

# IV. Preparing to Teach Fourth and Fifth Grade

## Introducing this Curriculum

The key message we recommend sharing with 4th and 5th graders is: These practices are tools to help you manage your own emotions, understand and control your reactions, build stronger friendships, and solve conflicts skillfully. *This is for you.*

If you are teaching students who have had **the *Peace of Mind Core Curriculum for Grades 3-5***, or are already familiar with mindfulness, here are a few suggestions to keep in mind as you introduce this curriculum to your students:



- Recognize your students' experience, and introduce this as a more advanced year of practice.
- Invite experienced students to help new students.
- Point out what's the same: Mindfulness Helper, Kindness Pals, some mindfulness practices, some lesson topics.
- Point out what's new: topics such as the embodiment of feelings, addressing bullying and bias; new mindfulness practices and games; all new skits, all new stories; the possibility for deeper discussions thanks to their own growth and development.
- Remind students that this practice is their own. The more they invest, the more powerful it can be for them.

## Expectations

We are not looking for perfection or final mastery from our students, but rather engagement and growth in the practice of mindfulness and kindness to others and ourselves.

Keep your expectations reasonable. Sometimes the kid who is sitting with his eyes wide open, legs jiggling, and fiddling with a pencil—but not talking—during mindfulness practice is doing his very best and is benefiting greatly from the effort. The exercises in this curriculum are for the benefit of the children and, as long as it is not preventing other children from practicing, a little moving around is ok.

## Engagement

There may be students in your classroom who are reluctant to engage fully in mindfulness practice because they think it isn't cool or have some sort of negative attitude toward mindfulness. If this is the case, it can be very helpful to relate mindfulness to sports. Many sports teams and sports stars such as the Seattle Seahawks, Kobe Bryant, and LeBron James practice mindfulness regularly to enhance their performance. Talking about how mindfulness practice can help us play better by helping us focus, control our temper, be more of a team player, connect our minds and bodies, and calm our nerves can be very influential to student athletes.

This can also be true of music, dance, and just about anything else that your students are interested in. Finding the relevance can be important, especially for the older elementary students.

You might remind your students that they always have a choice about whether to practice mindfulness or not. It is a personal practice. If they choose not to, that is fine, as long as they do not prevent their peers from practicing. Encourage them to stay with the group and just sit quietly and think about whatever they want to think about while the others are doing the mindfulness practice. Often knowing that they have the freedom to opt out will allow kids to opt in.

You might like to focus on the power these practices give us to take care of big emotions, to focus our attention, to decide how to respond to a given situation. These are skills for life that allow your students to learn to control themselves, so others don't need to step in to control them.

When children practice these tools, they also have what they need to build stronger, more positive relationships with friends and family. They can be peace teachers in the way that they act and respond to situations and people around them.

Finally, it may help to consider that you are planting and nurturing seeds that will mature at different times – perhaps long after the school year is over.

## Trauma Sensitive Teaching

One important area of growth in our field is in the area of trauma-sensitive mindfulness teaching. While mindfulness can be tremendously helpful for most people, for some, certain practices may trigger traumatic responses. These responses might range from discomfort and twitchiness to intense memories of a traumatic event. As teachers, our role is to notice our children's responses, to remind them that they always have a choice about whether to do a certain practice or not, to offer an alternative, to be flexible, and to seek help when we feel out of our depth.

Here are a few guidelines that we hope will be helpful to you in your teaching:

- Remember, offering choice is essential, and can be especially helpful in engaging older elementary students.
- Be flexible with points of focus, invite open or closed eyes, allow some flexibility with body position and movement, as long as adaptations for one child do not compromise the ability of other children to practice.
- Reassure children they can stop a practice anytime, or choose another practice as long as it doesn't interfere with anyone else's practice.
- Notice what is happening for your students as they practice. Check in with children who seem uncomfortable, and offer a quiet alternative.
- Seek additional help if needed.

We encourage you to learn more about this area. Here are two excellent resources: *Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness: Practices for Safe and Transformative Healing* by David Treleaven and *The Trauma Sensitive Classroom* by Patricia Jennings.

## Modeling what you teach

Students will take their cues from you. It is so important to establish your own mindfulness practice before you attempt to teach it to your students, and to continue to be open to learning along with your students. You don't have to be an expert in mindfulness but it is important to join your students on the journey.

You may have already found resources that support you in teaching the **Peace of Mind Curriculum**. If not, there are a few good ones listed in the Resource area of the Appendix and in the Educator section of the **Peace of Mind** website. [TeachPeaceofMind.org](https://TeachPeaceofMind.org)