

## Overview

**Welcome** to the *Peace of Mind Curriculum for Middle School*. This curriculum teaches secular mindfulness practices, basic information about neuroscience, and an effective conflict resolution method. Over the course of the year, students will learn and practice ways to help them cope with difficult emotions and challenging situations that will be useful in school and in life.

In addition to helping students develop skills to help themselves and to become peacemakers, the *Peace of Mind Core Curriculum for Middle School* equips and inspires students to address unkindness and unfairness when they encounter it at school or with friends, and to feel confident in their capacity to contribute to making the world a better place. This curriculum includes challenging, important lessons on noticing and addressing stereotypes, recognizing and addressing implicit bias, understanding and standing up to bullying behavior, and applying all of these skills to making positive social change.

Teaching the ***Peace of Mind Curriculum*** weekly over the course of the whole school year and integrating elements of *Peace of Mind* into every day creates positive change in a classroom and, over time, in a school's climate.



For an overview of the philosophy, history and goals of the **Peace of Mind Program**, please watch the short video introduction by Peace Teacher and curriculum author Linda Ryden on our website: [TeachPeaceofMind.org/videos/](https://TeachPeaceofMind.org/videos/).

### Curriculum Structure

The ***Peace of Mind Core Curriculum for Middle School*** includes four critical, integrated components:

- **Mindfulness**
- **Brain Science**
- **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and Conflict Resolution**
- **Applying Mindfulness for Social Change**

Every lesson begins with mindfulness practice and ends with Peace Partner practice. Brain science, social emotional learning (SEL), conflict resolution and social justice lessons are particularly effective because they are built upon this foundation.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to our thoughts, our feelings, and what is happening around us, and putting some space between our reactions and our response. Mindfulness practice in this curriculum might include quietly sitting to focus on breath awareness, practicing mindful listening, noticing where our thoughts are, noticing how our bodies feel when we have different emotions, engaging in active movement, and more.

Mindfulness practice is becoming more prevalent in schools because research shows that mindfulness training can help to enhance attention and focus (Zenner et al., 2014; Zoogman et al. 2015), improve self-control and emotion regulation (Metz et al., 2013), and improve overall social emotional competence including increased empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional control, and less peer-rated aggression (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2014; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010).

### Brain Science

Teaching basic neuroscience as it relates to emotions and mindfulness is a key ingredient in ***Peace of Mind's*** approach. ***Peace of Mind*** offers students a basic understanding of the roles of the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the prefrontal cortex in reacting and responding to stimuli. This knowledge helps students understand how and why we get angry, for example, and how and why practicing mindfulness can help us calm down enough to make a decision that moves us closer to the outcome we'd like to have. This knowledge can be liberating for our students.

### Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is the process through which we learn to manage emotions; set and achieve positive goals; feel and show empathy for others; establish and manage positive relationships; and make responsible decisions. (*CASEL.org*)

A growing body of research shows that tending to students' social and emotional needs has positive benefits. A meta-analysis of 213 school-based SEL programs with over 270,000 students found that students who received SEL instruction, compared to a control group, showed significantly

improved social and emotional skills, attitudes and behavior, and an 11 percent gain in academic achievement. (Durlak et al., 2011).

Peace of Mind's SEL components include: kindness practice in every lesson through Peace Partner and lessons on empathy, gratitude practice, building connection, apologizing and solving conflicts peacefully.

**Peace of Mind** helps to create a kind and inclusive school culture. Creating a kinder, more positive school climate and dedicating class time for social emotional learning are two important and evidence-based approaches to bullying prevention (Bradshaw, 2015; O'Brennan & Bradshaw, 2013).

Peace of Mind's goals and lesson structure are aligned with the 5 Core Competencies identified by the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

**Peace of Mind teaches mindfulness-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL).** We know that mindfulness and SEL both have positive benefits for our students and our schools. But here's what's really exciting: we have learned in over a decade of doing this work that integrating mindfulness with SEL is an even more transformative approach than either one on its own.

*Ultimately, when taught and learned together, mindfulness and SEL have the potential to transform our communities and our world with the former cultivating the tendencies for compassion and ethical ways of living and the latter teaching the skills to make that happen.*

— Linda Lantieri, Senior Program Advisor for CASEL and Director of The Inner Resilience Program

## Social Justice

Middle Schoolers care about the world around them and want to make a positive difference in their communities. When they are able to draw on their own mindfulness practice, an understanding of their brains, social emotional skills and the tools to solve conflicts peacefully as a foundation for social justice work, the results can be so powerful.

As educators, we have the capacity to support our students' work for a more equitable world. Dena Simmons, Director of Education at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, says:

*"Teaching for an antiracist future starts with us, the educators. An antiracist educator actively works to dismantle the structures, policies, institutions, and systems that create barriers and perpetuate race-based inequities for people of color. Educating students to see and respect the humanity and dignity of all people should be a national imperative, especially if we want to heal—and have a future—as a nation."*

Our students and schools need what you have to give.

## Lesson Themes

The 32 weekly lessons in this Curriculum are divided into 6 units and a closing lesson focused in the following areas:

### Unit 1: Community Building and Introduction to Mindfulness (4 lessons)

The first four lessons focus on building community through icebreakers, community agreements and the introduction of Peace Partners. Watching and discussing the video "Under Pressure" provides context for Peace of Mind class. Foundational mindfulness practices are introduced.

### Unit 2: Your Body, Your Mind, Your Feelings (5 lessons)

In this unit, we explore the embodiment of feelings and the nature of our thoughts. When we notice where feelings begin in our bodies, it gives us a head-start on gaining control over how we respond to them. When we learn to notice when our thoughts "change channel," we gain control over where we are focusing our attention.

### Unit 3: Gratitude and the Negativity Bias (2 lessons)

In this unit, we explore our brain's tendency to focus on the negative and how we can balance this tendency with gratitude practice.

### Unit 4: Your Brain and Your Thoughts (3 lessons)

In this unit, we review the functions and inter-relatedness of three key parts of our brains: the amygdala, the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex. We put this knowledge to work in written reflection, role plays and skits.

### Unit 5: Conflict Resolution (5 lessons)

In this unit, we introduce the concept of the Conflict Escalator, explore what makes a good apology, and meet the Conflict CAT, a method for

resolving conflicts. Through discussion, skits and games, we apply what we've been learning about mindfulness, kindness, empathy, and brain science to the challenge of resolving conflicts peacefully.

### **Unit 6: Mindfulness for Social Justice (12 lessons)**

In this unit, we explore how mindfulness practices, particularly those that help us notice our thoughts, help us to address stereotypes and implicit bias. We focus on the need for compassion for ourselves and others, and students begin to explore how they can use what they've been learning to address societal challenges.

### **Wrapping it Up**

The final lesson of the year invites students to reflect on what they have learned and how they can put their skills to work.

***NOTE:** You might choose to follow up on the final class with a service project that allows students to put their skills to work. While this is beyond the scope of this curriculum, we hope you'll consider it! You'll find one example of such a project after the final lesson.*

## **Lesson Sequence**

Lessons are designed to be taught in the order in which they are presented. Studies in our pilot schools suggest that teachers and students perceive the most benefit when the curriculum order is followed.

The very first lesson you teach about mindfulness is actually the first step toward peaceful conflict resolution in your classroom. From Lesson 1, you will be building the foundation that will enable students to solve conflicts with empathy, compassion and skill. Every lesson is a critical piece of the foundation for successful conflict resolution. Without the foundation, the conflict resolution lessons themselves will be less effective.

However, we know that in some cases, it may make sense to you to change the order of lessons to meet your students' needs or to coincide with events in your school community. Please do what you think best meets the needs of your class

For example, if you are seeing a great deal of conflict among your students in the beginning of the year and would like to get to those lessons more quickly, here is an alternative sequence: Teach all of Unit 1 and then go

directly to Unit 4, Brain Science and then Unit 5, Conflict Resolution. After Unit 5, you can return to Units 2 and 3, and then move to Unit 6.

Most of the lessons bear repeating. If you feel your class needs more practice in a certain area, and you have the time, feel free to repeat the lesson, or segment of the lesson, that feels helpful.

## **Lesson Framework**

Each lesson includes the following components:

- **Mindfulness and Mindfulness Leader**

You may choose to have one Mindful Leader or a pair of Mindful Leaders lead the Mindfulness practice in each class. The role of Mindful Leader(s) will pass to new students each week. Students reinforce their own skills when they lead practices for their peers. Leadership of this part of class may be particularly beneficial for students who do not have leadership opportunities in other areas of their lives.

- **Lesson**

Weekly lessons are designed to be engaging and challenging with a balance of listening, discussion, and activity. Some lessons focus primarily on introducing a new mindfulness practice; most start with a mindfulness practice as the foundation for topics described above.

- **Optional Role-plays and Skits**

Role-plays and skits are included throughout the curriculum to help students practice and embody the skills and tools they are learning. Some middle schoolers really enjoy these acting opportunities and some do not. Please rely on your own judgment about whether or not to include role plays in skits for your students. We have offered other alternatives that can be done instead or in addition.

- **Peace Partners**

Not only do Peace Partners give students a way to practice kindness, they are an essential tool for building a positive and inclusive classroom and school community. The Peace Partner practice at the end of each lesson may include:

- Sharing what Partners did for each other in the previous week
- Assignment of new Peace partners

- The Peace Partner Challenge: an activity that invites students to find out as much as they can about each other in 90 seconds.
- Sharing what Partners learned during the Challenge.

You may not need or have time for all of these components in every class.

**NOTE:** *In some lessons, you'll find guidance to assign your new Peace Partners before the end of class in order to have new Partners work together on pair activities.*

## Materials Needed

The only things you will definitely need for this curriculum are a means to show videos to your class and paper and writing materials for some lessons.

**Optional** materials include:

- a journal for each student. These may be used for written reflection in any lesson.
- a bell or a chime
- collage materials for two lessons
- *Peace of Mind* classroom resources
  - **Ways to Practice Mindfulness** - classroom poster that reminds students of the practices they've learned, and helps them to choose a practice of their own as needed.
  - **Peace of Mind Anchor Charts** for the Brain and Conflict Toolbox.
  - **The Conflict CAT Game** used in the Conflict Resolution section
  - Please visit [TeachPeaceofMind.org/shop/](https://TeachPeaceofMind.org/shop/) for a full range of classroom resources.

## Teacher Guidance

The first paragraph of each lesson offers you an overview of the lesson, and some include recommended reading to prepare to teach.

All of the lessons offer suggested scripts for you. They are there if you need them. Please use them as a support, but feel free to teach the lesson in your own words in the way that feels most natural to you.

Unit 6, our unit on Mindfulness for Social Justice, invites you and your students into challenging conversations about identity, bias, race, and standing up for what you believe in. You will find resources to help you prepare to teach this section in the Social Justice Resource Section at the end of the curriculum and in the introduction to many of the lessons in Unit 6. *We recommend giving yourself plenty of time to explore these resources before you reach Lesson 20.*

## Still have questions?

After reading the introductory material here, you may still feel that you would like some support preparing to teach *Peace of Mind*. You will find additional resources at [TeachPeaceofMind.org/for-Educators](https://TeachPeaceofMind.org/for-Educators).

