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These days, the answer to the question, “Should we prioritize academics or social-emotional learning in schools?” is a firm, “Yes to both.” Academic skills are of course essential for children’s lifelong success. But without intentional social-emotional development, students may not learn how to process their emotions and connect with others in healthy ways. That’s where mindfulness can come in.

If you’re not sure exactly what mindfulness is, here’s a quick recap. Mindfulness involves both an awareness and an acceptance of both the world around us and our internal experiences.[3] Mindful people tend to focus more on the present instead of ruminating on the past or future, and they cultivate a curiosity towards their thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations.

Let’s go over some of the benefits of mindfulness and how it relates to social-emotional learning (SEL). Then, we’ll share 51 tips and activities for teaching elementary students how to practice mindfulness.

## Why Mindfulness? Consider the Social-Emotional Benefits

Why teach mindfulness in our schools? The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has linked mindfulness to [two core social-emotional skills](#): self-regulation and self-awareness. These skills teach students not only how to recognize their thoughts, emotions, and actions, but also how to react in positive ways.

According to brain imaging research, practicing mindfulness can alter brain structure in a way that can improve a student’s reaction to stress.[1] It thickens the cerebral cortex, which is responsible for perception and reasoning, and increases blood flow in the brain.[2] And not only does mindfulness training reduce stress levels, it can also help alleviate anxiety or depression.[4,5]

A final reason to try mindfulness in your classroom? It can be especially helpful for children with learning disabilities, particularly attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). One study found that children with learning disabilities who received mindfulness training earned better grades and had fewer behavioral issues compared to before they started the program.[6] Children in special education programs better connected with their peers after mindfulness training.[7]

Overall, mindfulness has something to offer for every child in your class. It can relieve student stress, reduce bullying rates, and help children with learning disabilities or special needs develop stronger SEL skills. If you haven’t yet tried mindfulness activities with your class, now may be the time to see just how much they can benefit your students.

## 29 Individual Activities for Teaching Mindfulness to Children

The best way to show students how to be mindful is to practice it in class. These 51 engaging mindfulness activities can help your students develop self-awareness and self-regulation.

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1. [Heartbeat Exercise](#): As your students monitor their heartbeat and breathing after exercise, they'll learn to become mindful of how their body feels.



2. [Pinwheel Breathing](#): This exercise helps students practice deep breaths by using a pinwheel to show them how.
3. [Muscle Relaxation](#): How often are we truly mindful of the muscles in our body? With this activity, children can start practicing mindfulness around how they tense or relax their muscles.
4. [Five Senses Exercise](#): Did you know that you can use all five of your senses while being mindful? This activity can show you how!
5. [The Present Moment Worksheet](#): This free mindfulness worksheet teaches young students all about what it means to be present.
6. [Making Mindful Observations](#): Add a little social-emotional learning to your science lessons by teaching students to make mindful observations.
7. [Teaching STOP Mindfulness](#): Teach kids the core components of mindfulness through the acronym STOP: Stop, Take a breath, Observe, and Proceed.
8. [Breathing Boards](#): Have your students follow the line with their fingers as they take calm, measured breaths.
9. [Mindful Glitter Jar](#): This adorable craft can give students a visual example of how their thoughts settle down after practicing mindfulness.
10. [Mindful Eating](#): What student doesn't love a lesson that involves snacks? With this mindfulness exercise, students can learn to be more aware of what they're eating.

11. [Smiling Minds App](#): Try out this free mindfulness app for kids with your students to practice short meditations and other exercises.
12. [Quiet Time](#): Adding a little quiet time to your classroom schedule can give students room to de-stress and focus on the present.
13. [Nature Walk](#): Embark on an outdoor walk that will encourage your students to engage all of their five senses in observation.
14. [Rainbow Bubble Breathing Story](#): For younger students, this “story” about a rainbow bubble can be a great visual for practicing controlled breathing.
15. [Positive Affirmations](#): Check out this list of 125 positive mantras your students can use while meditating or reflecting on their strengths.
16. [Build-a-Face Story Stones](#): This activity can help students learn to observe and recognize different emotions.
17. [Blindfolded Taste Test](#): Taste is a powerful sensation, and this activity can be especially helpful for teaching students to analyze different sensations.
18. [Being Mindful of Anger](#): Anger can be difficult for kids to process and even tougher for them to react to in a healthy way. Use this quick meditation script to help students calm down when they feel overwhelmed.
19. [Mindful Journaling Prompts](#): Try some of these journaling prompts with older students to help them reflect on internal and external experiences.
20. [Emotion Octopus Craft](#): Learning about our emotions has never looked so adorable! Let each child put together an emotion octopus, then have a class discussion on feelings.
21. [Today I Feel...](#): Hang this Muppet-themed chart in your classroom and teach students how to recognize the emotions they feel each day.
22. [Square Breaths](#): Square breathing is a simple yet effective way to help students calm down when they’re feeling overwhelmed.
23. [Stop and Think Worksheet](#): Every action we do can cause a positive or negative reaction in others. Pass this worksheet out to your students, then discuss why it matters to consider others’ reactions.
24. [Raisin Exercise](#): Hand out a raisin to each of your students, then practice observing it using each of the five senses. Berkeley’s Greater Good Science Center recommends doing this exercise multiple times to get the full effect, but even once can be a helpful experience for your students.
25. [Draw Your Breath](#): This art exercise can help students gain self-awareness of their breath and use that knowledge to move towards relaxation.

26. [Melt or Freeze?](#): Mindfulness is a great way to help students manage their impulses. This activity helps students sort possible actions into impulsive (“melt”) and responsible (“freeze”).

27. [Tuning into Different Moods](#): If we’re overwhelmed or distracted, it can be hard to remember to stay mindful of our emotions. This exercise requires just a few minutes as you teach students to observe what they’re feeling in the moment.

28. [Emotions Bottles](#): While we definitely don’t want students to “bottle up” their feelings, this activity uses the Pixar movie *Inside Out* to help children name and claim their emotions.

29. [Mindful Coloring](#): Did you know that coloring is a great way to practice mindfulness for both children and adults?[8] Use these printable coloring pages for a quiet activity to relax and focus on the present.

## 21 Group Activities for Teaching Mindfulness to Children

Group mindfulness activities can help children practice what they have learned and discuss what it means to be grounded in the present. These 21 activities—including classroom ideas as well as home activities for families—are a great place to start.

30. [Yoga for Kids](#): Check out this video of mindfulness exercises that will help elementary students practice yoga through age-appropriate and imaginative games.

### Squish the Fish | Yoga for Kids! A Cosmic Kids Yoga Adventure



31. [Rainbow Walk](#): Go on a walk with your students and encourage them to find something red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet as a quick way to practice mindfulness.

32. [Mindful Quote Jar](#): This DIY craft (#3 on the list) will help you make a jar full of mindfulness quotes so you can share little insights with your students every day.

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33. [Mindfulness Bingo](#): Give your students the challenge of completing as many activities as possible on the mindfulness bingo sheet. Then, hold a class discussion on how many they did and how the mindfulness activities made them feel.
34. [Red Light, Green Light](#): This game is a classic P.E. staple, but did you know that you can use it to teach observation—a core part of mindfulness?
35. [What Would You Do?](#): Use this worksheet to help children become more aware of their actions and emotions in real-life situations.
36. [Root to Rise Activity](#): This activity combines yoga and meditation to help students mindfully practice self-confidence and peace.
37. [Assessing vs. Judging Others](#): Do you know the difference between observing and judging another person? Teach your students how to assess others mindfully with this social-emotional learning activity.
38. [Freeze Dance Mindfulness](#): Have a freeze dance party with your class as a fun way to engage and teach your students about mindfulness.
39. [Body Scan](#): Try this quick body scan meditation as a class to focus on emotions and physical sensations.
40. [Gift of You](#): This festive activity is a great way to teach mindfulness around the holidays.
41. [What Are You Doing? Activity](#): This activity teaches students both how to listen mindfully and pay better attention to their actions.
42. [Lots of Feelings](#): Share this take-home activity with families so they can help children practice recognizing and processing emotions.
43. [Read a Book About Mindfulness](#): Put together a story-time read aloud with this list of 11 best mindfulness books for young learners from Read Brightly.
44. [Who Am I? Game](#): This classic game encourages students to pay attention and make observations, which can be helpful for developing mindfulness.
45. [Mindful or Unmindful? Worksheet](#): To make sure your students grasp what mindfulness is and is not, fill out this worksheet as a class.
46. [Mindful Listening](#): Listening is an essential part of mindfulness. Use this resource to show your students how to become mindful listeners in school and elsewhere.
47. [Guided Meditation](#): Demonstrating how to meditate to your little learners can be tough. With this guided meditation designed for children, you can help them learn how.

## Friendly Wishes (Peace Out: Guided Meditation for Kids) | Cosmic Kids



48. [Mindfulness Safari](#): With this mindfulness safari, you can learn to pay attention to the world around you from the comfort of your schoolyard.
49. [What Mood Are You Generating in Others?:](#) Using this lesson plan as a guide, discuss with your students how everyday actions affect their classmates and what they can do to put themselves in another person's shoes.
50. [Mindfulness Scavenger Hunt](#): As students check off each box in this modified scavenger hunt, they will get closer and closer to practicing mindfulness.
51. [Mindful Gratitude Exercise](#): When students learn to be mindful of what they're thankful for, they can find greater contentment in their lives.

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## **12 CHILDREN'S BOOKS AND ACTIVITY GUIDES TO CELEBRATE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH WITH YOUNG LEARNERS**

May is Mental Health Awareness Month! Stories can mirror a child's experience to let them know they are not alone and offer them a window



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