

Arts-Based Mindfulness

A Toolkit for Parents & Guardians



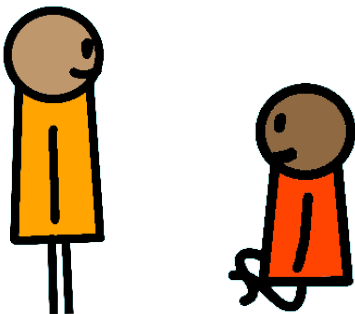
The Holistic Arts-Based Program (HAP)
Diana Coholic, Ph.D., School of Social Work






What's inside

- Page 6: [Introduction](#)
- Page 9: [Mindfulness](#)
- Page 10: [Why an arts-based approach?](#)
- Page 11: [What parents have said about their child's participation in HAP at school](#)
- Page 12: [HAP](#)
- Page 14: [How to practice mindfulness](#)
- Pages 16 - 19: [HAP activities that can be done at home](#)
- Page 20: [Benefits of mindfulness-based programs in schools](#)
- Page 22: [Benefits of HAP in classrooms](#)
- Page 23: [What young people have said about HAP in schools](#)
- Page 25: [The Current Research Project \(We need you!\)](#)
- Page 26: [Resources for parents & guardians](#)
- Page 27: [References](#)





I am very
mindful on how
I feel that day
is just like a cat
is 

Arts-based creation by HAP participant

In our research, we have found that learning and practicing arts-based mindfulness can help children & youth develop self-awareness and acceptance, improve mood and relationships, and help them make better choices about their feelings (Coholic et al., 2020; Coholic & Eys, 2016).

This Toolkit provides parents and guardians with knowledge about our arts-based mindfulness program called Holistic Arts-Based Program or HAP. It includes information about mindfulness, why we use an arts-based approach, activities that can be practiced at home, our current research project, and additional resources for parents/guardians.

Melonie Gilchrist and Melanie Romain (social work students and research assistants, Laurentian University), assisted with the preparation of this Toolkit.

Illustrations were created by Alex Brain.

Funding for printing and translation was provided by Laurentian University.

The HAP research team is led by Dr. Diana Coholic (School of Social Work, Laurentian University) and includes Dr. Mark Eys (Departments of Kinesiology/Physical Education and Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University), Dr. Robert Schinke (School of Human Kinetics, Laurentian University), and Dr. Hoi Cheu (School of Liberal Arts, Laurentian University).



Faithful

STRESS

hungry

hopeful

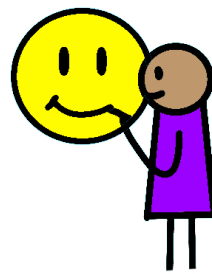
excited

irritable

overwhelmed

Arts-based
creation by HAP
participant

Introduction

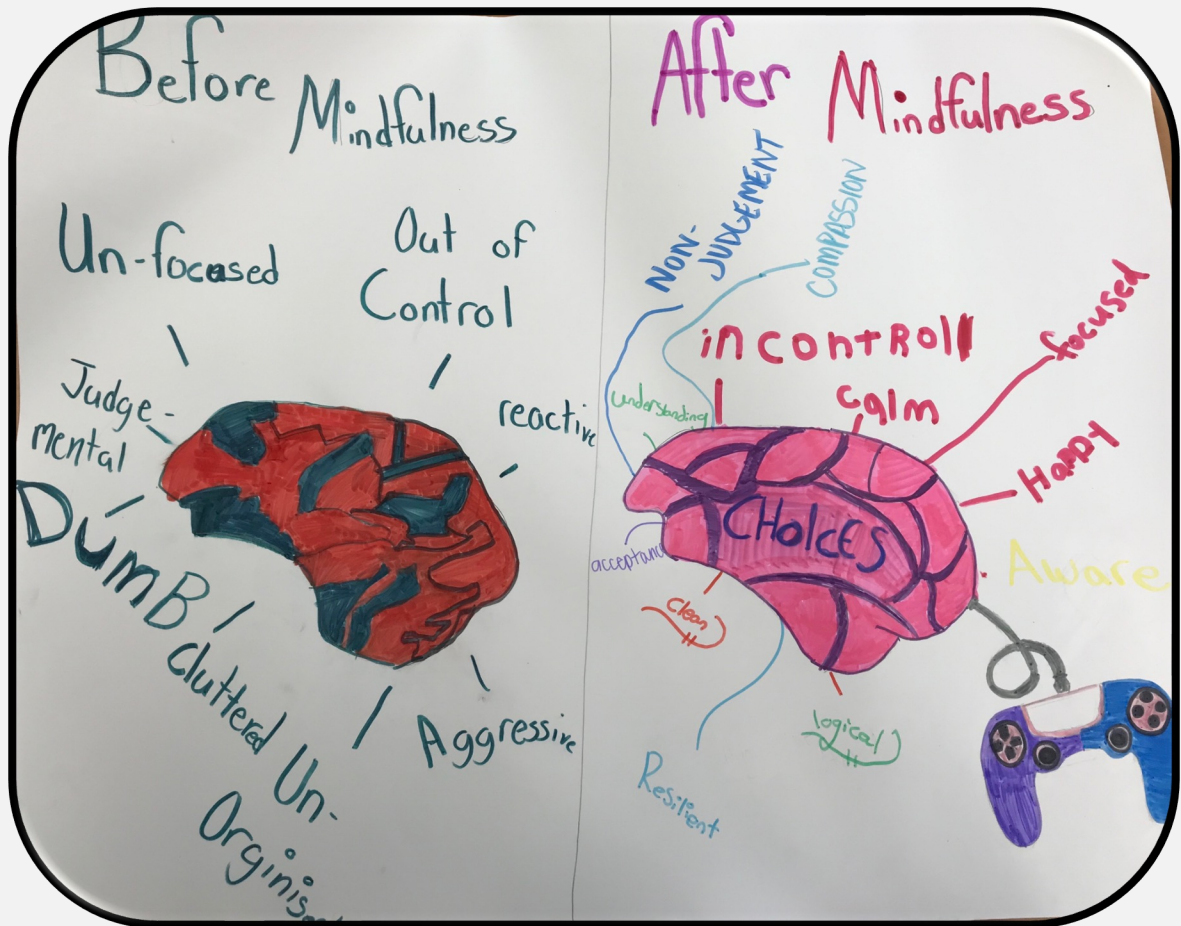


We have been studying the benefits of HAP for over 15 years. In our work, we have found that children and youth really enjoy the program and benefit in a variety of ways. The drawing on page 7 was made by a small group of 11-year old girls to show what they thought they learned by participating in HAP. Before participating in HAP, they felt dumb, out of control, unfocused, reactive, aggressive, and negatively judged themselves. After the program, they felt calmer, less judgmental, resilient, happy, and more focused. These benefits are similar to what other researchers studying mindfulness-based programs have reported.

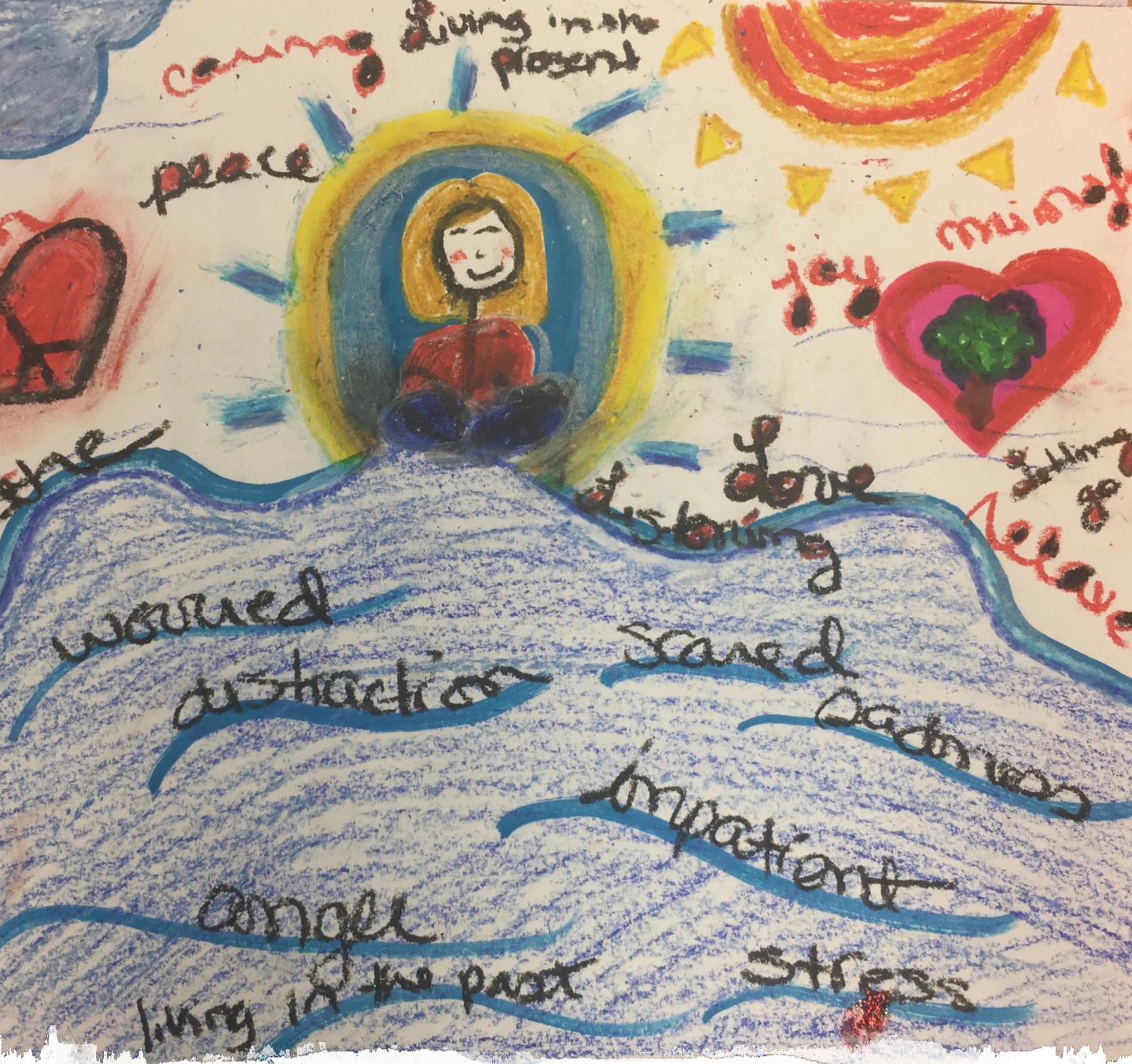
In HAP, we facilitate mindfulness using arts-based methods that includes drawing, painting, working with clay, listening to music, and other creative hands-on activities. In this Toolkit, we explain what mindfulness is and why we use a creative approach to facilitating mindfulness-based practices and concepts. We also provide examples of activities you can practice at home and resources you can use with your child(ren).

The traditional HAP program is offered in small groups, 1x per week for 12-weeks. Based on our success with HAP, we are currently studying if there are benefits to offering HAP in elementary and high school classrooms. In classrooms, HAP is typically offered 1-hour per week. We explain more about this current research project on page 25 of this Toolkit.

The past few years have been challenging for everyone and have affected many young people's well-being. Learning to focus and pay attention is essential to learning. Other young people are struggling with mental health challenges such as anxiety, coping with strong feelings, and social exclusion. It is important to offer children & youth opportunities to improve their well-being. HAP offers strategies that young people can continue to use to help themselves cope better so that they can reach their potential.



Benefits of Participating in HAP



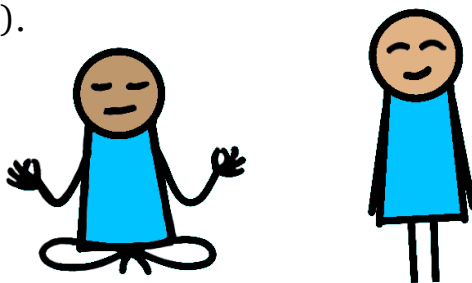
Arts-based creation by HAP participant

Mindfulness

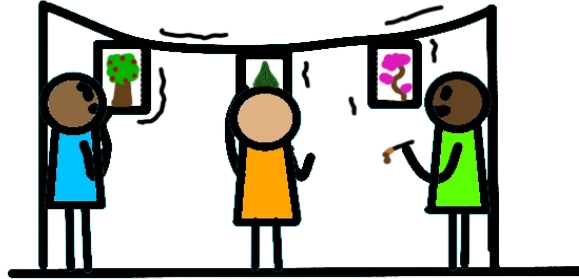
In the past decade, mindfulness has received a lot of attention as a practice and intervention to help children and youth improve mental health and well-being. Mindfulness is a practice and an approach to living life in which we aim to pay attention to what is happening right now in the present moment, and we practice accepting our thoughts and feelings without negative judgments. When we are more self-aware of what we're feeling, we can deal with these feelings and make choices about them instead of ignoring them and creating more problems. For example, if a youth realizes that someone is making them feel frustrated, they can make a good choice to walk away rather than engage with the person and escalate the situation. We can also develop more flexible thinking by viewing our negative thoughts as passing events rather than the truth. For example, a child might think they are bad or dumb but if they are being mindful, they can notice this thought and let it pass or challenge it instead of getting caught up with it.

Mindfulness concepts such as non-judging, patience, trust, letting go, and loving kindness encourage us to focus on what we control and see things as they are in the present moment. A mindful approach encourages us to approach our feelings, thoughts and behaviours with a curious and non-judging mind. It also encourages us to understand the connections that exist between people, to have empathy, and to be grateful for our experiences and the people that are in our lives.

Many people experience states of mindfulness, which are moments where we feel “in the flow” or fully immersed in what we're doing: this is called state mindfulness. Mindfulness can also be a trait or disposition so that it becomes how we live our lives most of the time. Parents who are mindful often have high quality relationships with their child(ren), experience reduced stress in parenting, and can help their children emotionally regulate (Duncan et al., 2009; Petcharat & Liehr, 2017).



Why an arts-based approach?



There are many reasons helping professionals use arts-based methods especially in working with children and youth. Two main reasons are:

1. Arts-based methods are engaging.

Arts-based methods are fun. When young people are enjoying what they are doing, they are more likely to practice what they are learning. They are also more likely to continue participating. Teaching concepts and skills using arts-based methods can accommodate diversity and are non-threatening ways to help young people express themselves and explore their feelings and thoughts. For children and youth who need help focusing, listening, and sitting still, these methods can make learning mindfulness and engaging in group work successful.

2. Arts-based methods are effective.

Arts-based methods help young people express feelings and thoughts. They can be used to teach concepts and help develop skills. They encourage non-verbal expression in safer and creative ways, and are developmentally appropriate.

John, a HAP participant shared: *It's really difficult for me to communicate as it is. And to be able to either write something down or communicate through poetry or through my drawings...really, it definitely helps out.*

Emma, a HAP participant shared: *It has built my self-esteem...when I expressed my art on the paper, I just expressed who I am...I just learned more of how I'm feeling and what kind of person I am.*

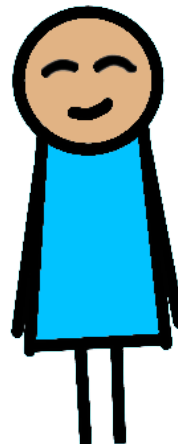
What parents have said about their child's participation in HAP at school

She's a little more self-aware of her emotions and when she gets upset or she realizes that she's not behaving very nice or listening, she'll just take a minute and she can reflect and be like, "I'm sorry that I'm doing this."

Sometimes I can get her to listen a little bit better.

I hope that you continue with the program because I find it so helpful...It's not something I really knew a lot about before, like five years ago, I was not mindful. I am now...It's so important to be able to identify why you feel a certain way.

He was very immediately reactive, and I would say probably in the last three weeks even, I would notice he takes a minute before he's, you know frustrated, instantly. So it's nice to see...that's an improvement, for sure.

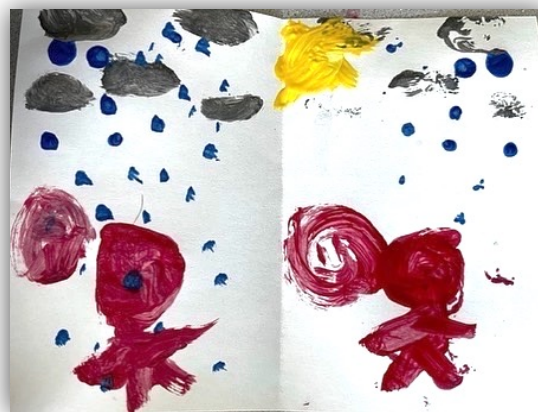


HAP

The diagram on page 13 illustrates the 3 important parts of HAP; group work, mindfulness, and an arts-based approach. HAP is a strengths-based program, which means that we focus on the positive characteristics young people have, their potential, and what is going well. We use challenges in individual and group behaviours as learning opportunities.

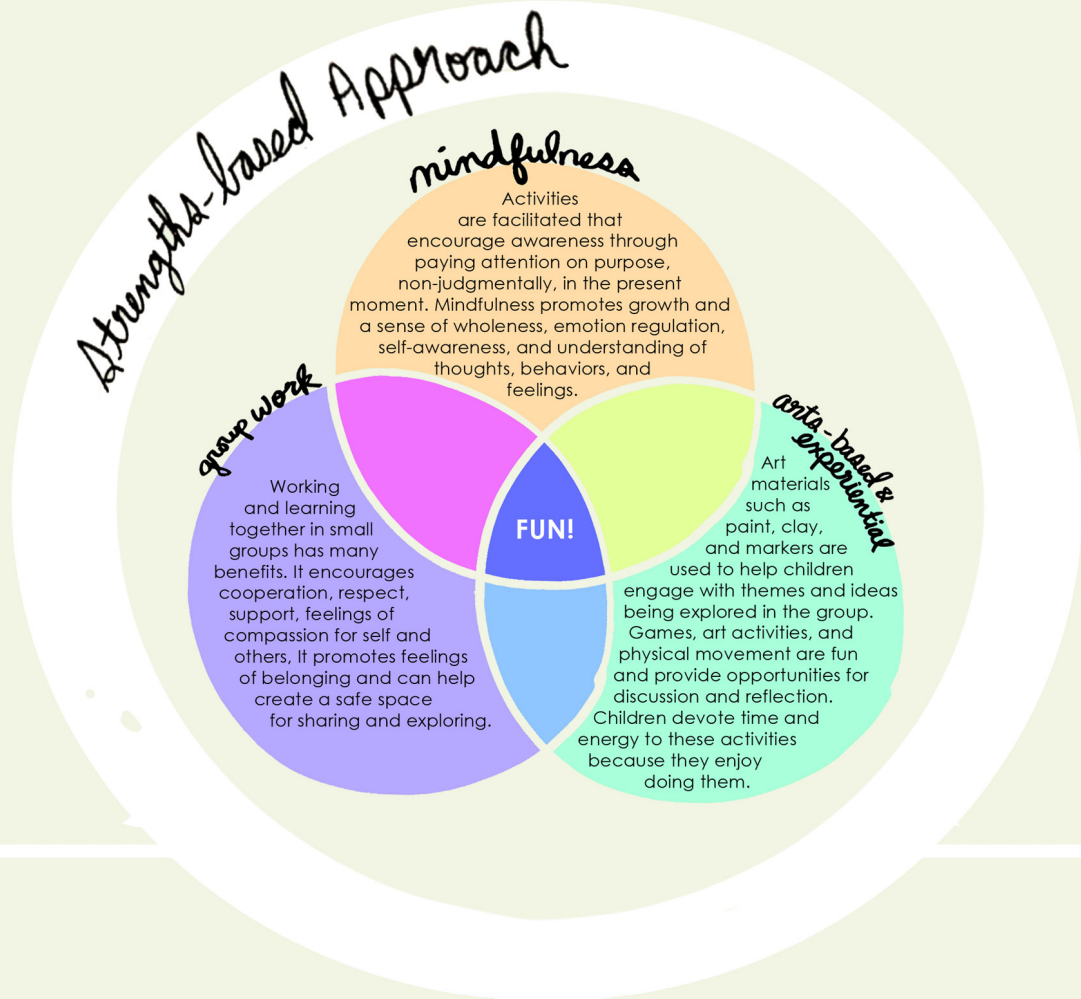
Learning to work together in a group and support each other teaches important abilities such as empathy, understanding, and teamwork. Building group cohesion and belonging is very important for young people especially those that feel socially excluded or isolated. Many of the HAP activities are focused on helping children and youth build group cohesion and belonging.

Most of the activities in HAP aim to teach a mindfulness-based practice or concept. This ranges from helping young people identify and express feelings and thoughts to discussing how they can cope better and not judge themselves. Bad Day Better is a favourite activity for many children/youth. In this activity, a bad day/moment is painted on one side of a page. Then the paper is pressed together to create a mirror image on the other side of the page. A better day/moment is then created from the mirror image. This activity provides an opportunity to discuss what bad moments feel like and why, how they are part of life, and how we can deal with these depending on what we focus on and think about.



Bad Day Better paintings by HAP participants

The HAP Map: A Conceptual Diagram



Program Goals

1. Teaching and facilitating mindfulness skills and concepts in accessible, relevant and meaningful ways
2. Improving self-awareness and understanding/expression of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors
3. Developing self-compassion and empathy
4. Recognizing and shoring up strengths

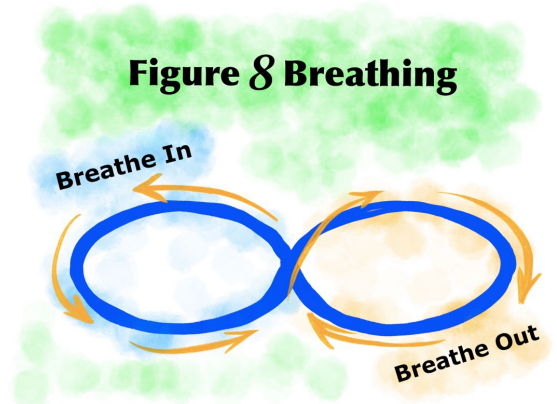
These objectives lead to the development of other abilities and skills such as improved mood and coping/social skills, better emotion regulation and self-esteem, and more effective performance at school.

How to practice mindfulness

Mindful Breathing

There are many ways to practice mindfulness ranging from daily life activities to more formal meditation practices. There are many ways to meditate including walking and the experience is not always the same. If you are not used to paying attention to your breathing, it's not always easy to do. Learning the skill of mindful breathing takes practice. A simple direction for mindful breathing is: Get comfortable in a chair with your feet flat on the ground. Rest your hands on your thighs. Take a deep breath through your nose and breathe out through your mouth trying to breathe slowly and paying attention to the in- and out-breath. The object is not to clear your mind, which is not possible. Your mind will wander. Just notice this and bring yourself back to your breathing. Set yourself up for success by starting with small amounts of time. Please note: For some people, meditation can make them feel worse by increasing anxiety and other feelings. Take it slow & stop if you're uncomfortable.

When we begin to teach young people how to focus on their breathing, we use arts-based methods including Figure 8 breathing. Trace the figure 8 with a marker on a page & breathe in through your nose & out through your mouth.

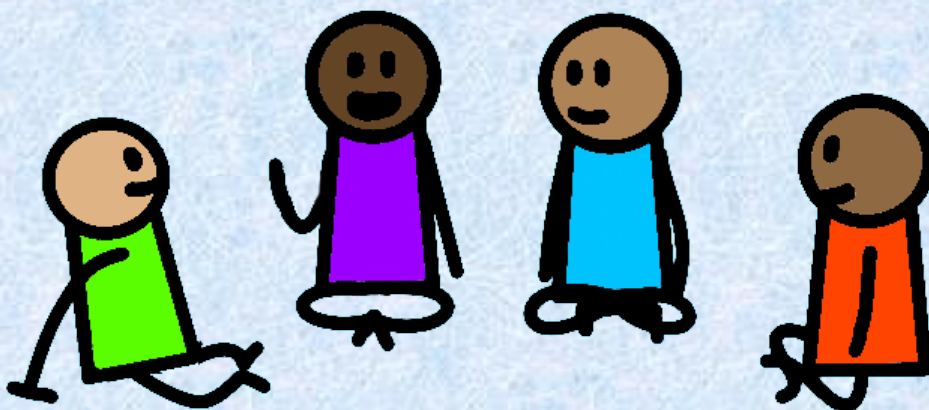


Daily Life Mindfulness

Choose something you have to do on a daily basis and practice bringing your attention and focus to it. For example, if you try to mindfully wash your dishes, you will notice what the water feels like, what the soap smells like, what the dishes look like, and so on. Again, your mind will probably wander but just notice this and bring your attention back to the task.

4 HAP Activities that can be done at Home:

Thoughts Jar	page 16
Paint / Draw a Feeling	page 17
Mindful Eating	page 18
Jar of Importance	page 19



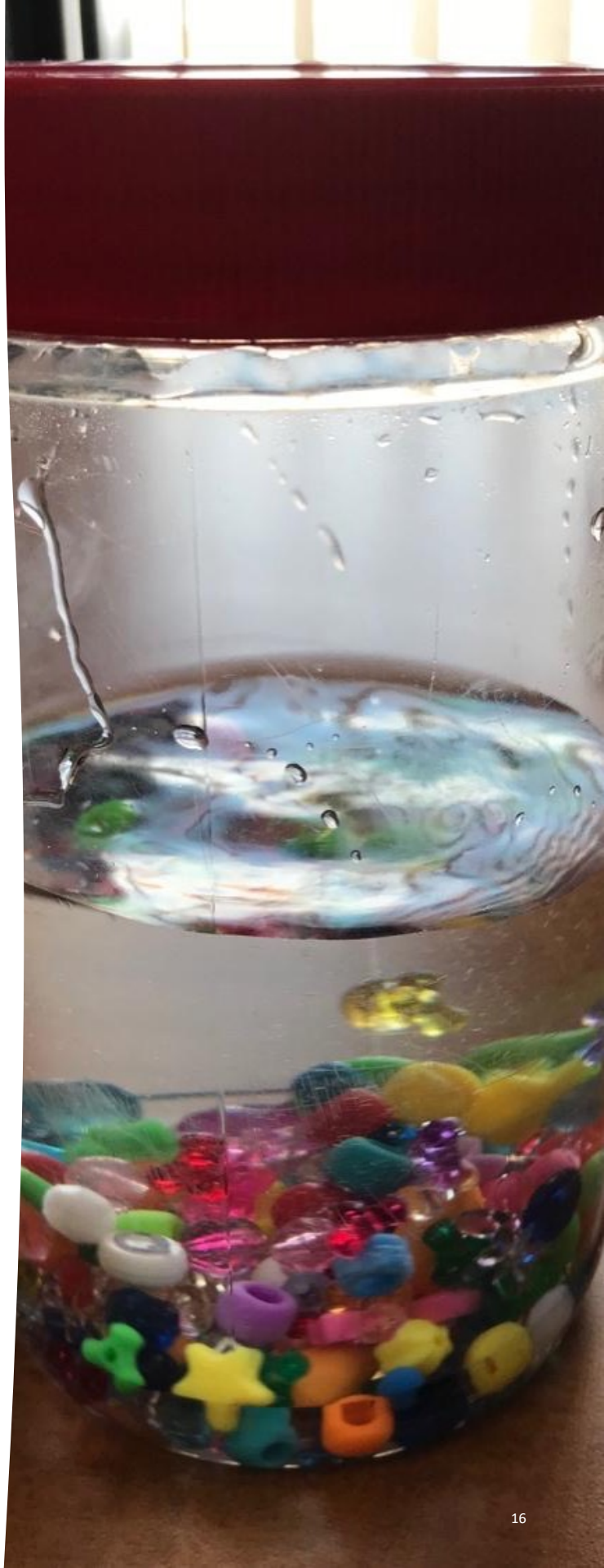
Thoughts Jar

Purpose: To introduce mindfulness & share thoughts and feelings.

Materials: Clear jar with a lid and assorted beads.

Instructions: Half-fill the jar with water. Take turns choosing beads, assigning them a thought or feeling, and place the beads into the jar one by one. Say out loud what the bead represents. Close the jar and shake it.

Questions: What does it feel like when your thoughts & feelings are swirling around? When do you feel like this? When does your mind feel calm like when the beads are settled at the bottom of the jar? What can we do to help our minds be calmer?



Paint / Draw a Feeling

Purpose: To share & talk about feelings using painting or drawing.

Materials: Paint or something to draw with, paint brushes, paper.

Instructions: Use your creativity & paint or draw a feeling that you had in the last week.

Questions: What feeling did you paint/draw?

Why did you feel that way this week?

Discuss the colours, textures, designs, & how they describe your feeling.

How do the paintings/drawings look the same or different?



Mindful Eating

Purpose: To show that being mindful while eating helps you to notice things about eating & food that you might not normally notice.

Materials: Any food that you & your family enjoy. Examples could be popcorn, small candies, fruit, vegetables, or a raisin.

Instructions: Really look at the food before you eat it & notice the texture, colour, & smell. Eat slowly & pay careful attention to your chosen snack with all of your senses.

Questions: Did you eat the same way you normally do?

What did you notice with your senses?

How can paying attention to how and what we eat help us make healthier food choices?

Jar of Importance

Purpose: Even though life can be busy, it's important to take time to recognize what really matters to us & to be grateful for these things & people.

Materials: 1 clear jar, small rocks, small beads to fit between the rocks, & sand.

Instructions: Add rocks to the jar to represent people & things that are important. Next, add beads to represent things that bring happiness or joy to your life. Then add sand to represent things you like doing but maybe don't do a lot.

Questions: Who or what did the rocks represent?

What did your beads & sand represent?

Why is it important to take time to do things that bring us happiness or joy?

How can we make time for these things?

How can we better appreciate all the things that make our lives full?

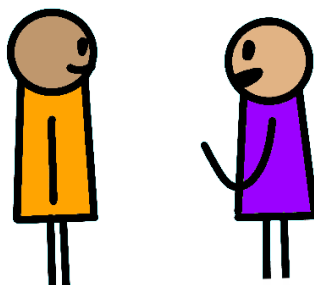


Benefits of mindfulness-based programs in schools

In recent years there has been increased interest in delivering mindfulness-based programs within schools. These programs aim to help children & youth develop and improve their self-awareness, interpersonal skills, self-control, mood, and decision making (Sciutto et al., 2021; Segal et al., 2022).

Researchers have found many benefits when these programs have been facilitated in schools including:

- Increased positive social behaviours such as kindness, sharing, helpfulness, and consideration for others' feelings (Sciutto et al., 2021; Vigla & Perlman, 2018).
- Reduced hyperactivity (Amundsen et al., 2020; Sciutto et al., 2021).
- Improved ability to calm themselves in situations where they experienced difficult emotions such as embarrassment, frustration, and anger (Janz et al., 2019; Sagal et al., 2022).
- Improved emotion regulation. This is the ability to not get caught up in feelings but instead make good choices about them (Amundsen et al., 2020; Sagal et al., 2022).
- Increased ability to pay attention and avoid distractions (Janz et al., 2019).



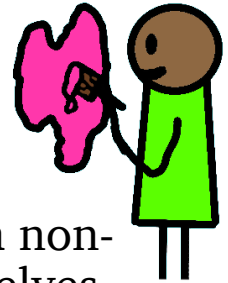


Arts-based creation by HAP participant

Benefits of HAP in Classrooms

Improved group cohesion & empathy

It can be hard for students to understand their feelings and the feelings of others. In HAP, students learn that their feelings are important as well as how their everyday words and actions may impact other people. Some teachers have noted that respect has been improved in the classroom after HAP. Students can develop a stronger appreciation for every one's unique perspective, helping them develop empathy. This happens as the students work together through activities.



Improved expression of feelings

HAP activities normalize feelings by providing a non-judgmental space for students to express themselves. Expressing feelings can be difficult; sometimes it is hard to explain feelings or it might feel uncomfortable to share. HAP activities help students explore their feelings in ways that feel comfortable.

Improved coping

By improving self-awareness, students can improve emotion regulation - the ability to make good choices about feelings. Students are encouraged to understand that all feelings are normal and we all have bad and good moments. With this understanding, students can build more skills in how to cope with challenging feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

What young people have said about HAP in schools

Mindfulness is a way of concentrating more and seeing around you and appreciating everything that's happening...It helped me concentrate with other stuff and it helped me express more things to other people. Like, my family and stuff like that.

I'd tell them that it's art but it's emotional.

With the 'painting on the line' I learned that things don't always go your way, that you can't control everything.

My favourite activity was probably when we made a 'bad day' and when we flipped it over, we could make it a good day. Then it might be a good day that we've already had or just a new good day that's just really good.

It's kind of a mindfulness program that helps you get comfortable with your feelings and it kind of helps you share about your feelings.

And describing it was helpful, calming, like letting yourself breathe, letting yourself like clear your mind.

What I learned is that opening up to people that are new when you get to know them is okay. And your thoughts aren't weird and what you dream about isn't weird. And what could help me outside of the HAP program would be just to take a break...just take a second and just kind of breathe and see, like I said, where you are and who you are.



We are all Beautiful



Created by a HAP group

The Current Research Project

(We need you!)



We've been studying HAP in small groups for many years. In its small group format, we found that HAP helped young people better deal with their feelings (Coholic et al., 2012). Improved mood, empathy, and attentional skills were also reported (Coholic & Eys, 2016). We have always found that young people enjoy the program and that the activities help them express & better understand themselves (Coholic et al., 2020).

Currently, we are studying HAP in school classrooms. We want to know if HAP can help young people in school improve their well-being. In order to understand this, we need to collect scores on different characteristics that we think might be affected by participating in HAP. This is why we ask young people to complete two short questionnaires. Their scores will tell us how they feel & think about themselves before & after HAP participation.

But we also need the participation of parents/guardians & teachers to complete a questionnaire that will tell us what you think about your child's behaviour, mood, & coping. Your feedback is vital because young people sometimes have a hard time reflecting on themselves, and you might see things that they don't.

It's very important that we collect these test scores before & after HAP delivery so that we can compare them. If we don't have both scores, we can't figure out if HAP was helpful or not.

Your participation is essential to the success of our project.

When we analyze the scores from the inventories, we are working with all of the numbers together & we are not focused on any one child's scores. **We follow strict research ethics so that confidentiality of everyone involved is assured.**

Resources for parents & guardians

Links to articles:

What is mindful parenting: <https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness/mindful-parenting>

How self-compassion can improve teen mental health: <https://www.mindful.org/how-self-compassion-can-improve-teen-mental-health/>

Links to resources on YouTube:

Headspace: <https://www.youtube.com/@headspace>

Smiling Mind: <https://www.youtube.com/@SmilingMindTV>

Calm Kids Collective: <https://www.youtube.com/@CalmKidsCollective-nz7ks>

Cosmic Kids Zen Den - Mindfulness for Kids:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8snGkhBF7ngDp1oJtx5VcjwaxZn8xLK>

Happy Minds Sleep Meditation & Bedtime Stories:

<https://www.youtube.com/@happymindsmeditation/featured>

Links to meditations:

Loving-Kindness Meditation for Kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p0ztXGN9zE>

Thought Bubbles! Mindfulness for Children: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70j3xyu7OGw>

Books:

Atluri, J. (2021). *Mindfulness journal for parents: Prompts and practices to stay calm, present, and connected*. Rockridge Press

Brown, K., & Brown, J. R. (2022). *I am okay to feel*. Zando Young Readers.

Clark-Fields, H. (2019). *Raising good humans: A mindful guide to breaking the cycle of reactive parenting and raising kind, confident kids*. New Harbinger Publications.

Libin, N. (2019). *Mindful parenting in a chaotic world: Effective strategies to stay centered at home and on the go*. Rockridge.

MacLean, K. L. (2004). *Peaceful piggy meditation*. Albert Whitman & Company.

Nance, A. J. (2016). *Puppy mind*. Plum Blossom.

Rubenstein, L. J., & Hehenberger, S. (2013). *Visiting feelings*. Magination Press.

Siegel, D. & Payne Bryson, T. (2018). *The Yes Brain: How to cultivate courage, curiosity, and resilience in your child*. Bantam NY.

Willey, K. (2019). *Breathe like a Bear*. Rodale Kids.

Willey, K. (2020). *Peaceful like a panda*. Rodale Kids.

Verde, S. (2018). *I am human: A book of empathy*. Abrams.

Viegas, M. (2015). *Relax kids: The wishing star*. Our Street Books.

Apps:

Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame

Headspace.

Stop, Breathe, and Think Kids

Calm

Mindful Powers

The Mindfulness APP

Dreamy Kid

Moshi

UCLA Mindful

Websites:

Mindful.org: www.Mindful.org

Generation Mindful: <https://genmindful.com/blogs>

Mindfulness Exercises: <https://mindfulnessexercises.com/>

UCLA Health: <https://www.uclahealth.org/programs/marc/free-guided-meditations/guided-meditations>

Movies:

Inside Out: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2096673/>

Turning Red: https://www.imdb.com/find/?q=turning%20red&ref_=nv_sr_sm



References

- Amundsen, R., Riby, L. M., Hamilton, C., Hope, M., & McGann, D. (2020). Mindfulness in primary school children as a route to enhanced life satisfaction, positive outlook and effective emotional regulation. *BMC Psychology*, 8 (71). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-020-00428-y>
- Coholic, D., Schinke, R., Oghene, O., Dano, K., Jago, M., McAlister, H., & Grynspan, P. (2020). Arts-based interventions for youth with mental health challenges. *Journal of Social Work*, 20 (3), 269-286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017319828864>
- Coholic, D., & Eys, M. (2016). Benefits of an arts-based mindfulness group intervention for vulnerable children. *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33 (1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-015-0431-3>
- Coholic, D., Eys, M., & Lougheed, S. (2012). Investigating the effectiveness of an arts-based and mindfulness-based group program for the improvement of resilience in children in need. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 21, 833-844. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-011-9544-2>
- Duncan, L. G., Coatsworth, J. D., Gayles, J. G., Geier, M. H., & Greenberg, M. T. (2015). Can mindful parenting be observed? Relations between observational ratings of mother–youth interactions and mothers' self-report of mindful parenting. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 29(2), 276–282. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038857>
- Janz, P., Dawe, S., & Wyllie, M. (2019). Mindfulness-based program embedded within the existing curriculum improves executive functioning and behavior in young children: A waitlist control trial. *Front Psychol*, 10:2052. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02052>
- Petcharat, M., & Liehr, P. (2017). Mindfulness training for parents of children with special needs: Guidance for nurses in mental health practice. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 30(1), 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcap.12169>
- Sciotto, M. J., Veres, D. A., Marinstein, T. L., Bailey, B. F., & Cehelyk, S. K. (2021). Effects of a school-based mindfulness program for young children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 30(6), 1516-1527. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-01955-x>
- Segal, S. C., Vyas, S. S., & Monson, C. M. (2021). A systematic review of mindfulness-based interventions in low-income schools. *Mindfulness*, 12, 1316-1331. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-020-01571-8>
- Viglas, M., & Perlman, M. (2018). Effects of mindfulness-based programs on young children's self-regulation, prosocial behavior and hyperactivity. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27, 1150-1160. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0971-6>



For more information:
www.dianacoholic.com

*“This research was supported by the Social Sciences and
Humanities Research Council of Canada.”*



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



Université Laurentienne
Laurentian University