



# Tips and Tools



## Tips and Tools for Developing a Mindfulness Practice for Teachers

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If you're thinking of implementing Kind Campus self-awareness exercises, perhaps you already have your own mindfulness practice, and want to share the practice and benefits with students in your classroom. Perhaps you've heard good things about mindfulness in the classroom, and want to try them out to see if they can help your students to be more focused or well-behaved, but you haven't yet tried these practices yourself. And maybe you're still skeptical about this but willing to explore it. Let's check it out together, exploring the benefits and reasons that you'll want to engage in your own practice.

### Why Should I Develop a Mindfulness Practice?

If you heard that there is a skill you could develop and strengthen over time, that was proven to support your ability to focus, manage emotions, be less stressed, and feel that you can handle difficult situations with greater ease, would you be interested? What if you also learned that it didn't involve any special equipment, costs, or lengthy education? Even more, what if you heard that this skill is one you already have the potential for, and only need to practice it consistently to see powerful results?

Mindfulness practices are backed by research that provides evidence to show:

- Improved attention skills
- Decreased symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression
- Help in supporting the way we regulate our emotions and cultivate positive mental states
- Enhanced skills needed for interpersonal relationships and increased empathy

As a teacher, you have a passion to shape future generations. The most effective teachers are those who are able to provide safe, emotionally supportive relationships with students, and who foster a sense of belonging and care for all students in their classrooms. This is hard to sustain consistently over time without tools and support. We're all human, and we all are vulnerable to moments of frustration and feeling overwhelmed. And for many in the profession who don't have adequate support from the organization or peers, and/or proper self-care, burnout can happen. Developing a mindfulness practice is an act of self-kindness, which also leads to a greater ability to hold the seat of care for students in your classroom.

## How to Start a Practice

Here are some ideas for how you can begin a mindfulness practice:

- Explore meditation groups or sessions - there are many offered in community organizations and spaces (try searching online for “meditation group” and your town or city to find a local group).
- Explore short meditations through apps such as Insight Timer, HeadSpace, or Buddify.
- Take a walk in nature and begin to notice what you’re seeing, hearing, and feeling. This practice is called “walking meditation” and is a great way to explore mindfulness.
- Notice your breath. Try to take deeper, full breaths and then allow the breath to return to its natural rhythm and simply observe the sensations, bringing awareness back to the breath as soon as you notice the mind has wandered (try using one of the apps mentioned above for meditation guidance). Don’t judge yourself if your mind wanders, which is a likely outcome! Practice gentle matter-of-factness and acknowledge that this is a new skill that you are building.
- Keep a journal of your experiences. Begin to observe how you’re feeling, what you’re sensing, and what comes up in your practice without judging it. Just simply observe and see what arises.
- Explore, play, and suspend expectations! Just as you’ll approach self-awareness with your students from a place of curiosity and play, approach your own practice in that same way to best model this approach for your students. You’re learning more about yourself as a wonderful, unique being - be playful, and open!

## Why is it important for me to have a practice in order to teach about kindness effectively?

In teaching self-awareness, you’re asking students to begin to explore their inner world of feelings, sensations, and reactions to their own emotions and to others and their emotions. Building self-awareness is a way to develop habits and patterns of greater empathy, understanding, and sensitivity to the world around us. This requires a great deal of scaffolding, emotional safety, and presence of mind on the part of the teacher. Your ability to be present, to guide students through these exercises, and to answer questions that will arise about their experiences from a place of experience and trust is paramount to the process of students being willing and able to develop these skills for themselves.

As you know, students are always watching adults. Always. Our behaviors, our attitudes, and the way we respond - even in subtle ways - to them, to their peers and classmates, and to other teachers and adults are being viewed and perceived with great interpretation about what is fair, how authentic we are, and the degree to which we can be trusted with what we say and do. By cultivating our own practices, we’re modeling that we’re learning along with our students, and we are better equipped to support questions, concerns, and fears that may come up as students practice these skills themselves.

Consider this: how effective was the teaching “do as I say, not as I do” for you as a child? As you think of the adults during your childhood who had the greatest positive impact, what were their qualities? What was it that felt supportive and safe? Our self-awareness practice can help us tap into these qualities within ourselves, to strengthen them and make them more available to our students consistently, not only when they are achieving or well-behaved, but also when they are struggling and we feel challenged by their behavior.

Lastly, enjoy your practice! Keep an open mind, and embrace a spirit of exploration and play. With deep gratitude for the work you do, and your commitment to our youth.

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