PART I

Introduction to the Mindfulness Matters Program for Children and Adolescents

Welcome to the *Mindfulness Matters* program, an adaptable, modular approach to teaching mindfulness to children and teens. This program is designed to be implemented in a variety of settings and schools, and for kids and teens ages 8–18 with a broad range of backgrounds and concerns, including mental health, learning, emotional, or behavioral issues with which they may be struggling.

Who Are We?

Randye and Chris are both licensed clinical psychologists. We are clinicians, educators, and researchers who are experienced at working with the youth populations for whom this book is intended. We both have our own long-standing mindfulness practices, which support our basic approach to teaching mindfulness. We have studied most of the popular or effective mindfulness programs in our search to build a user-friendly, practical, and versatile mindfulness resource for you and the unique kids with whom you work. And we have implemented all the activities we describe with kids of varying ages, from different backgrounds, with different needs, and in different settings. One thing we have discovered in our work as researcher-practitioners is that although dozens of excellent programs abound, a "one-size-fits-all" manual might well be impossible, especially when we work in so many diverse settings. So, the *Mindfulness Matters* program was developed with a clear focus on adaptability and flexibility of implementation.

What Is the Purpose of This Book?

Most of us live in worlds that are full of competing demands, never-ending challenges, and stress. These circumstances inevitably affect not only ourselves, but also the children and teens with whom we interact. One key purpose of the *Mindfulness Matters* activities is to

teach, experientially, how paying attention in a particular way (i.e., intentionally, in the present moment, and without judgment), can change how we relate to ourselves and to our own experiences. Developing mindfulness helps kids (and ourselves) become more aware of both pleasant and unpleasant experiences that often slip by unnoticed or unappreciated. Bringing greater awareness to pleasant experiences often increases the wonderful richness of those experiences. Bringing greater awareness to unpleasant experiences can help us respond to our kids, and help our kids to respond to themselves and each other, with greater understanding and skill.

For both children and adolescents, learning to practice mindfulness is a powerful tool with which to develop essential social–emotional competencies. These competencies include the qualities of self-awareness, responsibility, personal initiative, planning and implementation of goal-directed behaviors, inhibition of inappropriate behaviors, conscious decision making, empathic communications, compassion for others, and interpersonal skills in conflict resolution. Children and adolescents who are socially and emotionally competent are more likely to be successful in a wide range of areas, including family and peer relationships, academics, sports, and other extracurricular activities (Mak, Whittingham, Cunnington, & Boyd, 2017). Furthermore, these skills lay the foundation for mindful self-management of emotions and behaviors throughout life.

Embedded in the practice of mindfulness are opportunities to observe feelings as they arise and tolerate them just as they are. As kids improve their ability to stay present with distressing and uncomfortable feelings, they are less inclined to react impulsively or hastily to emotional triggers. Tolerance and acceptance of distressing thoughts and emotions are cornerstones of our mindfulness and social–emotional literacy approach. Staying present with distress is a skill that lets us see where we are right now, and lets us see our choices—before we even begin to choose adaptive and constructive ways to respond. As the psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) once noted, "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change" (p. 17). So we teach staying present long enough to see choices and recognize our freedoms. Trying vainly to control what happens to us is not freedom. Freedom is making conscious choices in how we respond to the events in our lives.

For Whom Was This Book Written?

This book was written for a few audiences: clinically trained mental health providers working in outpatient clinics, residential facilities, inpatient settings, and for those in the welfare and juvenile justice systems. It is also for those who are not clinically trained and who work with kids and teens in nonclinical environments such as schools, community recreation centers, or libraries. Parents who would like to bring mindfulness into the home and to work with their own children may also find this book helpful.

Because you are each working in different settings with different children who have different issues, we decided to base the structure of this book less on a traditional treatment manual or class curriculum format, and make it more like the "choose your own adventure" books that many of us may remember from childhood. Why? Because the developmental paths of childhood and certainly child- or adolescent-focused treatments are rarely as linear and predictable as the developmental theories that some of us learned in graduate school

might suggest. The paths are unpredictable, take surprising twists and turns along the way, and often get stuck or end up in a different place than we might have expected. Developmental trajectories are often based not only on the genes and environment that were given to us, but also on the adventures that we choose, or that are chosen for us as, we grow and develop. As far as we know, there aren't any other mindfulness programs out there like this one, which made the writing and makes the reading of this book both challenging and somewhat unconventional.

How to Use This Book

The *Mindfulness Matters* program offers instruction and practice in the essential skill of being present with each moment of our lives. Over the course of the program, children and teens learn to bring intentional awareness to their thoughts, feelings, body sensations, speech, and behaviors as they move through their daily lives. We do encourage you to read this entire book cover to cover, soaking in all of the practices, theory, research, and rationales as you go. However, in the 21st-century lives of extremely busy teachers and clinicians, we understand that many folks might just read the introductory sections and then flip to the activities or the pathway that has the most relevance for their immediate needs. The book will work just fine if you choose to use it that way. It really is okay if you don't read the whole book! But by reading all of the material, you may develop a greater depth of understanding and be more comfortable with this approach, particularly if you are not already experienced with integrating mindfulness and positive psychology practices into your work with young people.

One benefit that we built into the *Mindfulness Matters* program is "guided and informed customization." Some lucky educators, clinicians, parents, and other professionals have unlimited time and no financial restraints; others have kids for a handful of 30-minute sessions every other week; still others are restricted to working in large classrooms with a wide variety of kids and what feels like too many educational demands on their time already. This variability makes a "one-size-fits-all" approach effectively impossible. For that reason, in Part II we offer detailed descriptions of conducting broadly applicable activities, along with suggested uses and adaptations to make depending on the age of the kids; your setting and time constraints, the unique stressors, and the developmental and diagnostic presentations in your group. We have included nearly 60 activities, presented in a similar format and structure, which generally follow the outline shown in Table I.1.

The first activities we describe teach basic settling and attending skills, which include mindful breathing, mindful body, and mindful movement activities. The next section provides kids with opportunities to become more observant and mindful of perceptual–sensory experiences that are often performed with little awareness such as mindful eating, seeing, and hearing. Through these activities, children learn to notice the differences between mindfully observing their moment-by-moment experiences and letting them pass by unnoticed. They experience what happens when they react emotionally or judgmentally versus responding with attention, thoughtfulness, and compassion. Later activities are designed to guide kids in applying these mindfulness skills to relate more adeptly to their own thoughts and emotions, while also cultivating and expanding their social–emotional awareness.

TABLE I.1. General Structure of Each Mindfulness Activity

Time Requirement

- Explains time required or recommended for the activity and the follow-up inquiry.
- Most activities aim to take from less than 5 minutes up to 30 minutes.

Themes

Themes include the focus and underlying goals of each activity.

Background

This narrative section goes into greater depth about the rationale and offers a brief description of the activity.

Materials Needed

This section describes any materials needed to conduct the activity.

Vocabulary for Grades K–3 and for Grades 4–8

Developmentally appropriate vocabulary helps children understand the practices and offers a way to reinforce the experience of mindfulness and related practices through shared language related to mindfulness, mental health, and social–emotional concepts, between and among kids and adults.

Mindfulness Activity

- This section includes instructions for conducting the activity.
- Many activities include sample scripts, sample dialogues, and examples of charts.

Challenges and Tips

- This section offers tips for overcoming challenges that may arise with a particular activity, both for the kids practicing and for the facilitator leading the activity.
- Some sections include sample responses from kids and how to work with them.

Suggested Practice Activities

Practice activities are recommendations for activities that kids can practice (in class and/or at home), and additional "homework" activities they can do related to the aim of that activity.

Additional Discussion Questions for Children/Teens

- This section includes a few general inquiry questions.
- Note that each pathway includes more specific, pathway-relevant discussion questions to promote insight for that particular group of children or teens.

Variations

- Variations of the activities are provided that can further deepen the children's practices and facilitate their engagement by using creative alternatives on the same theme.
- Some activities include age-appropriate adaptations.

In Part III, you can choose to work within one of five suggested "pathways" through the activities that we described in Part II. We begin with a brief introduction to the five pathways to mindfulness. Each pathway is focused on a specific problem area.

- Pathway through Stress and Anxiety
- Pathway through Depression
- Pathway through Attention Problems

- Pathway through Problems of Emotion Regulation and Impulsive Behaviors
- Pathway through Trauma, Abuse, and Neglect

Within each pathway, we emphasize certain aspects of mindfulness that might yield more clinical or educational benefits for addressing commonly seen problems. We offer tips for avoiding clinical complications and identify specific contraindications along the way. We describe adaptations for different settings and age groups. Nevertheless, you may wish to, or need to, do more customization with your treatment or with a specific group that is beyond our recommendations. This is perfectly okay. Ultimately, you will know your kids, classrooms, and each group's dynamics far better than we do, and we believe that you should trust your own experiences of mindfulness, using compassion and good judgment as your guide. Of course, knowing when you need to seek consultation is also an important component of good judgment.

Creating these pathways was one of the most enjoyable and yet most challenging aspects of writing this book. The *Mindfulness Matters* approach consists of core practices and parent-, teacher-, and clinician-friendly resources for adults to implement with children at home, in classrooms, and in clinics. Whereas there is abundant and growing research on the use of mindfulness practices with adults from a variety of clinical and nonclinical populations, high-quality research on children and teens is less advanced. Research with juveniles is harder to conduct than research with adults. In part, this is due to the unique challenges of obtaining institutional review board approval to conduct research with minors, particularly in the context of entire classrooms or schools. There are also design and logistic challenges of matching sample populations, recruiting, screening, and consenting participants, selecting control interventions and randomizing participants, and perhaps most challenging with kids and their parents, consistent scheduling. The assessment of mindfulness in children also has special challenges, which are beyond the scope of this book. For those who may be interested in this topic, we suggest several reviews that discuss issues associated with assessment of mindfulness in adults (Baer, Walsh, Lykins, & Didonna, 2009; Grossman, 2008) and in youth (Goodman, Madni, & Semple, 2017, 2019).

The research community has not yet begun to investigate the effectiveness of individual mindfulness activities for particular disorders, albeit programmatic research is progressing (Part IV offers an overview of current research on mindfulness with kids and teens). For that reason, the choice of specific activities for each pathway was informed by the small amount of available research in combination with our own experience, clinical training and judgment, review of the existing clinical literature, and consultation with other experienced clinicians, mindfulness researchers, and child development experts. For each of the five pathways, we consulted with experts who specialize in that problem area. We also consulted with clinicians who are knowledgeable about cultural translations of mindfulness.

Each pathway explanation follows a similar structure. We begin with an overview of the problem area or syndrome and indications that might suggest whether or not your group will be appropriate for that pathway. We examine the ways symptoms manifest uniquely in children at different developmental stages, and how the symptoms "look" behaviorally in school, at home, and in other contexts, as well as how a child might describe them. We explain the theoretical and research rationale underlying each pathway; discuss the particular challenges of working with each population, gaining buy-in and engagement, and dealing with common

forms of resistance in sessions and out; and we provide tips for teaching and working with each population. Suggested inquiry and discussion questions along with a specific emphasis for each group are also covered. We highlight possible contraindications or significant adaptations that may need to be made with certain populations. We then lay out each pathway with a recommended sequence of activities:

- Introductory Activities
- Core Activities
- Intermediate Development Activities
- Advanced Deepening Activities
- Maintenance, Generalization, and Concluding Activities

Getting Started

Composing Your Group

If you are a classroom teacher, you likely have little or no flexibility regarding the size or composition of your group. We do suggest, however that you consider the specific issues or dynamics that may be present in your classroom. These may include the overall number of kids in your classroom, their ages, the gender ratio, the school environment (e.g., inner city, urban, or rural), and a wide variety of intellectual, emotional, or behavioral issues that may be present. The more individual attention a child or teen requires, the more important it will be to have a support person or co-facilitator in the room. If you are a clinician, you may have more flexibility in constructing your groups. In clinic settings, groups are generally smaller than in classrooms because the kids often need more individual attention. You may consider creating groups of similar ages (no more than 1–2 years apart), similar stages of development, or similar clinical diagnoses or problem areas. This selective grouping lets you provide more focused guidance than can occur in more heterogeneous groups. When the group is composed entirely of kids who require a high degree of individual attention (e.g., those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] or conduct problems), we recommend keeping the group size small (no more than seven or eight kids) and, when possible, including another clinician as co-facilitator. Another factor to consider is if the kids already know each other or if they meeting for the first time. If the latter, you will probably need to spend more time on icebreaker activities to create a sense of safety and to cultivate cohesion in the group.

Group Logistics

We recognize that scheduling groups with children, especially in a school setting, always presents challenges. We have included an estimated amount of time needed for each activity, but not for each "session." A teacher may have only 10– 15 minutes to do one or two activities at a time, whereas a clinician or after-school program facilitator may have 45 or 50 minutes, and can complete four or five activities in one "sitting." Instead of thinking of the *Mindfulness Matters* program as a structured curriculum, we encourage you to be creative, while broadly following the basic structure of introduction, core activities, intermediate

development activities, advanced deepening activities, and then the final maintenance, generalization, and concluding activities. How much time you spend in each area should fit into the logistics of the time and space you have available and the needs of the group with whom you are working. We encourage you to modify any of the activities or pathways necessary to meet the needs of your group members. When each level of practice has been suitably mastered, then move on to the next level. Many of the activities described in Part II include a number of variations for repeated practice, adaptations for different age groups, and suggested home practices that help the kids integrate mindfulness into their daily lives, outside of your group time with them.

Where to Conduct Your Group

A busy and loud school may not seem like the ideal environment in which to cultivate mindfulness, but we all have to work with what we've been given. If you can keep your environment relatively quiet and free of distractions, so much the better for learning anything, not just mindfulness. Elementary-age students do well sitting in a circle, either on chairs or on the floor using cushions or mats. Middle school kids might be better off seated in rows to reduce social distraction. When creating a seating arrangement for teens in high school, we recommend that you base seating decisions on the personalities and dynamics of the group. School desks or chairs are fine for sitting; you don't need any special mats or cushions, unless you would like to use them.

Basic Supplies

There are actually very few "essential" supplies needed to conduct the *Mindfulness Matters* program. When a particular activity requires additional materials, they are listed at the beginning of the activity. None of these are expensive—most are common household or classroom items that are free or readily accessible. A few activities will require some advance preparation. For example, the mindful drawing activities require drawing supplies and paper, and the activities involving mindfulness of smell require a few small jars and an assortment of scents. If you would like to seat your group on the floor rather than in chairs, providing small cushions or pillows is helpful. Yoga mats or bath towels can be used for activities such as the body scan, which can be done sitting up or lying down.

The only item that we do recommend you purchase is a bell or chime of some sort. We use mindfulness bells to start and end each activity. Very quickly, the sound of the bell becomes an invitation to let go of whatever the mind might be occupied with and bring attention to whatever is happening in that moment. At the beginning of each group, we invite anyone who feels the desire to become more present in that moment to ring the bell for him- or herself. We also encourage participation by inviting individual group members to ring the bells to begin and end an activity. This can be a useful technique for engaging an unruly or disruptive child. Bells come in many different forms. Some readily accessible choices include chimes, rain sticks, a classic handheld or hanging bell, or a small percussion musical instrument, such as a triangle or xylophone. If you are working in a school, we recommend bells or chimes that do not denote any spiritual or religious significance.

Suggestions for Creating a Safer Space

We suggest that guidelines and "rules" be kept to a minimum to allow enthusiastic and creative mindfulness practices to flourish. The most important benefit to using guidelines is that they create a sense of physical and emotional safety for all and a positive environment conducive to learning. To that end, teaching a mindfulness class will probably have similar rules and expectations as other classes: students are to speak quietly and respectfully to you and their peers, to participate, and not to disrupt the group. However, even when in a mandatory classroom or therapy group, children should be still free to participate or not. We sometimes joke that as long as kids are not disruptive, they are welcome to daydream or plan their summer vacation while we practice—although they are less likely to get much out of the class if they do!

The main difference in a mindfulness class in contrast to a regular academic class is that the inquiries and discussions can get quite personal, which sometimes may feel strange or even unsafe, especially for vulnerable kids. Adult facilitators may feel out of their element if children begin to disclose deeply personal or disturbing information. Guidelines about not sharing what group members have talked about outside of the group might be in order, even when working in classroom settings. Occasional reminders that practices are "invitational," not mandatory, can also help. As kids get older, invite them to create guidelines for their group themselves—thereby increasing their sense of empowerment and ownership of the group and its norms. Of course, the exception to confidentiality involves our role as mandated reporters. Anything a child discloses to you that concerns his or her safety or well-being, or that of others, should always be followed up on with the appropriate staff at your school, or with child protective services as mandated in your state.

Safety and Risk Management

We know that not everyone reading and using this manual will be a mental health clinician. You may be a teacher, recreation worker, parent, or even a librarian who runs children's groups. If you do work with groups of clinically diagnosed kids (e.g., in a therapeutic school or in the juvenile justice system), we strongly recommend that you co-facilitate or work in close consultation with a mental health professional. Have a safety plan and contact information handy, particularly if you have concerns about any child or teen in your group. About one in five children have a diagnosable mental disorder (Merikangas et al., 2010). So, even as a mainstream classroom teacher, you are almost certain to have some kids who are struggling with depression, anxiety, or other emotional or behavioral problems.

You may find students opening up emotionally during the inquiry process. This probably means that you are doing a great job of creating a wholesome space in which kids feel emotionally safe enough to share. At the same time, particular settings or aspects of certain group dynamics may make the group a relatively unsafe space to share deep-rooted thoughts or fears, intense emotions, or past traumatic experiences. Kids may not always be the best judge of whether their secrets are safe in their peers' hands. We suggest talking about the importance of confidentiality at the initial session. Everyone in the group should agree that "what happens and is said in mindfulness class, stays in mindfulness class." Of course, as an adult professional who works with children, you most likely also have a duty to protect, and

you probably are mandated to report abuse, neglect, or other safety issues. If you haven't worked with children in a while, we highly recommend you refresh your knowledge of your jurisdiction's requirements as they relate to minor children.

You may encounter children who are at risk of bullying or victimization from other kids, or alternatively those who may be bullying, aggressive, or threatening violence to others. You may learn about illicit alcohol or substance use (particularly with the older kids). You may also encounter kids who are at risk to themselves in terms of self-injurious behaviors or suicidal behaviors. These too should be dealt with according to your professional ethical standards, the protocols of your jurisdiction, the policies at your place of work, and the needs of the child. We have included a section on suicide risk management in the Pathway through Depression, and we strongly recommend you read this section even if the kids you work with don't appear to be depressed or suicidal.

Facilitating the Postactivity Inquiries and Discussions

To be an effective mindfulness facilitator, you need to embody mindfulness in the way that you present each activity and in how you guide the inquiries and respond to children during the discussions that follow. Just imagine trying to learn mindfulness from a tense, indifferent, frustrated, or burned-out teacher—it would be a less-than-ideal experience. Conveying an attitude of open curiosity and acceptance about child experiences will be more helpful than trying to provide explanations about their experiences. One way to facilitate curiosity and acceptance is to ask open-ended questions. It is also helpful to *invite* participation rather than calling on a specific child to respond and catching him or her off guard or unwilling to share. We model freedom to choose by inviting children to respond to our questions. This can sometimes be challenging for classroom teachers who are used to calling on children to elicit a single correct answer. We encourage you to practice taking off your "teacher hat" during the mindfulness activities, and also to share your own observations about the practice. Kids with language delays or English language learners can be given the freedom to write or brainstorm their ideas before having to share verbally. Moreover, not every response needs to be verbal or written. Communications can be powerful when conveyed through pictures, songs, or dance and other movements. The main purpose of the postactivity inquiries is to help kids connect their experiential wisdom to intellectual and practical understandings. The general structure of each inquiry follows three lines:

1. "*What was this experience like for you?*" Invite the kids to describe (without judging) the thoughts, emotions, and body sensations that they experienced during the activity. A feelings chart or vocabulary prompts might be helpful here too. We practice looking closely in order to better see what is actually happening inside us in each moment.
2. "*How was this experience different from what you normally do?*" We invite exploration of what might change when we bring mindful awareness to our activities. Often, the kids discover that the experience is richer, more interesting, more pleasant, or even less unpleasant than other, similar experiences.
3. "*How might you practice what you've just learned in everyday life?*" Throughout the program, we emphasize the "everydayness" of mindfulness practices. Learning and

practicing in the group will not be helpful unless the knowledge and skills are integrated into their daily lives.

After many of the activities described in Part II, we offer suggested questions and guidance for conducting the inquiry. Some general questions to consider after a practice include:

- "What did you notice? In your mind? In your emotions? In your body?"
- "What felt familiar or unfamiliar?"
- "What surprised you?"
- "What parts of the experience were pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?"
- "How did you decide if you liked or didn't like something?"
- "What were you curious about?"
- "What did you learn?"
- "When might it be helpful to you to use that practice?"
- "What urges or impulses did you notice?"
- "What changed . . . before, during, and after the activity?"

You might also ask kids to describe or reflect on their experiences using Daniel Siegel and Tina Bryson's (2012) acronym SIFT: "What did you notice in Sensations, Images, Feelings and Thoughts?" (p. 105). You can also use the mindful SEAT acronym to elicit responses by asking, "What Sensations, Emotions, Awareness, and Thoughts were present during that activity?" Speak slowly and clearly, with warmth and confidence, as you guide the practices. If you are truly present, calm, and centered, and express nonjudgmental curiosity and interest, the kids will be right with you.

Home Practice

Social norms can help facilitate compliance with home practice, as it does for school homework. Asking at the start of each class for examples of when or how kids used or didn't use their skills encourages them to learn from peers who are practicing and experiencing benefits. You might seed your inquiry with guiding questions such as "Who used mindfulness skills to help with homework, with stress, or with managing emotions with your family or friends or during sports or other activities?" Initially, you might choose to ask kids to write down their experiences if they are feeling shy, and perhaps share a few anonymous responses with the rest of the class. As group members become more comfortable with each other, you can encourage them to share their favorite mindfulness practices with family members or friends, and then ask about their experiences of sharing mindfulness with others in their lives.

Gaining Buy-In from Kids and Teens

Teaching mindfulness may feel unfamiliar, and new facilitators often think "Where do I begin?" or "How will I get my students to engage and focus?" Remember, though, that this is the question of teachers from time immemorial, and we usually manage to get kids to sit still and learn subjects like history or math that may not be so exciting to them. Mindfulness is no

different; it's just another new topic—new to both teachers and students, and one with which kids may not have any familiarity or understanding. For that reason, we suggest building on their current experiences and understandings by asking questions such as "When have you ever felt peaceful?" "What are the times when you feel the most present?" Conversely, you might ask about moments of "absent-mindedness" when they weren't present and missed out on something, forgot what they were reading or watching, or when something unexpected occurred. Questions like this help kids identify familiar experiences that, in turn, help them relate to concepts of mindfulness. With younger kids, mindfulness might be considered a superpower, and truly, staying calm in the face of frustrating, sad, triggering, or other emotional situations *is* a superpower. You might connect mindfulness with a child's existing passion for sports, music, arts, or socializing, exploring how mindfulness can make these activities more enjoyable, help the child to be more present with the experience, and even improve his or her skillfulness with that activity.

There are dozens of mindfulness role models in sports, pop culture, the arts, and even the business and political worlds. Movies such as *Kung Fu Panda* and *Avatar* feature characters that gain power and peace of mind through meditation. The Jedi Knights of *Star Wars* consistently preach mindfulness to each other, specifically as a way to foster compassion and restraint. Mindfulness is also totally Gucci (which, for those of us who aren't Gucci, means very cool, at least at the time of the writing of this book!). Celebrity meditators include Emma Watson, Kendrick Lamar, Jerry Seinfeld, Goldie Hawn, Miley Cyrus, Angelina Jolie, Richard Gere, Arnold Schwarzenegger, RZA and other members of the Wu-Tang Clan, and even Kourtney Kardashian. Mindfulness is seriously macho—it's being used to train police officers, first responders, and U.S. Army and Marine Corps personnel. Famous athletes such as Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, and Derek Jeter practice mindfulness. Entire sports teams are now incorporating mindfulness into their trainings. Examples include the Los Angeles Lakers, Chicago Bulls, and Seattle Seahawks. A simple Internet search, often accompanied by quotes about mindfulness or short videos featuring celebrities and potential role models, can offer motivation to engage in mindfulness practices.

Mindfulness can be presented as at least a partial solution to a particular problem or challenge, to improve attention or sleep, or to reduce stress and anxiety. Many kids of all ages are excited by the research and brain science of mindfulness. Still others can engage using a (half-serious) competitive approach. "Last year's class could do 15 whole minutes of silent breathing by the end of the year. There's no way you guys could do that . . . or could you?" Group projects can also engage kids in learning and sharing mindfulness with each other, not just sit and listen to us adults prattle on at them. These can include preparing an assembly for parents, doing a presentation to a class on the brain science of mindfulness, a group of senior students offering to lead mindfulness groups for the younger students, or the AV club creating videos to teach mindfulness.

You will almost inevitably face resistance from some proportion of your students when you teach mindfulness, but remember that this is true when teaching any topic. There are some basic tips for handling resistance that we are happy to share. First, we might examine our own role as we face resistance, in terms of the conditions we may be creating that lead to resistance. How much time have we spent building trust with these kids? Are we an insider or outsider? How can we gain their trust through other staff or through their peers? Next, are we pushing the kids too hard, or not hard enough? Resistance may come in the form of

acting out, giggling, or being disruptive during the practice activities. Passive resistance may be present as well—like simply ignoring the practice instructions, or not showing up at all. As clinicians, we believe all behaviors mean something. Behaviors can even be diagnostic. What might the "resistant" behavior tell you about what the child really needs or is trying to get via that behavior? The acceptance of peers? To avoid something uncomfortable or challenging physically or emotionally? As the well-known psychologist Robert Leahy (2001) has suggested, there is no such thing as a resistant patient—only a therapist who doesn't get it. How can we help kids get their needs met in other ways, or maybe set those needs aside during the group? Can the "resistant" kid be engaged on some other level, perhaps as a timekeeper, bell ringer, or even as co-facilitator, if doing the practice feels too difficult at that moment?

Gaining Buy-In from Administrators and Organizations

Between the two of us, we've consulted in well over 100 schools, hospitals, clinics, and other institutions, with varying degrees of success and buy-in from the administrators and organizations. Based on our experiences and conversations with others, we've collected a few basic tips to help you gain organizational buy-in. Some degree of buy-in from parents, educators, administrators, and other stakeholders is necessary to work effectively and also to avoid feeling undermined by certain systems and organizational cultures. The first question many organizational representatives will ask (just like when engaging kids) is "What's in it for us?" We have learned that taking time to learn the issues and needs of that particular agency, school, or district is never wasted. Presenting generic or "canned" information that doesn't address the needs of that organization is rarely a good strategy.

People are influenced by facts. For that reason, we suggest including research on the effectiveness of mindfulness in improving classroom behaviors, academic performance, or mental health issues in your initial presentations. Up-to-date research (much of which is presented in Part IV of this book), particularly neuroscience research, certainly helps bolster your credibility. The American Mindfulness Research Association (AMRA) maintains an online library of research information on their website at *http://goamra.org*. People are also influenced by their own personal experiences, and so we always include at least one short mindfulness practice in all of our presentations. We often discuss the impact of stress and burnout on teachers and clinicians, as well as the effects it has on the academic performance and behaviors of the kids with whom they're working. You might ask your audience to imagine being with "un-stressed-out" kids—and the ways in which the absence of stress might positively influence their achievements and behaviors.

Common objections are generally related to the costs—in time and money—associated with bringing mindfulness training into a school or clinic. These costs can include the fees required to hire trained facilitators; the time and expense of training teachers or clinical staff; the cost of the necessary space and supplies; and what may be most important to address, the amount of time that the program takes when multiple other demands may already feel overwhelming for a time- and cash-strapped organization. There is no one "right" way to address these concerns, but we often suggest starting with something very short and simple—like inviting teachers to practice 3 minutes of mindful breathing with their kids at the beginning of each class for just 1 week and observing what might change.

We generally don't push a "hard sell" when offering an overview of mindfulness to schools; instead, we simply suggest that mindfulness could be one more tool for educators to use if it resonates with them. As an outsider to the organization, this is particularly important in winning over skeptical staff who may have already had dozens of "miracle programs" thrown at them over the years. Another challenge may arise when outside facilitators begin mindfulness work within a school or clinic, and there are already staff members doing this work. Your mere presence may trigger them to feel challenged or undermined. We strongly encourage you to seek out and partner with those staff members—to establish yourself as a supporter and collaborator, rather than as a competitor.

The Importance of Cultivating Your Own Practice

As a mindfulness facilitator, it is essential to remain mindfully aware of what's going on with the kids throughout the class—checking in with them and observing their body language, tone of voice, breath rate, and nonverbal cues to monitor their engagement and involvement. Our own authenticity is key as well; not promising what mindfulness may deliver to the kids, only suggesting possibilities; embodying mindfulness ourselves through our choice of words, our attitudes, and our presence; and showing the kids we have no hidden motives.

Our own practice is key to all of this; when we practice cultivating presence, nonreactivity, and nonjudgment, we model the qualities that mindfulness fosters. We also model mindfulness as a means of embodying and expressing our authentic selves. Mindfulness is not about raising expectations; on the contrary, it's about removing expectations altogether and learning to accept ourselves and our lives just as they are. It's about freeing ourselves from the tyranny of our own thoughts and emotions, which in turn frees us to live a more fulfilling life.

What's more, mindfulness and compassion, as is the case for other mood states, appear to be contagious. This supports our belief that the best way to teach mindfulness is to *practice* mindfulness. As noted earlier, imagine trying to teach mindfulness to kids when you are tense and stressed out, or trying to learn mindfulness from a tense and anxious teacher. It's not a pretty sight! When we cultivate our own practice, we also teach from our personal experiences. We can speak to the challenges and successes that we ourselves have discovered. Depending on your relationship with the kids and your own personal level of comfort, you may wish to be more or less explicit about your personal experiences of mindfulness. In any case, it is our own practice that helps us maintain emotional equanimity, to be nonreactive in response to kids who are expressing their own distress, to be compassionate in the face of resistance, to be flexible and adaptable when the unexpected inevitably arises, and to be as fully present as we can be—for the benefit of the kids we serve.

Guilford Publications
370 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
212-431-9800
800-365-7006
www.guilford.com