mlk6xD_xAQ)

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 well being, 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 for relaxation!)

Find out more by reading:

- [Benefits of Spending Time in Nature Factsheet](#)
- [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.
- Where possible complete these activities outside in nature.
- 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

5 Minute Activities: Building Sensory Awareness

As a prelude to these activities, open a discussion with students: what are the five senses of the human body? What does each sense enable us to do? Explain that if we do not pause to notice what we are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching, we do not really know what we are doing. When we pause and carefully notice with our senses, clear, strong messages can flow to our brains. These messages help our brains become smarter and work better.

Whenever possible, take students outside to a green space and discuss with them how nature gives us lots of opportunities to notice, focus well, and grow happy, healthy minds. Explain to students that when we pause and notice carefully, we often have totally new experiences that make us feel curious. Just like discovering something for the first time!

Ask students: what does it feel like to be outside? How does your body feel with no walls around you, no roof over your head, no heating or air conditioner, no lights, no furniture and no carpet? Notice the feelings in your brain, in your body and in your heart as you sit in this space outside - how do you feel?

Opportunities for reflection and feedback after each activity:

- Warmly invite students to share what they noticed and discovered from the experience.
- To maximise learning opportunities for students and to personalise their experiences, it is valuable to discuss with students how they feel before, during and after the activities. It is also wonderful to acknowledge personal insights and discoveries.
- Did their attention wander?
- How would they describe their feelings?
- Did they feel a sense of joy or happiness?
- Would the activity feel different if it was conducted inside the classroom?

Time for feedback and reflection serves a strong purpose of reinforcing learning and memory, and also builds social connection, enhances

speaking and listening skills, and develops empathy.

Activity 1. Touch: Noticing the Self ... Noticing Nature

Resources:

Source a range of local natural specimens. These can include easily found pieces from the garden or school grounds: herbs, vegetables, leaves, sticks, bark from trees/shrubs, seed pods, long stemmed grasses, etc. Divide specimens into mixed groups. Create enough 'specimen batches' to allow students to explore sensing in groups of five and place them on a number of platters or trays.

Preparation:

Choose a comfortable space outside to enjoy these practices with students.

Introduction:

Explain to students that this activity is about 'waking up our skin' to notice how things feel on our hands and other parts of our body. Remind students that this is a quiet practice so that their hands can take in lots of information. Thank them for not talking until they are invited to share what they noticed at the end.

Procedure:

Step 1. Invite students to sit on the grass outside. Ask them to begin noticing their body: remind them that we do not just 'feel' with our hands, we can feel with our whole body. Ask if their bodies feel light or heavy on the ground? What does the grass feel like underneath them? Can they feel the grass through their clothes? Does the grass feel soft or hard? Do they feel comfortable?



Step 2. Ask students to choose something from the tray/platter that feels like their skin (perhaps bark or a leaf). Then ask them to close their eyes and notice carefully as they touch their own skin (on their hand/arm/face or leg) and then touch the natural specimen. What is the difference between the two?

Step 3. Ask students to choose something from the tray/platter that might feel like their hair. Then ask them to close their eyes and notice carefully as they touch their own hair (on their head or even on their eyebrows!) and then the natural specimen. What is the difference between the two?

Step 4. Acknowledge as much as possible the great job that the students are doing. Ask students to notice their body becoming quiet and still, so that they can notice the air around them with their eyes closed. Can they notice the touch of cold, cool or warm air? Can they notice that the air is moving?

Step 5. Ask students to notice how they feel inside now and bring their attention to the breath and to the touch of the air moving through their nose.

Nature of Mindfulness: The Sense of Touch

(<https://soundcloud.com/cool-australia/track-2-cool-aust>)

How to use this audio recording: Teachers may listen to the audio in preparation for this activity, as it provides a model for how they can run it themselves. Alternatively, teachers may simply play the recording directly to students if they prefer (audio equipment required).

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections.

Activity 2. Sight



Resources:

Source hula hoops (one for approximately 5 students) and a wooden popsicle stick per child. Locate an area outside that provides access to both grass and a garden bed.

Preparation:

Have a look around the school grounds beforehand for the optimal location for this activity. Enjoy immersing yourself in this activity before sharing it with the students.

Introduction:

Explain to students that this activity is about 'opening up our eyes' to discover the world beneath our feet. When we pause and truly notice we can be amazed at the tiny things that we might normally miss. Remind students that this is a quiet practice so that their eyes can take in lots of information. Thank them for not talking until they are invited to share what they noticed at the end.

Procedure:

Step 1. Divide students into groups (4 - 5 students per group) and give each group a hula hoop.

Step 2. Place each hula hoop on the edge of a garden bed: one third over the soil and two thirds over the grass.

Step 3. Ask students to stand two steps back from the hula hoop and pause. Ask them what they notice as they stand and look down into the space inside the hula hoop.

Step 4. Now, ask students to move to the edge of the hoop and notice what they can see as they look down at the ground inside the hula hoop.



Step 5. Invite students to quietly sit down on the grass around the edge of the hoop, either kneeling or with legs crossed.

Step 6. Invite students to lean forward and carefully look at all the tiny details they notice on the grass and soil. Explain that they can gently use the popsicle sticks to move little blades of grass, pebbles and clumps of soil to see what is underneath.

Step 7. Ask students to pause and reflect. How are they feeling after doing this activity?

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections.

Activity 3. Sound

Resources:

Source a range of simple instruments from the school to provide basic sounds, such as recorders, drums, rainsticks, beat sticks, etc.

Preparation:

Choose a suitable location outside.

Introduction:

Explain to students that this activity is about 'waking up our ears' to listen more clearly and carefully. It is about noticing how we can make all kinds of sounds and noticing the different sounds of nature. Remind students that this is a quiet practice so that their ears can take in lots of information. Thank them for not talking until they are invited to share what they noticed at the end.

Procedure:



Step 1. Ask students to sit in a circle and pause for a moment, with their eyes closed, to just notice what sounds they can hear.

Step 2. Invite one student to make a sound with a recorder or flute for a few moments, as the rest of the group listens with their eyes closed. Pause to notice if there are any sounds like it in nature (e.g. birds).

Step 3. Invite another student to make a different sound, with a rain stick or clap sticks, as the rest of the group listens with their eyes closed. Pause to notice if there are any sounds like it in nature (e.g. the wind moving leaves or branches).

Step 4. Now invite all the students to softly and slowly make the sound of humming as they breathe out for a few moments. Pause to notice if there are any sounds like it in nature (e.g. insects).

Step 5. Acknowledge the great job that students are doing with noticing sounds.

Step 6. Finally, invite students to bring their noticing home to their own bodies. Ask them to notice the sound of their own breathing as it moves in and out through their nose.

Step 7. Ask students to pause and reflect. How do they feel after doing this activity?

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections.

Activity 4. Smell: Noticing Natural and Man-made Smells

Resources:

Source a range of fresh and dried specimens from nature with a scent, such as flowers, herbs, leaves and dried spices. Also source a range of man-made liquids, such as vanilla extract, hand wash, soap, shoe

polish, etc. Wipe these onto cotton balls. Place these items on trays or platters.

Preparation:

Locate a suitable place for this activity outside, and check out any potential problems with student allergies.

Introduction:

Explain to students that this activity is about 'waking up our noses' to smell more clearly and carefully. During this activity we will try to notice the difference between natural and man-made smells, and how they make us feel. Remind students that this is a quiet practice so that their noses can take in lots of information. Thank them for not talking until they are invited to share what they noticed at the end.

Procedure:

Step 1. Arrange platters of specimens with natural objects on one side and man-made doused cotton balls on the other.

Step 2. Invite students to sit on the grass, if possible. Ask them to notice what they can smell around them, both from nature (e.g. flowers, soil, etc) and from human items/activity (e.g. paint, sprays, car fumes, etc). Ask them to notice what they like to smell and what they do not like to smell.

Step 3. Invite students to choose a man-made smell on a cotton ball. Ask them to notice what they like or do not like; to notice if the smell is strong or mild, and to even notice if a smell reminds them of a memory.

Step 4. Now, invite students to notice a dried specimen from nature (e.g. a spice). Ask them to notice what they like or do not like; to notice if the smell is strong or mild, and to even notice if a smell reminds them of a memory.



Step 5. Finally, invite students to choose a fresh specimen from nature (herbs, flowers, etc.). Ask them to notice what they like or do not like; to notice if the smell is strong or mild, and to even notice if a smell reminds them of a memory.

Step 6. Ask students to look at the things that they smelt and reflect on what they noticed and what they experienced.

Step 7. Ask students to pause and reflect. How do they feel after doing this activity?

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections.

Activity 5. Taste: Noticing Natural and Man-made Tastes

Resources:

Select a range of food for students to taste, including salty, sweet, sour and bitter tasting foods. Man-made foods could include potato/corn chips, bread, biscuits or lollies (depending on allergy conditions of children). Also source a range of natural food, including fruits and vegetables such as apples, plums, strawberries, pineapple, lemon, tomatoes, cucumbers and celery, as well as fresh herbs such as mint, parsley and coriander. If possible, try and locate some Indigenous bush tucker fruit for the students to try! Place these items on trays or platters.

Preparation:

Gather and organise the food the night before and check out any potential problems with student allergies.

Introduction:

Explain to students that this activity is about 'waking up our tongues' in

order to taste more clearly and carefully. During this activity, ask students to take notice of the difference between natural and man-made tastes and how they make us feel. Remind students that this is a quiet practice so that their mouths can take in lots of information. Thank them for not talking until they are invited to share what they noticed at the end.

Procedure:

Step 1. Arrange platters with food divided up into four groups: man-made, vegetables, fruits and herbs.

Step 2. Settle students in an appropriate outdoor space to sit around platters.

Step 3. Invite students to choose a man-made food. Have them start by carefully looking at the food, noticing colour, shape, etc. Next, ask them to feel the food with their fingers, and sense if it is soft, hard, moist, dry or sticky. Then ask students to smell the food (with their eyes closed to help them notice more carefully). Finally, the food can be put on the middle of their tongue (without biting immediately). Students can taste the food and how it feels in their mouth. They can move the food to their teeth and bite it, noticing the sound, touch and taste, and all the other feelings around their mouth.

Step 4. Now invite the students to observe the vegetables and choose one. Encourage them to explore the differences, following the same steps as above. Ask them to notice how different it feels to taste something natural.

Step 5. For the third round, repeat the steps above with a choice of fruit.

Step 6. For the fourth round, repeat the steps above with a choice of herbs.

Step 7. Ask students if they have ever spent so long noticing a small



bit of food, and what new discoveries they made.

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections.

Reflection

Conduct a class discussion about how students felt before, during and after each of the activities.

- What did they think of the activities? Which aspects did they enjoy or not enjoy? Why?
- Have they noticed any changes within themselves, in others or in the class as a whole?

Extension

- Encourage older children to keep a mindfulness journal so they can record their feelings, observations and drawings; noting any changes they have observed in themselves, in others or in the class as a whole. Alternatively, younger children could conduct one-on-one interviews with each other to reflect on how they feel and any changes they may have observed in themselves and in each other.
- Encourage students to practice a quiet state of focused attention using their senses each day. Share ways for children to make sure they keep the practice going and remind them to get a 'daily dose' of nature time!