

Section I

Teaching Mindful Awareness

Mindful awareness training is a **unique subject that is also uniquely subjective**. Many students are not used to this kind of experiential learning and exploration in school. Because of this, and because we are asking them to investigate and observe how their minds, bodies and emotions work, mindful awareness training can sometimes be challenging, and even at times uncomfortable for some.

Guiding children and young people in an exploration of the human condition takes great sensitivity and understanding. There is no 'one size fits all' approach and it is important to provide activities and practices that are both developmentally appropriate *and* engaging.



1.

Mindful Awareness in the Early Years Classroom (3-6 year olds)

In this chapter we provide you with:

Awareness Building Activities	Activities
Establishing Breath Awareness	Seeing Breathing Watch the Wind!
Energizing Activities	Tickling the Sky Clap and Connect!
Calming Activities	Pebble Practice Breath Buddy
Reflecting Activity	Glitter Mind Jar
Seasoning Activities	Jump or Run! Slow It Down Seashell Breathing Mmm, Nice!
Classroom Resource	Calm Corners
Conflict Resolution	Peace Begins with Me
Teacher Practices	Clarifying Intentions Relax, Release, Return Pause, Reflect, Plan

Working With This Age Group

'Early Years' is defined in different ways around the world and here we are using it to signify the 3-6 year age span.

The Early Years (EYs) are a precious and precocious time, full of wonder and curiosity. Oftentimes, children at this age are already present in the moment and full of questions about the world around them. They are natural seekers, love to explore, and are especially sensitive to the emotional weather of the classroom. It is critical that teachers are walking their talk when teaching mindfulness to 3-6 year olds. The most effective way to bring mindfulness to this age group is for the adults around them to be embodying it. Teachers practising mindfulness themselves is the essential foundation that will help young children develop mind-body awareness whilst learning the language of how to express their oftentimes strong and varying emotions in a safe and supportive atmosphere. Whether children are feeling frustration, anger or excitement, educators can be at the ready to help them deal with these powerful emotional experiences through mindful awareness.

Developmentally, this age group learns best through play, music and connecting with nature. 'Learning by doing' is key. They enjoy repeating activities and hearing things over and over again. Bringing mindfulness into an EYs classroom is ultimately about planting seeds of awareness in children as they begin to build up a toolkit that will help them explore their experiences with curiosity and kindness.

Awareness-Building Activities

In this chapter we unpack some activities that you can use to help begin to isolate and integrate the senses, and in Chapter 2 we explore using the full range of senses as the main gateway to building awareness. The overall intention here is to share experiential exercises that are responsive, useful and practical. **Teaching mindfully** is about 'reading the field' – sensing the mood of the classroom and applying what is needed in any given moment. You might feel that an energizing, fun activity will be most helpful or you may turn towards more calming and soothing practices, depending on the mood and feel of the class. These practices can help build up that mental and emotional toolkit, allowing your students to see that mindfulness can be useful in times of excitement as well as in times of sadness or anger.

As mentioned in the Introduction, we always start with ourselves, with **Being Mindful**, so let's now take a few moments to check in with our personal motivations and intentions:

Teacher Reflection: Clarifying Intentions



- First take some moments to ground yourself.
- Perhaps taking a few conscious breaths; connecting with the body; noticing the sensations of sitting; the movement of breath in the body; or the sounds around you ...

- What is motivating you to try this with your students?
- What is your intention?
- Stay curious for a moment longer and see if anything else, perhaps a deeper, underlying motivation arises ...
- Make a note of what came up for you.

The question 'Why am I doing this?' is an important one to keep in mind throughout this journey. Try to revisit this brief reflection from time to time and before guiding an exercise or practice.

Getting Started

The following activities are designed to be foundational in building up a mindful classroom culture. You can also **'season the day'** with these practices, sprinkling moments of calm and connection in the classroom whenever helpful. After the introductory Breath Awareness Practice, the activities are labelled as Energizing, Calming or Reflecting, and you can mix and match them as you wish to suit the needs of your classroom and the moment.



The scripts provided in this chapter are written as we would deliver them for 3-6 year olds so feel free to adapt the language and tone to suit your class. As usual, make sure to try these activities out before you introduce them to children. Most importantly, continue to practise yourself, nurture a growth mindset, and have FUN!

Establishing Breath Awareness

To a young child, 'Just breathe' or 'Pay attention to your breath' are quite nebulous instructions! The younger the child, the more tactile they need to be and the more modelling they need from the caring adults around them. With that said, there are a number of activities that can help children start to explore their breath.

Self-A

Self-M

Seeing Breathing

There are various ways we can help children actually 'see' and feel their breath. Depending on where you live, for example, you might be able to refer to seeing the exhaling breath outdoors on a really cold day or breathing onto a cold window and noticing the condensation. You can also set up fun activities to explore this, for example:

- Blowing soap bubbles.
- Making a feather move with your breath.
- Pushing a cardboard toilet roll cylinder across the desk using only the breath.

(Continued)

You could structure any of these activities by adapting the script provided here:

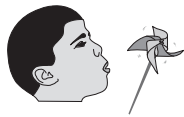
Self-A

Self-M

Watch the Wind!

This activity requires handheld toy windmills which can be bought or made in class as a craft activity – see here for an example of how to make them: www.makeandtakes.com/garden-pinwheel-craft

- Invite the children to sit in a circle.



Today, we are going to have fun with our breath. Your breath is always there for you, like a good friend, to support you through your ups and downs. We are going to use these windmills to help us to 'see' our breathing in action.

Now let's sit with our backs straight and our bodies relaxed.

- Model this so they can mirror you.

Now, let's gently blow on our windmills together using long, deep breaths, and see what happens.

- Model this yourself with a nice, even in-breath and a slower, more deliberate out-breath. Allow them to experiment with this.

Is it easy or hard to make your windmill move? How does that feel on the inside?

- Allow some sharing with children taking turns and giving their attention to each other.

Now, let's see what it's like to not change our breathing at all. Let's just see if we can breathe in our usual way. Not trying to make it faster and not trying to make it slower.

- This will be challenging for this age group as they will automatically want to change and experiment with their breath. Allow some space for that to happen and just gently bring them back to the instruction.

So, what did you notice about your breath this time? How did that feel? What happened to your windmill?

Wow, we can really use our windmills to experiment with our breath and then see how it feels on the inside of our body. Let's keep them in our Calm Corner so that when we need to take a moment to cool down or just explore our breath, we can use our windmills to check in.

Well done, everyone. This activity showed us how different types of breathing can tell us a lot about how we are feeling on the inside.

Sample Practices: Energizing, Calming, Reflecting

Energizing

Self-A

Self-M

Soc-A

Tickling the Sky Practice

Today we are going to tune into our hearing as we learn to reach up to tickle the sky.

What does it mean to hear? What does it mean to listen?

- Take some moments for them to take turns sharing.

And now I am sure some of you are wondering, tickle the sky! How will we do that?

- Bring out the chime (preferably one with a long ringtone).

I am going to show you what it means to 'tickle the sky'. First I need to create my own personal bubble.

Move into a space where you can hold out your arms and spin slowly around making sure to not touch any furniture.

Watch me as I get my body close to the floor.

- Model getting into a ball on the floor for them.

Then, I will ring the chime and as I hear the sound, I am going to move my body to stand up and then reach – reach – reach on my tippy-toes and wiggle my fingertips to tickle the sky! Then take a deep breath.

As I start to notice the fading of the chime, I will slowly melt down, down, down to the floor and move back into the same spot where I began. And then I will take another deep breath.

Now, let's try it together!

Find a space and create your personal bubble by stretching out your arms and moving in a slow circle.

- Continue going through the entire practice again with the class.
- Doing this practice three times in a row can be very energizing as the children tune their attention to the chime and respond with their body to the sound.

(Continued)

TEACHING TIP 

Lean in! Students will most likely giggle during this activity since they are 'tickling the sky'. Try to lean into the silliness, have fun, and just keep giving instructions as you move them through the practice.

Soc-A

Rel. Skills

Clap and Connect!

- Invite students to sit or stand in a circle (depending on where your class is with their spatial awareness development, you may find this works better sitting down).

Ok, friends, today we are going to do an activity that requires us to really pay attention and give our full focus to our neighbours. Can you look to each side of you and say hello?

- Give them a moment to do this – it's really about knowing who is actually next to them.

Now, we are going to play 'Clap and Connect!' Watch me as I look into Michelle's eyes for a moment before we clap our hands together at the same time. It's okay if you do not clap your hands at the exact same time, the point is to connect with your eyes and then clap together as best you can.

- Model this moment of making connection through eye contact before clapping hands together.

After we clap together, Michelle will pass the clap to the person on the other side of her. And then we will pass the clap in this way all around the circle until it makes its way back to me. Let's try it and remember to wait until you connect with your neighbour's eyes before clapping!

- Try doing this around the circle once. There will be moments of laughter, connection, and some will rush but that is okay – try to hold it all with a sense of fun and encouragement.

Wow, that was tricky to look into my neighbour's eyes and clap with them. I really had to pay attention and focus! How was that for you?

- Listen to some experiences and then try it again.

Wonderful focus, friends! You really tuned into each other and connected on those claps! Let's try this again but now we will challenge ourselves with going in the opposite direction. Let's give it a go!

- Listen to what they notice. Find out what helped them to clap at the same time. Be responsive to their sharing and encourage kindness and compliments.

Way to work together as a community! You really paid attention to your neighbours right here, right now, which is what made this activity so successful. Well done!

(This activity is based on a Drama exercise and there are various versions available online.)

Calming

Self-A

Self-M

Pebble Practice

Supply, or have students gather, four small stones each, ones that can be painted and fit in a small pouch. Have students paint their four stones different colours of their choosing: one representing water, one representing a flower, one representing a mountain, and one to represent sunshine. Once their pebbles are dry, have students keep them in a special pouch with a drawstring.

Today we are going to learn about Pebble Practice. This is a calming practice that we can do on our own or together to help us feel peaceful.

- Hand out their pouches.

We are now going to pick up our pouch and carefully take out our four stones, one at a time.

- Model doing this ever so gently, showing them how to reach in and intentionally take out one at a time, examining each stone as they place it down in front of them.

Let's take a few moments to look at our stones. What do we notice? ...

- Now model picking up the flower pebble carefully with one hand and placing it gently in the palm of the other hand.

Look at your pebble, take a deep breath and slowly say, 'Breathing in, I am a flower ... Breathing out I feel fresh'.

Pause for a moment. Set the stone down gently, starting a new pile.

Continue to pick up and look at each pebble in turn:

Look at your pebble, take a deep breath and slowly say, 'Breathing in, I am a mountain ... Breathing out I feel strong'.

(Continued)

Look at your pebble, take a deep breath and slowly say, 'Breathing in, I am water ... Breathing out I feel calm'.

Look at your pebble, take a deep breath and slowly say, 'Breathing in, I am sunshine ... Breathing out I feel warm and happy'.

- Now they can give themselves a hug and take one more deep breath.

What did you notice when you were holding your stones?

- Allow for answers and sharing. Their sharing can be full of deep understanding and wondering so make time for this whenever possible. Not all children need to share; just a few responses can be helpful for the group to connect with their personal, as well as the wider group's, experiences.

Let's now carefully put our stones back in your pouch and gently bring them to the basket in the centre of the rug.

- Give verbal feedback as you notice them taking extra care.

We will try this practice again soon. We will keep our pebble bags handy in the Calm Corner.

Any time you feel angry or frustrated you can pick up the flower pebble, take a breath, close your eyes and feel that freshness inside yourself.

Or when you feel frightened or worried you can pick up the mountain stone and feel stronger.

When you feel upset or muddled up, you can pick up the water pebble and feel calmer and clearer.

When you feel sad or lonely you can pick up the sunshine stone and try to feel that warmth and happiness inside yourself.

This is how the Pebble Practice can help us take care of our feelings.

(Adapted from the original practice by Thich Nhat Hanh, *Happy Teachers Change the World*, reprinted by permission of Parallax Press.)

TEACHING TIP



You might get a feel for the pace of this practice by watching a version led by Thay Phap Luu, www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcIpdjPG9BM

Extension Activity

There is a lovely, calming song by Betsy Rose, 'Breathing In, Breathing Out', that you could use to accompany this practice:



- Lyrics: www.betsyrosemusic.org/lyrics/
- Audio: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFgLvpHUjYk

Self-A

Self-M

Breath Buddy Practice

When we help younger children connect with their breathing in simple, fun ways, they often find it quite calming. There are various ways to help them feel into their natural belly breathing. In this activity, adapted from Susan Kaiser-Greenland (2010), we show how we have used stuffed animals to help the students tune into their breathing. We have also found this works quite well using bean bags or flat river stones which can be personalized as Breath Buddies by painting them.

Invite students to bring in a small stuffed animal, or you can provide them in order to make sure the size is just right. The stuffed animal should be able to fit on their tummy while lying down without any problems of it being too big. If you do have your students bring in their own, take time to let them share about their toys with one another. Before beginning this practice, you may also want to have some mats of some kind where the children can lie down around the room. Before you begin the practice, gather students together in a circle and show them what they are about to do. You can also have eye pillows for each child. These can help immensely with encouraging children to tune into their own experience. However, you know your students best so make sure to take their personal histories into consideration. If trauma is in their sphere of experience, then do not use the eye pillows or 'make' them close their eyes. These should both be optional anyway.

Note: Children who have experienced trauma may sometimes find some awareness activities uncomfortable. See Chapter 5 for information on trauma-sensitive teaching.

Good morning, friends. Today we are going to learn a practice called 'Breath Buddy'. This is a gentle breathing practice where we will be lying down. What do you think we will be doing with our toys during this practice? (Gather a few responses.) Great ideas – now, let me show you.

- Show them your 'buddy' – and then lie down in the centre of the circle. Place your buddy on your belly.

I am going to place my buddy on my belly as I lie down. I want to make sure my buddy is safe and secure so I am going to find a spot where it won't fall off. Now that my buddy is feeling ready, watch as I breath in (buddy goes up) and watch as I breathe out (buddy goes down). Notice how my buddy goes up and then it goes down, ever so carefully.

- Model this for a few more breaths. Then sit up and have children find a spot to lie down. It is best if you have prearranged spots with mats already placed around the room.

(Continued)

Now, let's all go to our spots and lie down on our back. Take a deep breath once you settle into your spot and then see what it is like to find that spot on your belly where your buddy will be safe and secure.

- Once most students are settled with their buddy, you can guide them through this gentle, calming practice.

Let's all now take a deep breath, seeing if we can really tune in to our buddy on our belly going up. Now letting our breath go, we notice our buddy going down as we slowly breathe out. See if you can pay attention to the up and down rhythm of your breathing and notice how it calms your buddy.

- Continue to model all of these steps for them. Go through at least five to ten cycles of breathing. The first few you can guide, and then in the last few you can just allow them to fully be in their own experience.

Let's now just notice what we notice when each one of us really gives our full attention to our buddy ...

- Allow for some silence. Exaggerated breathing is bound to happen – you can walk around the room and guide individual students if they need encouragement or reminders to give their buddy all their care and focus. After this tuning in, you can have them go through one last breath for the practice.

Let's take one last breath together and then slowly come up to sit. From sitting, let's look at our buddy, give it a hug, and then come back to our circle. Your buddy can sit in your lap.

- Take some time to share experiences and what they noticed with the buddy on their belly.

Extension Activity

In all of these activities we are trying to bring a kind and loving quality of attention. Some teachers like to help their students consciously develop kindness for self and others, and one way to do this could be to extend the Breath Buddy activity. After students have had some time to settle themselves and their buddy, you can add a compassion practice, encouraging them to focus on sending kind thoughts and wishes to their 'buddy', then perhaps to a friend, a family member and then to themselves. You can find a good example of this in the activity *Sending Friendly Wishes* (Kaiser-Greenland, 2010: 68-9), from which this is adapted.

Extension Activity

The Belly Breathe song from Sesame Street is a fun, energetic way to follow-up with some singing and dancing: www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mZbzDOpyIA&t=4s

Reflecting

Self-M

Glitter Mind Jar Practice

This practice can really bring us into the moment by offering a strong anchor point. It can help us to rest, reflect, and even turn our attention to gratitude. You can make glitter jars ahead of time, or if you decide to make them *with* your class, just remember that you will need lots of assistance or parent volunteers! As messy as it might get, it is definitely worth it as the children feel a true sense of ownership with this powerful mindfulness tool. (See for example, 'How to Make Your Own Glitter Jar': www.mindful.org/how-to-create-a-glitter-jar-for-kids/)

This practice gives children the space and time to calm down and learn how to pay attention to what is going on inside their body and in their surroundings. Regularly practising this with the glitter jar can increase their sense of self-efficacy with strong emotions. Glitter jars are a very useful mindfulness tool both at school and at home. Watching the glitter swirl around and then settle on the bottom of the jar gives an individual, or the class, the time to calm down and reframe their attention. This is done in silence as much as possible. Your tone during the guidance should match the calm space.

Today we are going to learn the Glitter Jar practice. We now get to add it to our toolkit of practices.

Let's take the jar and give it a good shake.

- Model doing this and then guide the students to safely do the same.

Do you see how the glitter swirls around in the water; it's hard to see through isn't it? That can be how we feel inside sometimes. Our mind might be all mixed up and our body might feel wild like this glitter – going this way and that way.

Now, let's stop shaking up our jar and put it down. (Model this for them.) Let's watch the glitter settle to the bottom. As the glitter starts to sink to the bottom, let's place one hand on our belly and one hand on our heart. Feel your breathing.

- Model each step – one hand on belly, one hand on heart – the children will look to you for this guidance and will mirror what you do.

Keep watching closely until all the glitter has settled. Ok, now that most of the glitter is at the bottom, let's take one, long deep breath. (Do this with them.) Did you notice that the glitter didn't go away? It's still at the bottom of the jar but we can see clearly now. How are you feeling right now? What do you notice? Do you feel a bit more calm?

(Continued)

- Allow for some varied responses.

How might the Glitter Jar be like our busy bee bodies and minds? How might this practice help us when we are feeling mad or sad or even excited?

- Allow for some responses and examples of their own experiences with feelings.

It's hard for us to see clearly in the jar when the glitter is moving around. When we take the time to calm ourselves, our bodies and minds slow down and settle just like the glitter.

- Have them shake their glitter jars once more, put them down, place hands on belly and heart to breathe and then watch the glitter settle.

The Glitter Jar can help us calm down and see more clearly how we are feeling and how we can help ourselves. We will put some in the Calm Corner to be part of our mindfulness toolkit.

Extension Activity

After you have established this practice, you can show this beautiful video—'Just Breathe': www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg&t=7s—so students can continue to connect the Glitter Mind Jar with supporting their emotional wellbeing.

Educator Voice: Glitter Mind Jar in Action

After introducing the glitter mind jar to my students, they made their own jars as well as a community one for the class. Students took their personal one home so they could use it whenever they needed it, which also provided a strong link between school and home. It reinforced that these practices are for our everyday lives and not just in the classroom.

One morning we were having a 'Rose and Thorn' check in circle and one little 5 year old boy, Jeremy, talked about a problem (thorn) he had in a public playground over the weekend. Another little boy had come over and pushed Jeremy off the slide. Jeremy told our class, 'I got so angry and wanted to go push him down but my mom said to remember my mindfulness. I stopped and thought about my glitter jar, I just imagined it swirling around in my mind. I put my hand here (on his belly) and took deep breaths. I could see the glitter going down, down, down to the bottom and I felt good in my heart'. He took another deep breath and then Jeremy got his mom's help to go over to the boy so he could tell him how he felt about the push. Jeremy finished by asking the boy if he could be more careful next time and the boy agreed.

Everyone in the class was listening so intensely to every word that Jeremy was saying and when he was finished, one little girl even started to spontaneously clap for him. The whole class followed, applauding with big smiles, they were so proud of him. This story became a very important one for our class.

Many children would often refer to it when we would talk about the power of mindfulness. Every student eventually had a glitter jar story to share ... so many you could fill a book! This showed me how meaningful this tool was in connecting the dots for them and for me, providing a way for these children to calm themselves and illustrating that peace really does begin with each one of us.

Krysten Fort-Catanese – Head of Elementary, Friends School, Boulder, CO

Self-A

Self-M

Other Seasoning Activities



Choose any simple, short activity to help your class Calm, Energize or Reflect, whichever is most needed at the time. For example:

- **Jump or Run!** Do star jumps or run on the spot for one minute, then place your hand on your heart and pay attention to your how your heartbeat and your breathing feels. Check in again a few moments later and see if anything has changed. How do you feel?
- **Slow It Down:** Choose any familiar action and just do it really slowly, for example: Dreamy Dancing, Swimming in Syrup (or 'Moving in Molasses!'), Walking in Water. Then come to a stop and notice how you feel.
- **Seashell Breathing:** Place your hands flat against each ear and breath in and out slowly. Listen to the sounds. Does it sound like sea?
- **Mmm, Nice!** Think of something that smells nice – maybe a flower or a freshly baked cake. Breathe in through the nose to really smell it, and as you breathe out, make a gentle 'Mmmm' sound.

There are also lots of great movement and breathing activities (for example Rainbow Breathing) available at the www.gonoodle.com/ website.

TEACHING TIPS



- Try to develop a combination of repeated core practices to support awareness along with the occasional introduction of new activities to maintain interest and engagement.
- Don't forget to look at the other chapters in Section I for more ideas to draw from and adapt for your students.
- You will find lots more general teaching advice and pedagogical tips in Chapter 5.

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Expert Voice: We Are Not Trying to Create Little Meditators!

Many heart-warming images show small children meditating in a still, crossed-legged posture, eyes closed. Whilst not discounting the value of this experience, mindfulness can be introduced to children and young people with more relevance to their everyday experience and lives. Mindfulness has much broader potential than simply as a form of relaxation, or a way to 'fix' things. Practising mindfulness to develop attitudes of curiosity, friendliness and allowing is more valuable than only practising while sitting still with the focus inside us, with eyes closed. We need to teach ways to create connections, resilience and effective responsiveness within ourselves, with other people and with the world we inhabit. Learning theory tells us that we learn best when the learning is clearly connected to where we can apply it. Could we expand our understanding of mindfulness to fully, and equally, value practising awareness in everyday life? Practising as we walk, talk, play, work, move and be still? Because mindfulness is about practising living mindfully rather than developing little meditators: it's about 'being mindful' rather than 'doing mindfulness'.

Sarah Silverton – Mindfulness teacher and trainer, UK,
www.thepresentcourses.org/

Setting the Weather

If you become frustrated or agitated with children during any of these activities, try to anchor yourself with a few deep breaths. Doing so can transform the entire feeling and mood of the room and prevent a potential 'power play' between yourself and a child. By doing this, teachers can *co-regulate* the room, which can have a profound impact on classroom management in general. Don't be afraid to let go of the activity if it's not feeling right. Maybe they are too distracted, finding it hard to settle and focus, or maybe there are external factors that are affecting the classroom environment. Whatever the reason, it's okay to acknowledge that now is not the best time to do the activity and save it for another time. Trying to force these types of activities when the time isn't right could end up putting them off completely.

I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized. (Ginott, 1994 [1972])

'Relax. Release. Return' Practice

Try this practice if you find yourself really struggling, especially if this age group is not 'doing as they are told' and you are frazzled. This is a highly versatile practice that can last anywhere from 20 seconds with eyes open to 20 minutes with eyes closed or lowered, and it can be done standing or seated.

1. **Relax:** Notice the body and any areas of tension. See if you can relax those muscles a little, especially in the shoulders, back, and jaw.
2. **Release:** Shift attention to the breath – this breath coming in, this breath going out. See if you can make the out-breath just slightly longer. Notice the busy mind and just keep releasing through the out-breath.
3. **Return:** Open up your attention to the whole body, from the top of your head to the tips of your toes, grounding yourself. Stay curious right here, right now. Take in your surroundings and return to the task at hand, asking yourself, *What kind of weather do I want to set?*

(From Cultivating Emotional Balance program, adapted with permission from Dr Alan Wallace)

Calm Corners – Creating a Safe Space

We highly recommend creating a Calm Corner (or 'Peace Corner') in your classroom or school where children can go to take care of their needs, settle their bodies, calm their minds, and feel peaceful and safe. This doesn't need to take up much space – it can even be a low, small table with cushions around it. The table can hold different resources that children can access at any time, such as glitter jars, windmills, mini-Hoberman spheres ('Breath Balls'), sand timers, markers and paper to express their feelings/experiences, conflict resolution tools, and books with social-emotional and mindfulness themes rich with illustrations. A poster of some of the foundational practices that they have learned with you can also be put on the wall.

When setting up this space in your class, it is important to teach your students that this is not a place for 'Time Out', which often has negative connotations, but rather it is a place to help them better understand themselves – body, mind, heart – and how they are feeling in a given moment. It is essential to establish the Calm Corner as a positive, designated space for their own flourishing.

Self-M Rel. Skills Resp. D-M 'Peace Begins with Me ...'

The Calm Corner can also be used for taking a first step before entering into any conflict resolution. When issues arise with friends, they can begin to use their mindfulness resources and this space to help them come to a place of more peace and calm in themselves.

- Students can learn to let you know when they are having difficulty with something or someone.
- They can be supported to learn how to choose one of their mindfulness skills to self-calm before going any further.
- If needed, the next steps of mediation can take place in the Calm Corner.
- Help them take turns listening, sharing, and then coming up with a plan to move ahead together.

Mindful awareness practices can thus dovetail beautifully with the use of Calm Corners and in this way exemplify the cultivation of kindness and compassion through self-awareness and awareness of others that we are seeking to promote in our school communities.

Educator Voice: Calm Corner Connection

I recently visited a preschool classroom where one little 4 year old girl was clearly struggling with her emotions during my visit. Her grandmother had just passed away and her teacher had only found out during an activity on expressing emotions. The teacher was able to reach out to the parent to share some tips to help her daughter deal with her loss and to offer a story book about loss to share with her.

Later in the day, the teacher had been using the Hoberman Sphere* with the class to practice noticing the breath during a circle time activity. The sphere is a useful way to help young children connect with the physical movement of their breathing. The teacher later left the sphere in the mindfulness corner of the classroom where students go to spend quiet or reflective time. There they can choose to perhaps listen to audios, read mindful books, look at the goldfish, smell lavender pots or watch snow globes settle.

The young girl visited the corner at one point in the day and she independently took the sphere and started breathing in and out while playing with it. When one of her classmates joined her and asked what she was doing, she said, 'This can help you feel better – you breathe in and out – do you want to try it?' Together the two girls practiced their breathing using the sphere. Smiles appeared and they decided to watch the glitter jars settle before moving on to other activities. These brief moments of self-care, using resources to manage feelings and to notice and respond to emotions is becoming a key part of learning for these children.

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*See this article for detailed tips on using the Hoberman Sphere with students: www.mindful.org/a-mindful-kids-practice-the-breath-ball/

Pause. Reflect. Plan.

Now that you have got started, where you go next depends on how much time and space you have available and also on your deeper intentions about **what you really want for your students**. This is a good time to pause and reflect again on where you are heading with this work and on how you can continue to sustain yourself on this journey.

To help you reflect on this, please turn now to the **'Teacher Reflection' on p. 45**.

Ultimately, Early Years education is a time of exploration and play. Introducing mindful awareness in ways that can be joyful is essential. Helping children to ground themselves in their body is a powerful way to begin. The above practices are just a few ideas to help students build up their ability to aim and sustain their attention as well as cultivate kindness and compassion. Keep returning to your intentions and motivations. Be aware of your own need to make things go your way or to be 'right' versus following the needs of the class and responding to the children right in front of you. The most important piece is that you are coming from a place of *Being Mindful*. See for yourself what it is like to 'Relax, Release, and Return' in these moments so that you can truly practise being present. Above all, keep it joyful, stay curious, and cultivate a sense of wonder. This will lead to new and exciting discoveries for both yourself and the children in your care. You are setting them up with the foundations of an emotional toolkit that they can return to again and again throughout their lifetime.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter we have:

- Shown you examples of how to introduce mindful awareness activities to 3–6 year old students.
- Provided some practices you can try out to begin to extend students' practice in developing these skills and to 'season' their school day.
- Highlighted the importance of a Calm Corner space in your classroom and/or school.

Further Reading and Resources

Curriculum Training

Dots Curriculum (Mindfulness in Schools Project) – for 3-6 year olds, <https://mindfulnessin schools.org/teach-dots-3-6/dots-curriculum-ages-3-6/>

Kindness Curriculum – Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 12-week program for pre-kindergarten, <https://centerhealthyminds.org/join-the-movement/sign-up-to-receive-the-kindness-curriculum>
MindBE Preschool Curriculum – for 2-6 year olds, <https://mindbe-education.com/>
The Present Curriculum – for children ages 3-12+, www.thepresentcourses.org/the-present-courses/for-primary-schools/

Books

Kaiser-Greenland, S. (2010) *The Mindful Child: How to Help Your Kids Manage Stress, Become Happier, Kinder and More Compassionate*. New York: Free Press.
Nhat Hanh, T. (2011) *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press.

Books to Read Aloud

We show just a few examples here and you can see a longer list at www.mindwell-education.com/mtt-resources

MacLean, K. (2009) *Moody Cow Meditates*. Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications.
O’Leary, W. and Willard, C. (2019) *Breathing Makes it Better: A Book for Sad Days, Mad Days, Glad Days and All the Feelings in Between*. Berkeley, CA: Shambhala Publications.
Rechtschaffen, D. and Willard, C. (2019) *Alphabreaths: The ABCs of Mindful Breathing*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
Verde, S., Illustrated by Peter Reynolds (2017) *I Am Peace: A Book of Mindfulness*. New York: Abrams Books for Young Readers.

Songs

Mindful Songs for Children – www.mindfulteachers.org/2016/05/songs-for-children.html