

1 Willard: Toward a New Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness

Until I began working with young people, it never occurred to me that mindfulness could be, well, *fun*. Certainly it could be pleasant, and the benefits to my own life were clear, and practices were often interesting, but rarely fun. In the decade since I began experimenting with introducing young minds to contemplative practices, I've found it has only grown more joyful, not just for the kids, but for me too. Amy Saltzman and I created this book with that very idea in mind, that mindfulness, whether we teach children or adults, should mirror life itself- playful and joyous at times, reflective at others.

If you are holding this book, you may not need much convincing that mindfulness will benefit you and the young people you serve. Certainly, there is objective scientific evidence, as seen in the thousands of studies in the past decades on the physical and psychological benefits of mindfulness for adults. Some of the data regarding the benefits of mindfulness for children and adolescents will be reviewed in this book. Then there is the compelling historical evidence; there must be some reason that these practices have existed for millennia, and not only remain with us, but are expanding into every facet of the modern world. Then there is your own experience when you greet the world with an authentic and open presence. While approaching this world with an open heart and mind may initially seem vulnerable, mindfulness builds emotional and spiritual resilience in a world that is far from the compassionate place we might like it to be.

Beyond the benefits listed above, many of us have an intuitive sense of why it is so important to pass these practices on to the younger generation, particularly in our culture right now. Many of the reasons that mindfulness for young people is gaining momentum are the same reasons as for adults. We adults spend so much of our time rushing around, doing, with no time to be. As Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "we are turning into human doings rather than human beings." Sadly, as a society we are now creating younger and younger human "doings." You don't need to spend much time with young people today to see how overbooked, overscheduled, stressed and distracted from their true experience they are. What we idealize as childhood, a time of play and ease, is shrinking away; it is now available only to younger and younger children. Young people no longer have the privilege of slowing down, investigating, and learning about their own experience and the world around them through exploration. We see this everywhere, from the impoverished inner city where kids are often raised by violent video games inside or gangs on the streets outside, to the leafy suburbs where helicopter parents frequently enter their children in the college rat race, the nanny shuttling kids from soccer practice, to SAT tutors, to piano lessons. Meanwhile, almost every child or teen I encounter is too wired from anxiety, screen stimulation, or both to sleep well enough to function inside or outside the classroom. Many of our young friends are worried not only about their personal futures, but also about the future of planet, the environment, war, poverty, racism and violence. In a culture like this, it's no surprise that third graders come to my office with panic attacks. There is little room for childhood as we knew it, and precious moments to slow down and observe are increasingly rare. This leaves kids

2 Willard: Toward a New Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness

lacking emotional intelligence and underprepared for the tasks of development and learning, let alone adulthood.

Mindfulness offers awareness and calm in the frantic and distracted modern world. Mindfulness is a practice of being. If it is “doing” anything at all, it is slowing down and single-tasking. Such practices can at first feel strange, because doing one thing at a time has become so unfamiliar to us. This runs counter to the stream of our increasingly fractured attention spans that tempt us into multitasking in spite of the evidence showing that multitasking is impossible. With this context, I invite you and the children you work with to just try single-tasking for a moment – place one finger in the center of your forehead, close your eyes, and simply place your attention on the sensations.

Notice what your forehead feels like against your finger...

Notice what your finger feels like against your forehead...

Bring awareness to the sensations...

Notice temperature...

Texture...

Pressure...

Moisture...

Can you feel your pulse?

Stay with this for a moment... and if the mind wanders, just noticing that and bringing your mind gently back.

And then open your eyes, and noticing how you feel.

If you could do this practice, then you can and already have practiced mindfulness. This exercise quickly demonstrates what happens when we begin to focus on our experience; it is simple, short and immediately demonstrates the power of slowing down and single-tasking, essentially, mindfulness. This is a great short practice for kids who may struggle with settling in and starting a task like homework; many young people may find this a little more interesting than “focus on the breath.” Others, may find their minds instantly start to wander. In that case, they have had their first lesson in the nature of mind. The nature of mind is to wander. I heard someone once say that the nature of the pancreas is to secrete insulin, and the nature of the mind to secrete thoughts. Through these practices, we are training young minds to remain still, so that our young friends can more closely examine thoughts, emotions and urges as they arise.

3 Willard: Toward a New Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness

Our culture's current relationship to technology complicates the temptation toward multitasking. Sherry Turkle, an MIT sociologist who studies our relationship to technology writes "If we don't teach kids how to be alone, we will teach them to be lonely." As a therapist, I see this over and over, not just in the record rates of mental illness among children and teens in the so-called "developed" world, but also in young adults who simply never learned how to be alone. When they finally have the independence to figure out who they are, what they want, and to make their own life decisions, they become overwhelmed with anxiety.

Sadly, our culture is teaching adults and children to be lonely, teaching them to be too busy to attend to themselves and the world around them. We teach them to deal with their uncomfortable or confusing emotions by checking *out*, and clicking through, rather than checking *in*. Even positive emotions are to be shared instantly online, rather than fully experienced. However, with mindfulness, we can offer youth something different- a way to observe their internal experience, become curious about it, tolerate it, maybe even learn from it and have fun in the process. In this way we raise happier, healthier children, teens, and young adults, and change the world for the better.

How to Use This Book:

It would be easy to pick up this book, scan the table of contents, and find a chapter that looks relevant to your passions or profession and read only that. We realize many readers will do just that. Yet we strongly encourage you to read this book from start to finish, deepening and expanding your understanding of mindfulness, absorbing the wisdom of experienced teachers in a wide range of settings, exploring various ways to work with kids from all kinds of backgrounds, in a variety of creative ways. We also strongly believe that facilitators should have depth and breadth of personal experience and techniques for teaching and leading mindfulness, as well as experience with the challenges or discomforts of practice. As adults, we encourage kids to write, participate in sports or play music. If we are skillful we encourage them to explore activities at which they excel, and others at which they may at first struggle. Challenge yourself in the same healthy way you challenge your kids; get out of your comfort zone and do some artwork even if you haven't lifted a paintbrush to paper since age eleven, learn some brain science even if you majored in music. We ask our kids on a daily basis to make themselves vulnerable- now we ask that you practice this principle yourself.

How We Put this Book Together

Though this book is thorough, it is in many ways still incomplete. There are so many more potential contributors out there who do not have chapters, and more still who contributed ideas that didn't make it into the book in formal ways, but whose voices echo in these pages. We have included many, but by no means all, of the talented and creative people pioneering the work of bring mindfulness to youth from many perspectives and through many mediums. Meanwhile, even as we

4 Willard: Toward a New Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness

assembled and edited this volume, programs proliferated and blossomed like wildflowers and the task of capturing all of it grew out from underneath us. Still others, perhaps you among them, are quietly teaching mindfulness to young people in your work or in your home. While you may not be a writer or speaker, we nonetheless encourage you to share this wisdom for the benefit of all beings, young and old. *Methods of teaching mindfulness to young people are endless, we vow to learn them all.*

This book is meant to inspire, as well as instruct- for that reason, we chose not to spent much time on the “alphabet soup” of manualized programs that are already out there, and have been written about extensively. We honor the value of such programs, and have asked many of their authors to contribute to this book .We also do not want you, dear reader to feel limited by curricula that may not apply to your setting. Rather, we want you to finish this book and wisely pick and choose what speaks uniquely to you and to the children you work with. We realize that we all work within constraints in our schools and offices, and applying a comprehensive program in its entirety is not always realistic. Thus, we offer you many tools and building blocks to create your own unique offering.

To that end, we organized the book into sections thematically. We open with chapters on bringing practices to different kinds of kids, teens and parents, in schools and other settings. From there, we turn to childhood activities that can incorporate mindfulness, and ways to bring mindfulness into a broad range of activities such as movement, sports, musical, artistic, and written expression. Finally, in the concluding chapters, we review the research documenting the benefits of offering mindfulness to youth, and the scientific explanations for how mindfulness works.

Defining Mindfulness: A bow to tradition and a nod to science

The task of defining mindfulness has grown easier over time, even a few years ago, offering a definition of mindfulness could take up a substantial portion of a lecture or workshop. These days, mindfulness has entered the mainstream vernacular. For that I believe we owe a debt to Jon Kabat-Zinn, who popularized mindfulness outside of any specific spiritual tradition. As far as definitions are concerned, the most commonly referenced adult definition of mindfulness is “paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” My co-editor Dr. Amy Saltzman offers a kid friendly definition: “Mindfulness is paying attention here and now, with kindness and curiosity, so that we can choose our behavior. “Choosing our behavior” incorporates the critical element of responding, rather than reacting, that is an essential aspect of adult mindfulness often not emphasized in the primary definition. This element is particularly important for children as thoughts and feelings lead all too frequently toward less than skillful behavior.

There are two components to mindfulness, formal practice which involves engaging in a guided, or self guided exercise, and informal practice applying what is

learned during formal practice to daily life. Some practices in this book emphasize specific aspects of mindfulness- beginner's mind, non-judgment, and intention. Some emphasize mindfulness with a specific population, others emphasize ways of incorporating mindfulness into a child's existing activities and interests. Specifically, while many people find mindfulness relaxing, the intention of mindfulness practice is not to be relaxed; rather the intention is to be aware of what is present in the moment – relaxation, tension, ease, anxiety....- Additionally, when visual images are used in mindfulness they are used to support awareness of their present moment experience, rather than diminish or alter this experience.

In secularizing mindfulness, there is risk- of watering down definitions and practices, or not honoring the historical origins of many practices. Our contributors each offer their own unique view and experience, and reasonable people, experts even, may disagree about certain definitions and distinctions. Yet, we feel it is important to distinguish mindfulness from other techniques with some similar aspects and benefits, and have asked contributors to do so.

INTENTIONS:

As we begin, I do want to offer a few words about intentions and expectations when it comes to bringing mindfulness to young people. Repeat after me: "If my kids are not meditating at home they may still be learning mindfulness." In fact, if your kids are not meditating in a therapy session or in class they may still be learning mindfulness. When we consider intentions rather than goals, we focus on the process, which we *can* influence, rather than an outcome over which we have little control. Intentions tell us not just where we are going, but where we are in the present moment, keeping the focus on the journey rather than the destination.

When we consider intentions, we also must examine our intentions for teaching, and work with our attachment to outcomes, which can be quite strong. For me, when I first thought about bringing mindfulness to young people I was a wide-eyed, naïve and frankly grandiose recent college graduate who thought he was going to change the world by teaching kids to focus on their breath. The students at the residential school where I worked had other ideas, not to mention the staff.

It's now been over a decade since I started on the path of the therapist, and bringing mindfulness to young people in practice, looks very different from how it looked in the imagination of an eager and occasionally ego-driven twenty-something. Sometimes, it looks like two people practicing together, other times like one person guiding a practice and another following, and often it looks like an adult trying to maintain and demonstrate mindfulness in the face of strong emotional currents in the room.

I'm still not enlightened, and frankly, my clients look to be a lot closer than I am. Meanwhile, I've come to accept that many kids are unlikely to want to sit still and breathe deeply for more than a few minutes. Initially they may not want to

engage the “fun” practices that this book offers. Some schools may never allow mindfulness by any name in their classrooms, whether its fear religious connotations, or fear of it disrupting their test preparation regimen. Of course many young people are eager to learn and many institutions are inspired to offer mindfulness. In situations where we meet resistance what can we do? We can practice, or as Amy says, “listen, breathe, respond”, and work with the one student who we can really influence, ourselves. Regardless of the eagerness or skepticism of our audience, we want to always build teaching on the foundation of our own practice.

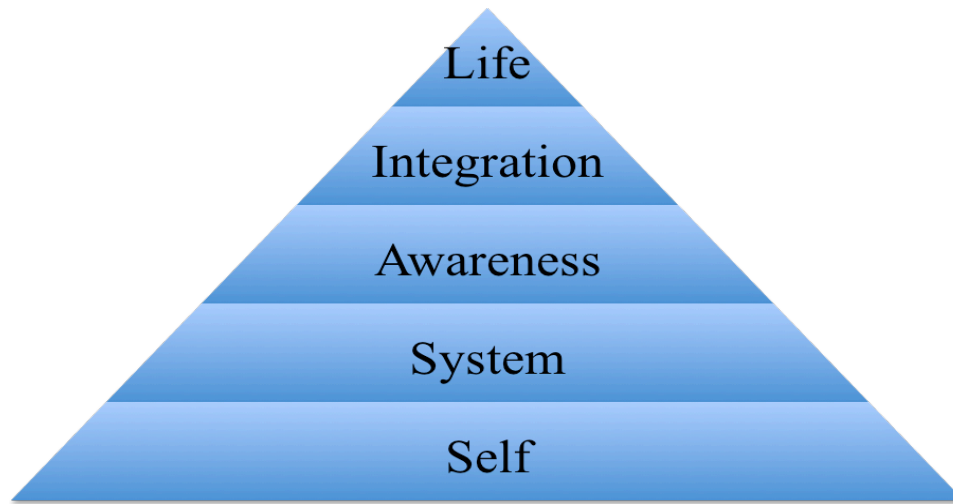
Boundaries

We all work within boundaries that describe and proscribe the limits of our professions as we engage with young people. Then there are the personal boundaries we each feel comfortable with in terms of the kids we work with, knowing that teens especially will push on these boundaries. Parents have different boundaries than teachers, who have different boundaries and professional expectations from therapists and other professionals. While we all share dedication, affection, and often love for the children we work with, an important part of our work is that we work within certain boundaries of our professional relationship to maintain everyone’s emotional safety.

We want to move ourselves and the kids out of our comfort zones, and remain well within the safety zone. If you are a therapist- know where your job ends, encourage teachers and families to integrate mindfulness into their schedules; respect their parental and professional expertise and the limits on their time. If you are a teacher, coach or another professional you may find that these practices unexpectedly open kids up emotionally- be prepared for conversations that challenge the limits of your own training, and don’t promise to keep secrets. In these cases, seek support and supervision, and be the best *teacher* you can be, while knowing when its time for a professional counselor, therapist or psychiatrist to step in. Whatever your role, know and remember your ethical and legal obligations about mandated reporting when you hear sensitive or worrisome information. And remember the common sense obligation not to stray beyond your area of expertise or training. Help and support are available. Find and use your local resources.

Stages of Teaching and Learning: Self, System, Awareness, Integration, Life

I have found it helpful to conceptualize teaching and learning mindfulness as a rough five stage process: Mindful **Self**, Mindful **System**, Mindful **Awareness** Instruction, **Informal** Mindfulness **Integration**, and Mindful **Living**. (see Diagram)



Note that the diagram get smaller toward the top- in all likelihood, more of us will practice mindfulness ourselves than will see our students live mindfully, but practicing ourselves is still teaching mindfulness. In fact, our own practice cultivates the most valuable thing we can bring to the young people in our lives, our authentic presence.

Self:

Those of us interested in bringing mindfulness to young people are frequently asked “What is the best mindfulness practice for a kid in the midst of a meltdown.” The answer to this question however, may be unexpected. The best practice for that kid is your, the caregiver’s, practice. And thus the first stage of bringing mindfulness to young people is to start with ourselves. Certainly, and with good reason, it is conventional wisdom in mindfulness circles, and emphasized and reiterated by the contributors to this volume, that you must practice what you teach. Not many among us would send a child into the ocean for swimming lessons from a lifeguard who’s only knowledge came from reruns of *Baywatch*. Mindfulness, especially the deeper practices, may take us to some beautiful places and some dark places, and the young people we bring on this inner journey need experienced guides. Furthermore, we demonstrate explicitly and implicitly, both the practices and the benefits of practice. Are we more credible if we tell kids we find mindfulness has made us more creative, calm, concentrated and compassionate, or if we *show* them these qualities through our actions and interactions? Will kids be more likely to do a practice we recite to them off a script, or one we plan, tailor for them and

then sit down and *do* with them? The effects of mindfulness are contagious- therapists who practice have patients who recover faster, teachers who practice are better able to manage respond to students, who then perform better on a number of measures, and parents who practice have happier families with better communication. There are countless reasons for us to practice, these are just a few. If you simply use the offerings in this book to deepen of your own practice, you are doing more for your students, clients and children than you could possibly imagine.

A solid practice allows us know our own strengths and teach from these. Work within your own professional purview, and be open to learning from other professionals. As a therapist I have learned about leading groups from conversations with classroom teachers than I ever did in a group therapy class. Teachers I meet are often excited to learn about ideas we in psychotherapy consider basics, such as countertransference and transference- the ways we unconsciously react to the children in our lives, and the ways we unknowingly trigger them. It has been our great privilege to learn from our skillful, wise and compassionate contributors, and to share this learning with you.

Systems:

The second level of teaching and learning mindfulness comes at the systemic or institutional level. Thich Nhat Hanh describes teaching children mindfulness as “planting seeds.” If we follow this metaphor further, we can think of families as soil, schools as sunlight, and the presence of compassionate adults in the community as rainwater and fertilizer that will create the conditions under which mindfulness practice is most likely to blossom. Yet, it is helpful to keep in mind that even with all of these in place, some seeds may blossom, and others may not. Robert Louis Stevenson says, “Don’t judge each day by the by the harvest you reaped, but by the seeds you planted.”

For that reason, we encourage you to educate and engage the larger community where you teach. This can be done by sharing some research mentioned in this book and elsewhere, or explain the science behind the beautiful images of brain scans. More powerful still is offering community members a direct experience of mindfulness. Usually, offering decision makers a personal experience with practice dispels myths and misconceptions, and directly demonstrates the power of mindfulness. The more enthusiastic your school, clinic, hospital or family, is, the more likely mindful awareness is to flourish in the rich environment of community reinforcement. We realize it can sometimes feel awkward to approach coworkers and supervisors who are unfamiliar or skeptical, and returning to your own practice can guide you and build your confidence.

There are many simple ways you can introduce mindfulness in your specific setting, such as offering workshops to staff or parents, leading sitting meditations on lunch breaks once a week, creating a mindfulness working group, study group or ideally a *practice* group with coworkers. If you are in a leadership position, open and

close staff meetings with short practices, bring mindfulness in-services to your staff, or recommend a book on mindfulness for the community to read together when there is time. Given what you know about your community you may discover other creative ways to introduce mindfulness; I've seen long lasting programs flourish when just one or two interested individuals within an organization find each other and work together. Remember, the young people you serve will benefit from almost anything which fosters a mindful community, whether they are formally taught mindfulness or not. And in moments of discouragement, compassion practices for the people in your workplace, particularly those who are dubious about mindfulness always helps.

Leading Awareness Exercises:

The next level of teaching kids mindful awareness is, well, teaching and leading kids in mindful awareness. For some of us, the transition from practicing to teaching is natural. Still, for others it can feel like a significant step from being a long-term student of mindfulness to a teacher or leader of mindfulness practices. Doubt can creep in, "*Who am I to teach mindfulness to these kids?... They'll laugh me at me... They'll think I'm a crazy old hippie.*" If you have doubts about your ability to teach, check in with a respected mindfulness teacher or mentor. If you don't have doubts, *definitely* check in and establish a relationship with a mentor or teacher. Along the way, continue to consult with mentors and supervisors. By seeking out guidance, we demonstrate humility and the importance of asking for support when we need it.

Before you teach or lead, practice in higher stakes setting; your initial audience can be a friend or colleague, a neighbor, niece or nephew, or it can be a collection of stuffed animals. Consider factors like volume, it can be easy to speak to softly as we become relaxed, speed- many of us have a tendency to speed up when nervous, and tone- too monotonous can invite sleepiness or silliness.

Eventually, from our personal practice we begin to teach mindful awareness practices, in our classroom or clinic office, from our unique professional, parental, and personal perspective, through breath awareness or creative expression, whether our clients are kindergarteners or juvenile offenders. If it makes sense, try to do the practices along with your students, although closing your eyes and fully engaging in the practice together is not always realistic or safe. The kids may or may not take these practices home at this point, and you are still giving them an experience of presence together. Intentions at this point are to offer an experience of mindful awareness. If you do that for a few of the kids in your session or your class, consider your intentions met, and know that you have planted the seeds that may blossom in time, if not on your timeline. If it feels like a strain and the kids are passively or actively resistant, remember the diagram, and consider taking a step or two back. Is there a way that you can help or engage the system to better reinforce practice? Is there anything to be learned, or do skillful ideas arise from returning to your own practice?

Integration/Informal Practices

The next stage, encouraging integration of mindfulness into daily life, offers tremendous benefits to young people. This is how life itself becomes a mindfulness practice. Still, this stage presents its own set of challenges. It can feel like another stretch of our teaching ability as we encourage kids to practice informally at home, come back to us, and integrate the insights they are beginning to have. Doubts may arise, again- *Will they do the home practice? Will they want to talk about it, or even have anything to say?* Trust the process, the practice, and yourself. Most of all, trust your students to let you know the best pace for their learning and practice. If home practice falters, don't give up on the work you are already doing in sessions or classes together, but continue on as you had. Work to create the space for vulnerability and growth but do not force it.

Offer simple home practices of short, fun, mindful moments or check-ins that are interesting, relevant, and most of all reasonable in terms of expectation. Find together, or suggest, regular opportunities for your students to practice, bringing mindful attention to daily activities like walking and eating, teaching parents or friends about mindfulness, or breaking automatic habits by, say, brushing teeth with a non-dominant hand in the morning.

Much of the best teaching and learning comes not just from leading or following a guided practice, but in the discussion and reflection after the practice. The experience of mindfulness is inherently subjective, and thus observations and reflections about it cannot be right or wrong. Encourage discussion, help students put their insights to use in the real world outside of your office or classroom, and make connections to times that they can use mindfulness when feeling stressed, angry, afraid, mindless or disconnected. Certainly ordinary homework is not most kids' favorite activity, but when the mindfulness homework is explained with as a smile as "your homework is to do nothing," some kids might appreciate it. A beneficial type of peer pressure can support more reluctant individuals in engaging in practice. Creative means of expression, including reflective writing, poetry, artwork and music may engage kids who are hesitant to participate in discussions. Know your audience and adjust accordingly; utilize the chapters in this book that address your particular kids and context.

During this stage, as mindfulness is integrated through informal practice in daily life, the group or the therapy dyad becomes more familiar with mindfulness through common insights and shared frustrations. Insights create common language we can speak across other differences. We can begin to speak of "sitting with that," "allowing it to arise and pass" and "dropping in," all of which reinforce the lessons, serve as reminders, and fertilize the practice.

Living Mindfully

The final stage, which few kids we work with will get to, especially in the short time we have with them, is that of independent *living mindfully*. This is the stage I grandiosely imagined everyone reaching with my help when ego drove my teaching in the early years. Let go of this as a goal to reach, and yet never stop aiming for it. This is the stage in which the people we work with have a fairly consistent, integrated, formal and informal practice (something even mindfulness teachers continually aspire to). Like a perfect winning season or perfect SAT scores, this goal can be a North Star to navigate by, but rarely is this the destination. And yet with practice we, and the youth we serve, can live this way more often using mindfulness to skillfully see and respond to various situations. Some days we will be more skillful than others, and large doses of self-compassion will certainly help us through it all. Ideally at this stage, an individual can use mindfulness to be with their experience and then choose a wise or skillful action. This is where young people can use their awareness to see a range of choices in a challenging moment- *Do I drink or do I walk away? Can I focus on my breath, even for a moment, or will I give up on this test? At my most compassionate, will I stand by and watch bully pick on a classmate?*

Looking at the chart you might notice that the base is larger than the tip, like the sail of a sailboat. The top, representing *living mindfully* is small, while the base of *Self* and *System* are large. Though the parts are different sizes, they are all important and interrelated. Like a sailboat, we want to move toward a mindful life under natural power. In our journeys, we, and the children in our lives, will encounter sunny days, storms and doldrums, yet we can learn to skillfully navigate through them. We can use mindfulness to see the weather approaching on the horizon, and to skillfully respond to it, maintaining our equanimity and balance (at least most of the time) with whatever comes our way. And at some point, we the adult let go, hand over the ropes and tiller, so that the children we work with can learn to sail for themselves, internalizing the lessons of mindfulness, staying afloat and balanced in the face of whatever arises, and perhaps bringing a few others along for the ride. After all, as the saying goes, "calm seas never a skilled sailor made."

Body Awareness: The First Foundation

To illustrate these five stages of teaching and learning in the model, I will offer the example of mindfulness of the body. Mindfulness of the body is the first foundation of mindfulness, and one of the first practices taught in Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction program. On one level we can use the body as an early warning system, an emotional barometer, and on another as something that we can use to respond to and soothe a difficult emotion or feeling. Some mindfulness teachers speak of turning the mind into an ally- the same idea holds for our bodies. Body-based awareness practices give us information, and the tools to respond. Our own body scans and check-ins tell us about what is happening within us, in the present moment. Our bodies can even indicate what we *think* may be coming on a moment-to-moment basis. Mindfulness can help us feel our bodies tighten or loosen, notice our heart skip a beat, or tune in to other pre-cognitive signals that our bodies send about our emotions. Still other body practices serve as a

12 Willard: Toward a New Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness

vehicle for healing, calming or relaxation- through breathing, awareness, yoga and other body-based mindfulness exercises, we can respond to emotional situations.

Within a **system**, our bodies continue to give us information- when I worked in a particularly overcrowded, underfunded inner city school, my body was signaling burnout to me well before the thought reached my mind. I often slept poorly the nights before I went in, had stomach aches the mornings I went in, and my muscles, fists especially, would clench as I entered the building and roamed the halls. Bringing mindfulness to my body, I was able to sense the effect the job was having on me even before it reached my consciousness. Body awareness allowed me care for my body and overall well-being by taking action, such as walking mindfully from the subway to the school, eating more healthfully on those days, and nurturing my body after work by getting to the gym or yoga classes. Because I was burnt out I didn't particularly look forward to going to work, but by attending to my bodies messages, and responding accordingly the physical and mental burnout of the work began to fade.

My calmer demeanor in the chaotic school **system** attracted the attention of a few teachers who knew of my interest in meditation and mindfulness, and wanted to bring more awareness to the students through yoga and simple mindfulness. It also was noticed by students, who gravitated toward the safety of any staff member who demonstrated authentic presence and compassion. I now had an in, and was able to collaborate with interested teachers on creating some programming in the classroom for the students, setting the stage to create a more mindful system in which we could effectively teach basic mindful **awareness** to the students. Together, we taught them and ourselves basic body awareness through body scans, identifying emotions in the body through other short practices. These can include a scan of parts of the body like CALM- chest, arms, legs, and mind, or an check in about one's needs like HALT are you feeling Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired, and can you skillfully respond to these?

Over time true **integration** began to occur. We encouraged students to notice how their body felt in different contexts, as they experienced or even just imagined different emotional states. We invited them to bring their reflections back to the larger group, or classroom for discussion, or to individual therapy where they could write, draw, or talk about the experience. When I work one on one as a therapist, I tend to steer away from longer traditional body scans, and find other ways to encourage kids to regularly find and identify emotions, thoughts and triggers in their bodies, for example, by just taking turns naming our own physical experiences.

Did the majority of students reach a consistent level of practicing mindfulness independently, and truly **living** their practice? I don't know, as I eventually went on to work elsewhere. What I do know is that the seeds were planted for these teens to use their bodies as a way to check in on their physical, mental and emotional health. From there, they learned to mindfully respond to and *use* their bodies proactively through diaphragmatic breathing, yoga stretching, mindful walking and movement.

Your Role in Bringing Mindfulness to Youth

Take a moment and consider a child in your life, perhaps the one who inspired you to learn about teaching mindfulness. How might it make the most sense to begin? At what level will introducing mindfulness have the most impact for this child? Perhaps it's teaching a few short take-home practices to them, or perhaps it's teaching mindfulness to their family, to create a mindful home, that will help this child the most. Maybe it's leading a mindful movement exercise in a classroom, or maybe the best way mindfulness can help this child is by deepening your own practice, so that you can be more compassionate and authentically present for them. Bringing mindfulness to others means far more than reading a meditation script or leading an exercise. Make a *practice* of considering all the possible ways mindfulness can help the child, beyond you directly instructing them.

So we encourage you let go of outcomes and expectations about what teaching mindfulness looks like, and open and return to your intentions. Consider these stages as loose guides, they are not rigid, and the reality is that we and our students bounce between and among them at any given time. Wherever we and our students fall on the spectrum, from our own independent practice to our students' independent practice, mindfulness is being taught, and mindfulness is being learned. Over time, we recognize and develop our own strengths with teaching. Perhaps the best way we can teach is by example, or maybe we are best at system-wide interventions. Others may have the charisma to inspire home practice, and still others may lead through creative expression, inspired by chapters in this book. Find the approaches that feel true to you, honor your strengths, and open to sharing mindfulness in new ways.

Your best work may not be at all the stages, you may be most effective at one or a few of them. When I offer workshops I often joke that I spend more time teaching adults how to teach kids than I do teaching kids, but perhaps that is where I'm best and most needed right now. Someone else may pick up the lesson after you and inspire the children to deepen their practice, or the kids may find their own path. It is not entirely, or always, up to you. Rest in a job well done, with faith in your own work and that another teacher will come along when the time is right. Be happy, be grateful, whether today you are the one plant the seeds, or today you appreciate the blossoms.

Most importantly, the best parenting advice is the same as the best mindfulness advice. *Never give up*. Don't give up on trying to bring mindfulness to the people in your life, especially your own mindful presence. Don't give up on your own practice. And don't give up on the youth you serve. Because what better way than mindfulness to teach resilience in an often uncompassionate and complicated world? Difficulties will inevitably arise no matter how hard we try to protect and shield our kids, they will get hurt, if they haven't been already. So while we can't always protect them we can empower them to protect and heal themselves. Make the practice of bringing mindfulness to kids your practice. Just as in your own

14 Willard: Toward a New Model of Teaching and Learning Mindfulness

meditation practice, some days will be full of joy and inspiration, and other days you may feel frustration or boredom, but stick with the practice of teaching in the face of whatever arises, learn from the challenges, and keep moving forward. So with the simple goal of changing the world, one moment, one child, at a time, we offer you this book.