

## "Mindfulness Practice for Emotional Regulation in the Classroom"

CEEF Fall Grant Cycle - 2019

The Cape Elizabeth Middle School's "Mindfulness for Emotional Regulation in the Classroom" program is so grateful for CEEF's support this academic year. Phase 1 began in September and taught introductory mindfulness in professional development meetings for the 16 teachers that elected to participate in the program. Phase 2 began in January 2020 and extended mindfulness education into 11 classrooms grades 5-8, reaching 212 students. Each class received 30 minute mindfulness based instruction, once each week for 8 of the 12 planned weeks. In this time, students and teachers learned and practiced skills related to several areas of mindfulness including the following:

**Class 1:** From Autopilot to Manual Control: Mindfulness of Body

**Class 2:** Neuroplasticity + Mindfulness of Sound

**Class 3:** Neuroscience + Mindfulness of Breath

**Class 4:** Impulses, Patience, and Self Control + Mindfulness of Impulse

**Class 5:** Negativity Bias + Savoring/Gratitude (Lesson of the Heart)

**Class 6:** Body image + Body Scan

**Class 7:** Attentional Choice + Kindness for Others (Practice of the heart)

**Class 8:** Difficult Emotions + Mindfulness of Emotions

In order to maintain healthy stress levels and subsequently enhanced wellbeing, three things are important: responsive relationships, strengthening core life skills, and reducing sources of stress. Mindfulness training in schools for our staff and students is an incredible way to support all three areas and promote whole child wellness. As a school and community, it is our responsibility to promote healthy child development not only through the provision of information but also through the environments and relationships that support wellbeing. For these reasons, we are grateful for the opportunity to promote an essential life long skill to navigate varying levels of stress and adversity today and moving forward.

It is our hope that the teachers and students who participated in our program are able to utilize their skills and share information with loved ones to enhance wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mindfulness is a critical aspect of each person's self care. An awareness of one's internal landscape, and the ability to create space between emotions and reaction by utilizing your breath to be in control of your response is a powerful skill for us all. Once this space is created and emotions regulated, we can all make better and more informed choices to further our wellbeing. These choices may be in relation to practices that are also critical aspects of good health including adequate sleep, healthy nutrition, regular exercise, and meditation.

We heard from students and staff at the midway point about how they were finding the practice personally useful. Many students spoke to the benefits of helping them fall asleep at night, prepare mentally for tests, and deal with difficult interactions with siblings.

Here are a few reflections from staff:

"Since beginning this mindfulness cohort with my colleagues and my students under [Erica's] direction I have found that I am taking the time to practice mindfulness techniques and that I am able to reduce and relieve many of the stressors and negative thoughts that invade my mind on a daily basis. I think I am forming a wonderful new habit!" - 8th grade teacher

"I understand from the guidance counselor that one student who has had trouble with test and school performance anxiety has shared that she finds these sessions to be helpful. I have been delighted to see that even my most "active" of friends have been able to center their minds and bodies as part of daily practice." - 6th grade teacher

"I had a student getting ready to take a science test on the Periodic Table. She was very nervous, as were other students in the room. She spoke up and said, "Can we all just take a minute to calm down? Let's do a mindful minute!" - 8th grade teacher

With this in mind, we'd like to offer a few mindfulness resources for all to access:

1. [2 minute practice led by Erica](#) (based on the in-class experiences we've had together)
2. [Smiling Mind](#) (guided mindfulness practices with programs appropriate for 3-year-olds to adults)
3. [Mindful Schools](#) is offering free 30-minute mindfulness lessons for K-5 students at 1pm, Tuesday-Thursday, (and their families) through Facebook Live
4. A brief script you can use to draw awareness to the good that exists in your life, even amidst times of struggle and difficulty:

### **Savoring the Good**

Find a comfortable upright posture. Let your eyes close or bring the gaze down.

Sense the relaxing effects of gravity. Feel the points of your body that are touching the ground or chair. Let the tension in your body drain.

Bring your attention to your anchor point, which can be the breath, sound, or even the sensations in the hands.

Think of something positive in your life- it can be a person, an animal, an event, or an achievement. Something that easily makes you feel good. Create a sharp image of that person or experience. When it fades away, see if you can bring it back into your mind.

You might notice very subtle shifts in the body. A small smile. A lightness. A warmth. Let yourself soak up those sensations.

When you are ready, let go of the image in your mind, and come back into the room.

