

# Core Curriculum for Early Childhood

## Introduction

This curriculum was developed over the course of many years through my work as an elementary school counselor at Lafayette Elementary School in Washington D.C. Like many school counselors, I started out using a simple character education program with my students. We spent time learning about honesty, respect, and other positive character traits. After a couple of years of this, I began to accept that these lessons were not changing my students' behavior, despite my best efforts. Then one day a student asked, "so when are we going to learn some new vocabulary words?" I realized we needed to dig deeper and go beyond the vocabulary-type lessons to really teach kids how to "do" these words on a more profound level.

Around this same time, my colleague Linda Ryden was developing and expanding her *Peace of Mind* program, an elementary school curriculum that integrates mindfulness, social and emotional learning and conflict resolution skills. Linda had been teaching *Peace of Mind* to students in upper grades at Lafayette for many years with great results. Our older students were learning how solve conflicts, even when they felt angry, to practice kindness, even with children who weren't their friends, and to empathize with others. We realized that the strength of the *Peace of Mind* curriculum was its foundation: mindfulness. All of the social and emotional skills were taught after students acquired and began to practice foundational mindfulness skills.



After seeing the impact of including mindfulness in the curriculum for older students, I realized this was the missing piece in our early childhood classrooms. We needed a **Peace of Mind** for our littlest learners. Working with Linda, and drawing on my own many years of experience working with 3 to 6 year olds, I developed this curriculum with my students over the next several years. Now they have tools, rather than just knowledge of vocabulary, to manage their bodies and emotions in a better way. The information they are learning feels deeper and more valuable, and they are able to tell me how they calm down with mindful breathing and work out conflicts using tools they've learned in class. They move on to the next elementary grades having a foundation of mindfulness that can continue to be built upon.

The **Peace of Mind Core Curriculum for Early Childhood** not only teaches mindfulness, empathy and foundational conflict resolution strategies, but also helps to guide the youngest students into the rhythms of school, and prepares them to learn how to focus their attention, build healthy relationships, and become peacemakers.

We hope that the lessons here help you in building more positive and inclusive classrooms and schools. Thank you for taking up this important work!

- Jillian

