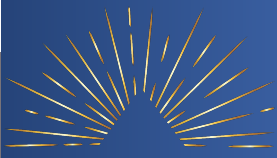


# Mindfulness for Children and Teens

Kathryn Lewellen and Denise LaPorta

October 29, 2019



# Agenda

- What is Mindfulness?
- Benefits & Research
- Neuroscience of Mindfulness
  - Positivity Project & Growth Mindset
- Mindfulness in the Classroom
- Mindfulness at Home



# Mindfulness Misconception #1

Mindfulness is Buddhism in disguise.



# Mindfulness Misconception #2

The goal of Mindfulness is to be peaceful and calm.



# Mindfulness Misconception #3

There is one way to be Mindful.



# Mindfulness Misconception #4

Mindfulness is yoga and breathing.



# What is Mindfulness?

- It is paying attention in the present moment, with non-judgment, acceptance and compassion.
- Approaching our experiences with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with what is
- It is noticing our thoughts and feelings without becoming consumed by them—*responding* instead of *reacting*.
- Inner and Outer Compassion is key
  - Determining “What Do I Need?” is essential for well-being
  - Turning point in mindfulness-based therapy



“BETWEEN STIMULUS AND RESPONSE THERE IS A SPACE.  
IN THAT SPACE IS OUR POWER TO CHOOSE OUR RESPONSE.  
IN OUR RESPONSE LIES OUR GROWTH AND OUR FREEDOM.”

-Viktor Frankl



It is **this** moment where resilience is cultivated.  
Change is a given but **how** we respond is a choice.





# Components of Mindfulness

## Types of Practice

Single Object Awareness

Open Awareness

Acceptance &  
Compassion

## Ways to Practice

Informal

Formal

Retreat

## Types of Awareness

### Outer Focus

- Walking, Listening, Nature
- Eyes Open
- Grounding/Safety

### Inner Focus

- Body Scan, Thoughts, Feelings
- Evoke salient memories/affect
- Requires vulnerability



# Mindful Minute



# What Does Mindfulness Feel Like?



# Benefits of Mindfulness



## Increases in:

- Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, Happiness
- Resilience and Compassion
- Self-Confidence, Self-Awareness, Emotional Intelligence
- Optimism, Curiosity, Gratitude, Generosity, Flexibility
- Sustained Attention and Working Memory
- Executive Functions (time management, perseverance, organization, planning, risk awareness)
- Academic performance, grades, test scores
- Positive emotions and relationships (prosocial behavior)
- Effective and compassionate parenting
- Immune system functioning, sleep quality, energy



## Reductions in:

- Stress, Anxiety, Depression
- School Absences, Teacher Burn-Out
- Maladaptive Perfectionism and Self-Criticism
- Rumination
- Shame
- Suicidality
- Impulsivity
- Behavioral problems and acting on anger
- Physical Pain, Blood Pressure, IBS, PTSD symptoms
- Feelings of Loneliness



# Benefits of Mindfulness

## Benefits for Students

Studies find that youth benefit from learning mindfulness in terms of improved cognitive outcomes, social-emotional skills, and well being. In turn, such benefits may lead to long-term improvements in life. For example, social skills in kindergarten predict improved education, employment, crime, substance abuse and mental health outcomes in adulthood<sup>19</sup>. Research finds that youth who practice mindfulness experience develop:



### Attention & Learning Skills

- Attention & focus<sup>20</sup>
- Cognitive development<sup>21</sup>



### Social & Emotional Skills

- Behavior in school<sup>22</sup>
- Empathy & perspective taking<sup>23</sup>
- Social-skills<sup>24</sup>



### Resilience

- Emotional regulation<sup>25</sup>
- Anxiety<sup>26</sup> & stress<sup>27</sup>
- Post-traumatic symptoms<sup>28</sup>
- Depression<sup>29</sup>



# Benefits of Mindfulness

## Benefits for Educators

When teachers learn mindfulness, they not only reap personal benefits such as reduced stress and burnout<sup>15</sup> but their schools do as well. In randomized controlled trials, teachers who learned mindfulness experienced:

- **Reduced stress and burnout**<sup>15</sup>
- **Greater efficacy in doing their jobs**<sup>16</sup>
- **More emotionally supportive classrooms**<sup>17</sup>
- **Better classroom organization**<sup>18</sup>



# Benefits of Mindfulness

## Educator Results

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 90% | Report lower stress and greater self-compassion |
| 82% | Connect better with students                    |
| 80% | Deliver curriculum with more ease               |
| 77% | Are more satisfied with their jobs              |

## Student Results

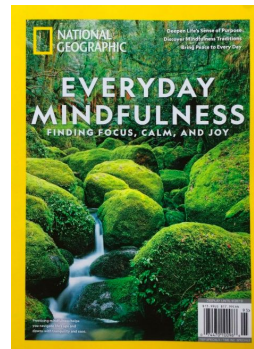
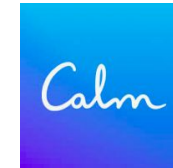
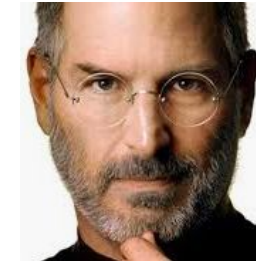
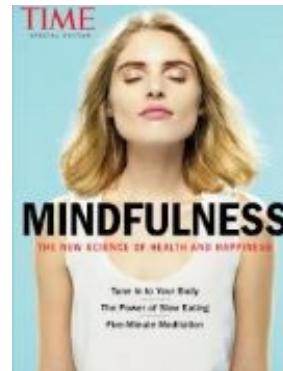
|     |                                |
|-----|--------------------------------|
| 89% | Improve emotional regulation   |
| 83% | Improve focus                  |
| 76% | Demonstrate greater compassion |
| 79% | Improve engagement             |

Summary from two types of surveys from participants who have taken our Mindfulness Fundamentals or Mindful Educator Essentials trainings. Results as reported by teachers.



# Mindfulness is Everywhere

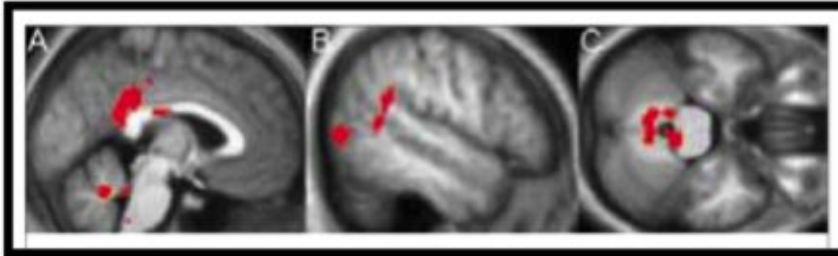
- Professional Sports
- Singers, Actors, Politicians
- Scientists, Researchers
- Schools, Corporations, Prisons, Government
- Magazines, Businesses, Books, Apps





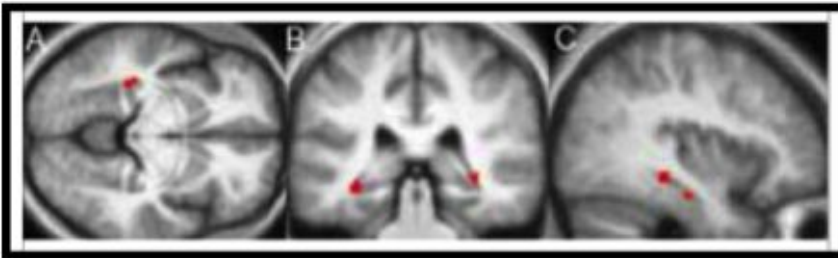
# Scientific Research

## Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)



Areas that showed increase in gray matter concentration following eight weeks of MBSR

- A: posterior cingulate cortex and cerebellum
- B: temporo-parietal junction
- C: cerebellum and brain stem



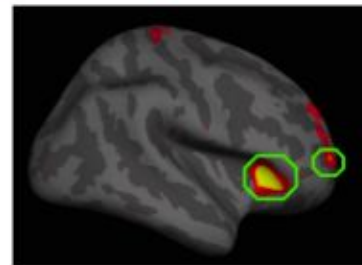
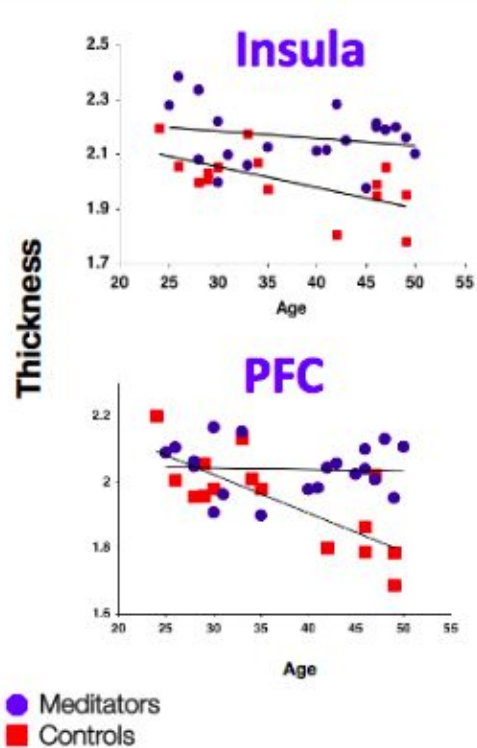
Brain scans of the hippocampus, showing the regions that were affected by meditation.

Changes in gray matter in brain regions involved in:

- Learning and memory processes
- Emotion regulation
- Self-referential processing
- Perspective taking

# Scientific Research

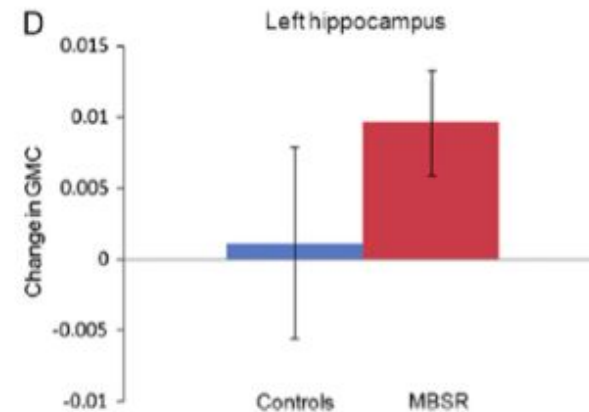
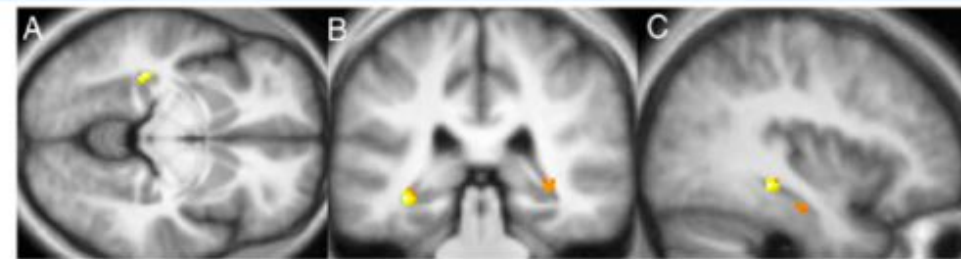
## Preservation of Cortical Thickness



These graphs show age and cortical thickness of each individual. These figures show brain areas (the insula and the prefrontal cortex (PFC)) that are thicker in practitioners of Insight Meditation than control subjects who do not meditate.

Lazar et al 2005

## Change in Hippocampal Gray Matter Concentration Following Mindfulness Training



# Scientific Research

## Integrating Mindfulness Training into K-12 Education

### Fostering the Resilience of Teachers and Students

“Research on the neurobiology of mindfulness in adults suggests that sustained mindfulness practice can enhance attentional and emotional self-regulation and promote flexibility, pointing toward significant potential benefits for both teachers and students. Early research results on three illustrative **mindfulness-based teacher training initiatives** suggest that personal training in mindfulness skills can **increase teachers' sense of well-being and teaching self-efficacy, as well as their ability to manage classroom behavior and establish and maintain supportive relationships with students.**”

“Since 2005, 14 studies of **programs that directly train students in mindfulness** have collectively demonstrated a range of cognitive, social, and psychological benefits to both elementary (six studies) and high school (eight studies) students. These include **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.**”



# Scientific Research

## 2 MIT studies with Middle Schoolers

### Study #1:

- Showed correlation between levels of mindfulness and better grades, higher test scores and fewer absences.

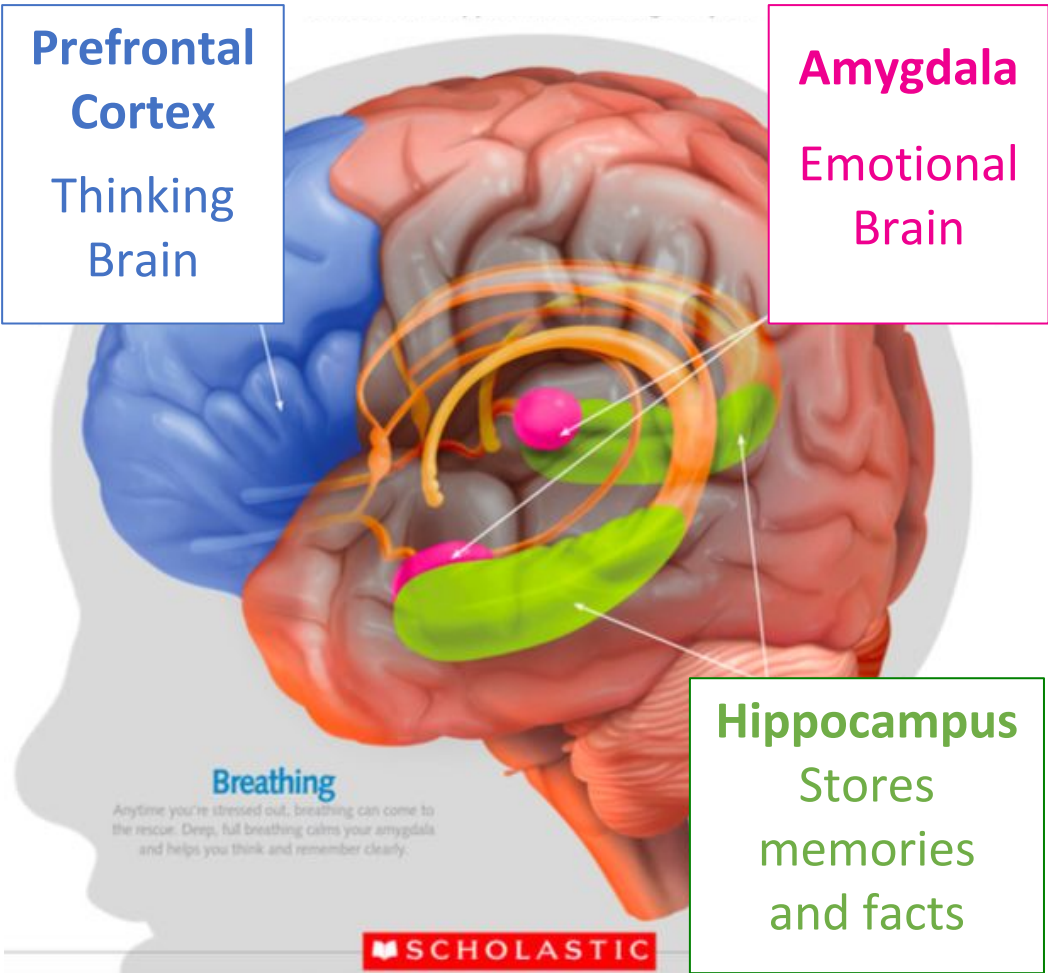
### Study #2:

- Mindfulness training correlated with better academic performance, fewer suspensions from school and less stress.
- 6<sup>th</sup> graders reported having fewer negative feelings and showed less activity in their Amygdala.



# Neuroscience of Mindfulness

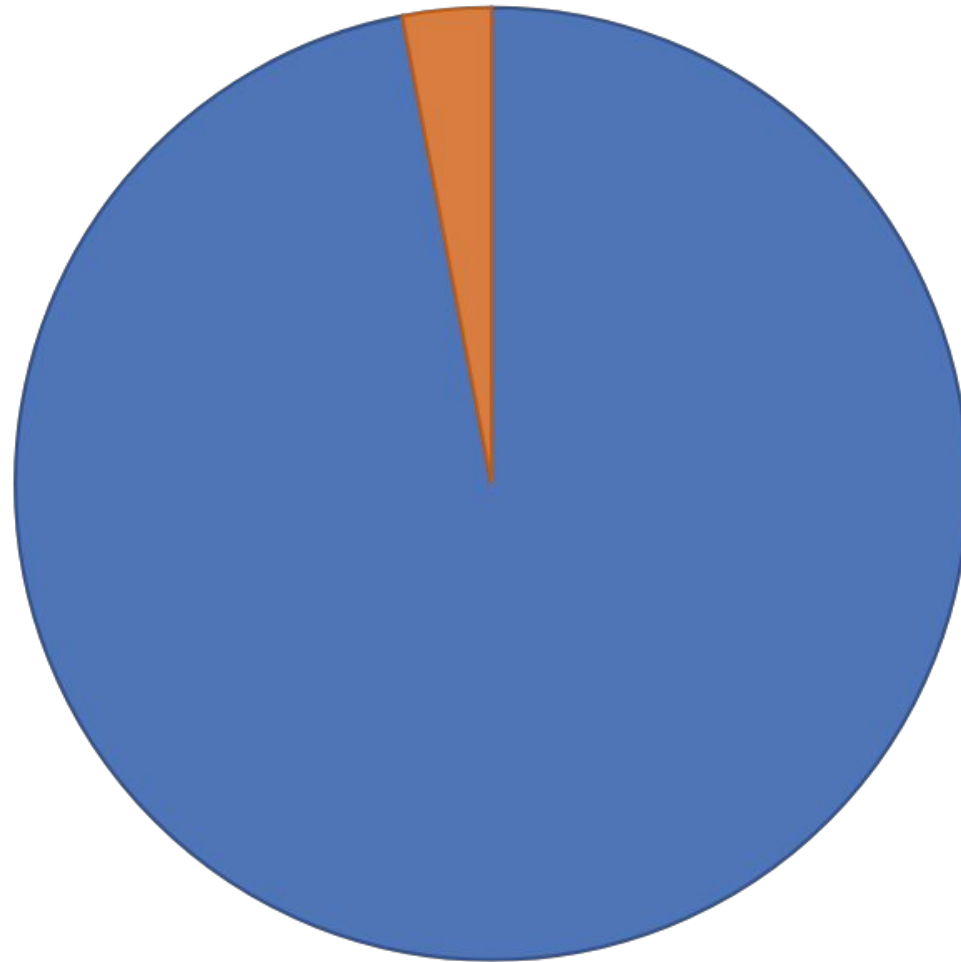
## Hand Brain



# Stress Response



# Pie Chart of Worry



- Things We Worry About
- Things We Worry About That Actually Happen



# Stress = Regress

Fight/Flight/Freeze/Forget

## Physiology of Threat

- Evolved to keep us safe from physical threat
- Negativity Bias
- Used as way of coping with emotional threats (social, academic, relationships, grief)

## BRAIN

- Amygdala (cave person) ON
- PFC (evolved brain) OFF
- Everyone/Everything a threat
- Thinking “How do I make this end?”

## BODY

- Breath quickens
- Heart rate up
- Muscles tighten
- Digestion OFF
- Immune system OFF





# Stress = Progress

Attend & Befriend

## Physiology of Mindfulness

- Compassion for self and others
- Seek meaning and connection
- Feelings of safety

## BRAIN

- Amygdala OFF (cave brain)
- PFC ON (evolved brain)
- Open-minded
- Negativity filters gone
- Respond vs. React

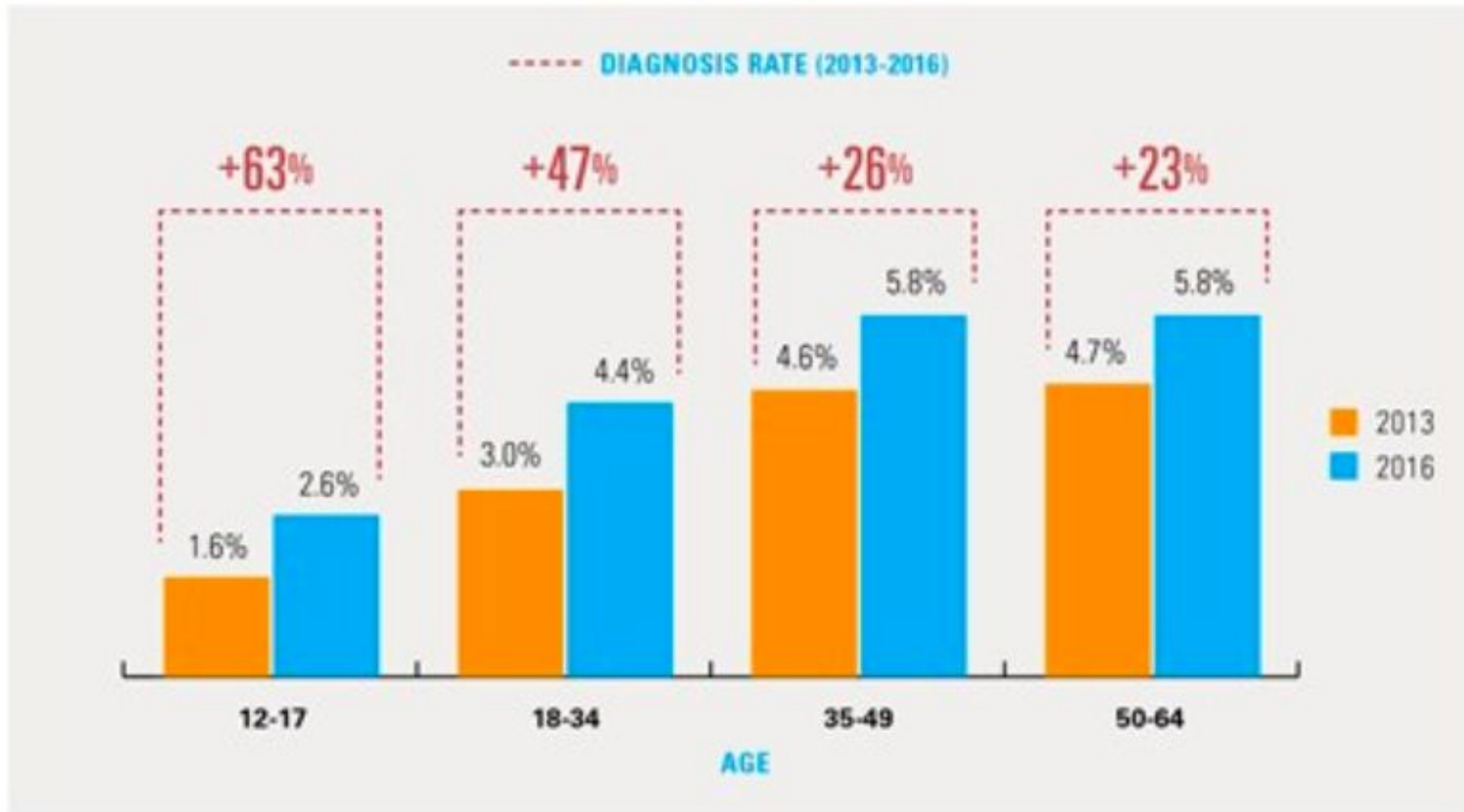
## BODY

- Breath deeper and regular
- Heart rate slows down
- Muscles relaxed
- Digestion ON
- Immune system ON



# Statistics - Depression

EXHIBIT 3: DIAGNOSIS RATE AND RATE OF CHANGE FOR MAJOR DEPRESSION BY AGE  
(2013 COMPARED TO 2016)



**Adolescents** ages 12-17 reporting symptoms of a MDE increased **52%** between 2005-2017.

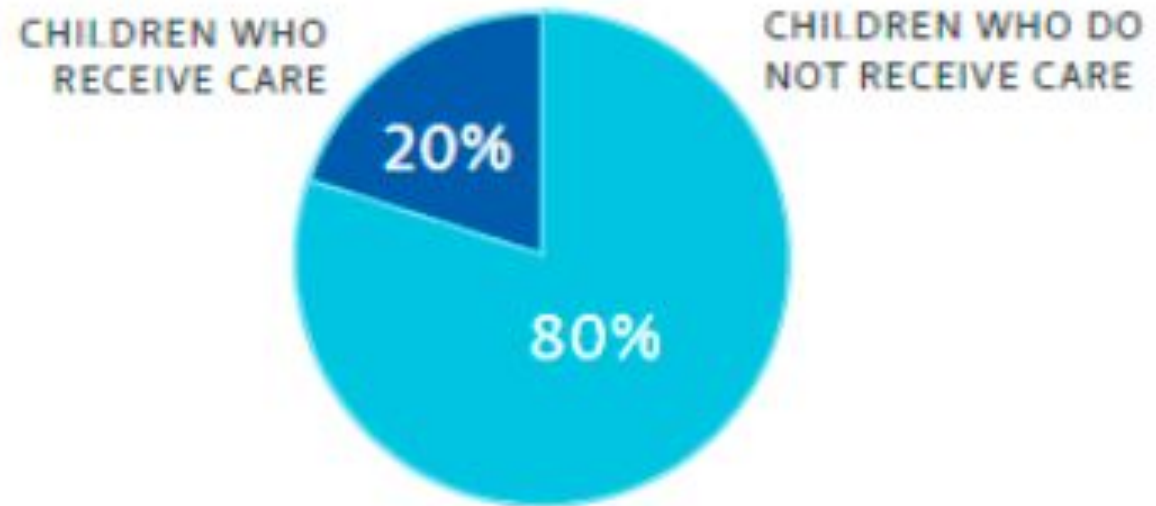
**60%**  
don't receive  
treatment



# Statistics - Anxiety

38% of teenage girls and 26% of teenage boys have an anxiety disorder

1 in 3 also have behavior problems (37.9%) and depression (32.3%)



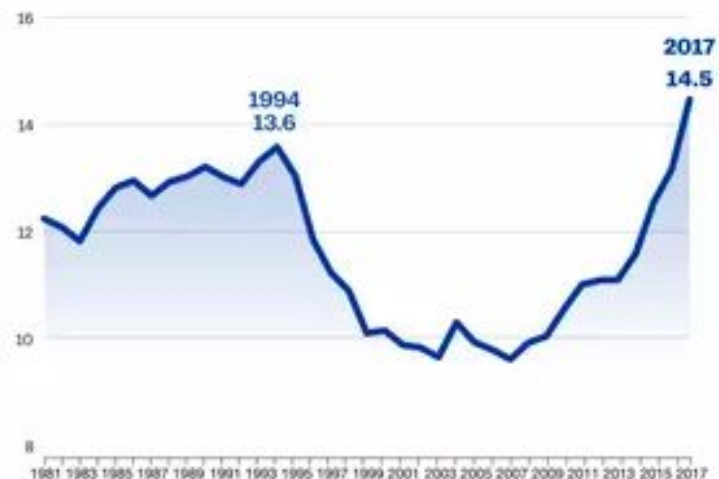
Untreated anxiety is linked to **depression**, **school failure** and a two-fold increase in risk for **substance abuse**.



# Statistics - Suicide

## US teen and young adult suicide rates are highest on record

Suicide deaths among people ages 15 to 24, per 100,000 people



Source: WISQARS/CDC

Vox

2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in ages 10-24

Ages 10-14, rate tripled over past decade

Ages 15-19, 76% increase between 2007-2017

# of suicide attempts in CA's largest school district:

255 in 2010

5,000 in 2018



1,861%  
increase

*Suicide is now considered an epidemic. "Deaths are just the tip of a sorrowful iceberg - beneath it is a rising tide of pain and emotional trauma in young people."*



## Children & young people

Mental health problems often develop early

In US, 1/6  
(aged 2–8)

1/10

children aged 5-16 have a diagnosable condition



1/2

of all mental health problems are established by the age of 14



3/4

of all mental health problems are established by the age of 24



“Our schools need to be focusing much more on mental wellness or providing kids and youth with skills to deal with the emotion dysregulation they’ll experience during adolescence.”

James Mazza, University of Washington youth suicide researcher

Source: The five year forward view for mental health, Mental Health Taskforce, 2016



# Positivity Project

## Positivity Project based on:

- VIA 24 Character Strengths (Curiosity, Bravery, Teamwork, Enthusiasm, Fairness, etc.)
- Building positive relationships - “Other People Matter”

## Need base of Mindfulness and Neuroscience for Positivity messages to be effective

- Range of emotions is natural and beneficial - key to mental health
- First develop inner strength and resilience in order to embody PP character strengths
- Disempowering - turns into failure and shame when you don't reach the ideal image of what has been taught

Kids need to be centered and focused, feel safe and feel seen before any kind of SEL learning can be effective.



# Positivity Project

Children need to learn about the mind and develop certain qualities of awareness—like openness, curiosity and care. Curiosity is not just knowing to ask questions – **it is a mind state.**

Where some of the trouble starts to arise is when people want to feel very intense or frequent happiness and they judge themselves when they don't get it."

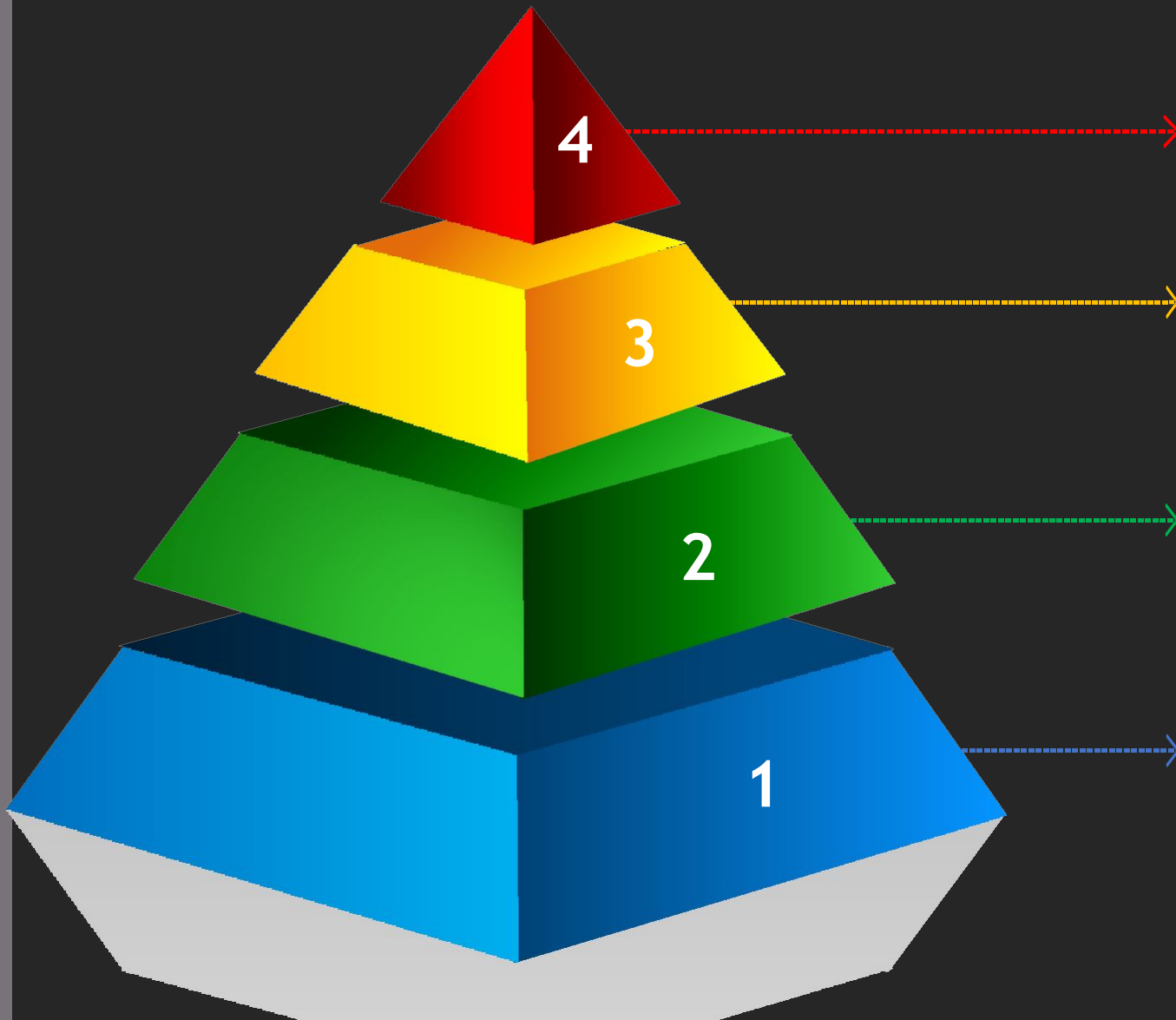
"Any time you're setting a standard for your mood, when you don't meet that standard, it's painful. You're basically adding pain on top of a lack of happiness."  
*-Brett Ford, University of Toronto*

"We can't be happy all the time, but we can be OK with whatever emotions we are having.

..there's a level of contentment that comes with that. I'm content that I'm happy. I'm content that I'm not happy. Whatever emotion is here is here."

*-Judson Brewer, Brown University*





## HAPPINESS

- Awe, Gratitude, Savoring, Wonder

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

- Positivity Project, Character Strengths
- Growth Mindset, PERMA-V, ABC/ETR

## NEUROSCIENCE

- PFC, Amygdala, Hippocampus
- Neuroplasticity, Teenage Brain

## MINDFULNESS

- Awareness of Thoughts & Emotions
- Being present without judgement
- Heartfulness/Compassion
- Respond vs. React





# Mindfulness in the Classroom

Studies show teachers make at least 1500 decisions a day - works out to 4 decisions a minute - multi-tasking can reduce productivity by 40 %

## Teachers trained in mindfulness

- Less Stress and Burn-Out, More Productivity
- Ability to distinguish between student misbehavior and stress behavior
- Better able to connect with students and create a positive learning environment
- Gives kids choice and empowerment

Study with NY teachers showed that **teachers** who had mindfulness training had more supportive classrooms and were more sensitive to the needs of students.

Students were **more engaged**, had **increased motivation** and **higher reading competency**.



# Mindfulness in the Classroom

## Key Skills for Teachers

- Teachers have to **BE** mindful, not just **DO** mindfulness.
- Use mindfulness to encourage balance and emotional regulation, not as a classroom management tool!
- Help children feel connected. Disregulation is often the result of not feeling “seen”.
- Incorporate discussions of emotions where relevant.



# Mindfulness in the Classroom

## Ideas for Implementation

- Build Mindful Minutes into transitions and school-wide to start the day
- Incorporate gratitude/kindness/heartfulness for students and staff
- Practice mindful breathing/walking/moving and body awareness
- Practice mindful test taking skills
- Greet students in an individualized way to foster connection
- Role-play conflict resolution scenarios to build skills and confidence



## Students who went through mindfulness training with Ms. Kathryn last year had these things to say...

....My favorite things you taught me was awe and seeing the beautiful nature and gratitude because it makes me happy for what I have.

Thank you for teaching me mindfulness and mindful test taking strategies. It really helped during the EOGs. My favorite part was learning about how to notice thoughts and avoiding thought-holes.

Mindfulness helped me a lot at big tests like the EOG and I enjoyed the feeling of it. It helps me calm down a lot when I am nervous.

Thank you for all you have taught us. I have used mindfulness countless times, it has helped me to calm down when I'm frustrated. I know it will be very helpful in middle school. I'm not as worried as I was on the first day of 5th grade.

Thank you for teaching me how to become aware of my emotions and how to control them, it has really helped me a lot. I remember when I was crying one day and I remember what you told me, you said name the emotion that I was feeling, then in my head I said, "I am sad." After that, I calmed down and stopped crying.





Every day in a  
hundred small  
ways our children  
ask,  
*“Do you see me?  
Do you hear me?  
Do I matter?”*  
Their behavior  
often reflects our  
response.



Children  
aren't  
**giving**  
**you** a  
hard  
time,  
They  
are  
**having**  
a hard  
time.

# Mindfulness at Home

## Embody Mindfulness

- Be aware of your own mental state and what you're projecting

## Talk about Mindfulness

- Incorporate discussions about emotions, feelings, behaviors into conversations

## Encourage healthy habits

- More sleep, time in nature and prosocial behavior. Limit digital/social media.

Educate yourself on the neuroscience of the adolescent brain



# Mindfulness at Home

Build emotional intelligence by helping your child consider their own and other people's mental states



- Tell them what is happening in **your** mental space so they have an inside view of your emotional processing - this is essential to developing their own emotional capabilities and resilience.

“Fights” are important for building skills because they require us to think through how we feel and how to resolve situations. It's the path toward resolution that is key.





# Mindfulness at Home

 **Parents can influence the way their teen's brain develops at 11-12 years old.** 

A 2014 study of 188 children in Australia compared the effect of mothers who were warm, affectionate and approving during disagreements, versus mothers who became angry and argumentative. Teens at age 16, who had affectionate moms when they were 12, showed brain changes linked to **lower rates of sadness and anxiety and greater self-control.**



# Mindfulness at Home

- **Reassurance doesn't usually work.**  
“Calm down, it'll be ok”. “You'll get over it.” “Be grateful.” “Just be positive.”

## **TOXIC POSITIVITY**

- **Validation does work**

Acknowledge your child's feelings and let them know that you think they can handle it, and you're there to help.

**NEVER...**

In the history of  
calming down

Has anyone ever  
calmed down

By being told to calm down.



# Mindfulness at Home

- **Be aware of shame.**
- **Shame goes after character, not actions.** It goes after who they are, not what they did.
- Child either agrees they are a bad person or (to keep self-esteem intact) decides parent is the bad one. Lose-lose situation.
- **Shame has lasting effects.**



Be who you  
needed  
when you  
were  
younger.



A moment of self-compassion  
can change your entire day.

A string of such moments  
can change the course  
of your life.

*-Christopher Germer*



Denise LaPorta  
dlaporta@wcpss.net  
laporta.weebly.com

Kathryn Lewellen  
<https://www.trianglemindfulness.org>  
<https://www.kathrynlewellen.com>  
(password=happykids)

