Instructional Sample:

**Mindful Breathing**

K-3, Physical and Health Education

# Rationale

Research on the effectiveness of mindfulness interventions has grown substantially in the past 15 years, moving from clinical/medical settings to population-based application at the school level.

For students, training in mindfulness practice has demonstrated improvements in working memory, attention, academic skills, social skills, emotional regulation, and self-esteem, as well as self-reported improvements in mood and decreases in anxiety, stress, and fatigue.

This approach can be used at the start or end of class, or between activities; it can also be used during a transition time, to help students calm and prepare themselves for a reflective activity after physical activity.

**Big Ideas:**

* Our physical, emotional, and mental health are interconnected
* Adopting healthy personal practices and safety strategies protects ourselves and others.

**Curricular Competency:**

* Identify and apply strategies that promote mental well-being

**Content:**

* Practices that promote health and well-being

**Core Competencies:**

* Personal Awareness and Responsibility – Well-being

**First Peoples Principles of Learning:**

* Learning involves patience and time.

# Description

## Getting ready: Finding a relaxed position

Ask students to sit with you in a circle on a flat surface, facing toward the centre, with their legs crossed and hands clasped and resting in their lap. If there is enough space, you can ask the students to lie down.

## Group activity: Mindful breathing

Tell the students you are going to teach them a special way of breathing that can help them relax when they are upset or stressed. Explain the deep breathing technique by saying, “We are going to breathe in and out slowly and evenly. On the first count we breathe in [model the ‘in’ breath], and on the second count we breathe out [model the ‘out’ breath]. Let’s all try the even breathing now.”

Let the students try three sets of evenly spaced in-and-out breathing.

At the end of the three sets, ask the students to raise their hands if they feel more relaxed.

Explain to students that even breathing can calm them down when they are stressed or angry, and that no one else will even know what they are doing. Tell them the deep breathing technique is like having their own first aid kit for regaining calm and feeling in control. Continue the exercise until all students have been quiet and relaxed for a few minutes.

When the group begins to stir, ask everyone to follow you by taking a deep breath in, letting it out, standing up, and stretching.

Ask the students what it was like to just think about their breathing for a few moments – how did it make them feel?

Invite students to try the breathing exercise at home. Brainstorm with them about good times to use it (e.g., before they go to sleep) and ask them to report back about how it worked. Remind the students that they can use deep breathing any time they need to calm down or de-stress. Remind students to breathe out as slowly as they breathe in. Breathing in deeply without relaxed, slow exhalation can lead to dizziness or hyperventilation.

## Follow-up: Application

A few days later, ask the students to share their experiences of using the breathing exercise at home. Did it work? If not, ask them to think about some of the reasons why it might not have worked. Were they distracted by others? Were they unable to find a quiet spot to do it? Did they repeat their deep breath in and slow exhalation?

Ask the students to reflect again on other instances when the breathing exercise might help to relax them or calm them down, and have them commit to trying it again.

# Resources

## Mindfulness for K-3

* [Kids have Stress Too!Activities for Classrooms Grades 1-3](https://psychologyfoundation.org/Public/Resources/Public/Resources/Resources.aspx?hkey=dd3ae1e1-877b-4eb4-a69c-06552878dd7f)
* The [MindUP™ program](http://www.selresources.com/sel/mindfulness-training-program-for-elementary-school-students-the-mindup-program/) is used in [many BC schools](http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/).
* The following are just a few of the many mindfulness programs in schools:
	+ [Inner Kids Program](http://susankaisergreenland.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (Pre-K-8)
	+ [Inner Resilience Program](http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/)(K-8, adults)
	+ [Mindful Schools](http://mindfulschools.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (K-12)
	+ [Still Quiet Place](http://stillquietplace.com/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)(Pre-K-12, adults)
	+ [Wellness Works in Schools™](http://wellnessworksinschools.com/) (Ages 3-18 years)

## Social emotional learning for K-3

* [Psychology Association of Canada](https://psychologyfoundation.org/Public/Resources/Resources.aspx?WebsiteKey=7ec8b7ce-729b-4aff-acd8-2f6b59cd21ab&hkey=dd3ae1e1-877b-4eb4-a69c-06552878dd7f&New_ContentCollectionOrganizerCommon=2#New_ContentCollectionOrganizerCommon)
* [Heart Mind Online](http://heartmindonline.org/resources?search_api_views_fulltext=&field_audience=All&field_resource_type=All&field_developmental_age=26&field_format=All&field_themes=All&sort_by=created)
* [Healthy Schools BC](http://healthyschoolsbc.ca/key-focus-areas/comprehensive-school-health/)
* [SEL Resource Finder](http://www.selresources.com/sel-resources/)

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# Additional tips and information for teachers

* The concept of “mental health” is often confused with “mental illness.” The Physical and Health Education curriculum focus on “mental well-being” recognizes that everyone falls somewhere on a continuum between optimal mental health and poor mental health, independent of the presence or absence of a mental illness.[[1]](#footnote-1) From this perspective, classroom-based and whole-school strategies can be geared to enhancing the positive mental health and well-being of *all* students, including those with and without identified mental health challenges.
* Teachers have an important role to play in fostering the mental well-being of their students, though they do not require specialized or expert knowledge to do so (i.e., they are not expected to play the role of psychologist or counsellor). Teachers may understand their role to include, as a guide:
	+ supporting students to understand how to foster and maintain positive mental health and well-being, and thereby enhance their readiness to learn
	+ creating a welcoming and safe classroom/school environment
	+ highlighting things that enhance both physical and mental well-being, such as adequate sleep, physical activity, healthy eating, and stress management techniques
	+ helping students recognize the signs of common mental health concerns
	+ guiding students to trustworthy information and resources related to mental health
	+ supporting students to know how to seek assistance when needed
	+ challenging common stigmas related to mental health
* There are a number of simple, everyday practices that teachers can use to supplement their instructional approaches to mental well-being. These include:
	+ increasing opportunities for physical activity
	+ taking students outside, even for a short time, to help them to restore readiness to learn
	+ leading a circle check-in, where all students have a chance to voice their perspective
	+ intentionally strengthening their relationships with students through personal conversations
* For students who are experiencing a problem related to their mental health, sources of support include:
	+ talking to a school counsellor
	+ Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868 ([KidsHelpPhone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca))
	+ [Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre](http://keltymentalhealth.ca)
* Teachers are encouraged to think about their own mental well-being, and what strategies may be required to support it. A number of helpful health and wellness resources can be found on the [BC Teachers’ Federation website](https://bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=37000).
1. Viewed from the perspective that “mental health” and “mental illness” are two separate but related concepts, someone could have optimal mental health (feeling good about and functioning well in life) while experiencing a mental illness. Conversely, someone without a mental illness could have poor mental health. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)