

CORE Skills and Habits of Mind

Strengthening the foundation for teaching and learning

CORE skills

C = concentration

O = observation

R = relaxation

E = emotional balance

CORE habits of mind

C = curiosity

O = openness

R = responsiveness

E = empathy

Concentration skills; Curiosity – *Mind as a muscle*

- Strengthening innate ability for attention, the awakened mind
- Cultivating awareness
- Reducing the restraining force of distraction
- Developing a baseline of attention that increases satisfaction in all activities
- No more boredom!

Explore breath as focusing tool during stillness and movement.

Observation skills; Open awareness – *Mind as scientist*

- Experiencing fresh perspectives from the senses – inner and outer landscapes
- Promoting self-discovery and insight
- Developing fully attentive observation without judgment and reactivity
- Increasing awareness of habitual thought patterns
- Decreasing the habit energy of obsessive thoughts, compulsive behaviors

Observe objective space (touch, sight, sound) and inner space (feel, image, talk).

Relaxation skills; Responsiveness – *Mind as trainer*

- Touching silence, stillness in the body and mind
- Cultivating awareness of sensation and rest in the body
- Techniques to cultivate relaxed alertness and response-ability
- Developing skills for centering, self-calming, self-awareness

Explore restful states, relaxation, and new ways to respond to stress.

Emotional balance skills; Empathy – *Mind as embracer*

- Developing ability to see the world just as it is, without bias
- Promoting a capacity to set aside prejudices and judgments
- Increasing acceptance of self and others
- Increasing awareness of interdependence and sense of community
- Promoting an attitude of care toward self and others

Explore the possibilities of good will and focus on positive; contemplative explorations.

CORE Attitudes/Behaviors

What is mindfulness?

A commonly used definition of mindfulness in western culture comes from the mindfulness-based stress reduction program (MBSR):

Mindfulness is “paying attention in a particular way - on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally.” (Jon Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

Paying attention ...

Mindfulness practice increases awareness of the subjective world of inner thoughts (images, talk) and emotions (via body sensations), as well as awareness of the objective world of sight, sound, and somatic experience (touch). A core attitude for paying attention in mindfulness is curiosity – an exploration into the “what” of experience, rather than the “why.” An attitude of engaged curiosity brings clarity and vitality to one’s experience in everyday life.

In a particular way...

The particular way is with a core attitude of acceptance and friendliness toward one’s experience and toward others. This makes mindfulness a highly practical inner orientation for facing stress, pain, and emotional turbulence.

On purpose ...

Paying attention on purpose involves intention. Paying attention with intention strengthens the natural human meta-mechanism of the mind, an observing consciousness, and the capacity to direct that conscious awareness.

In the present moment ...

Increasing awareness of present experience (by noticing when the mind is focusing on the past or the future and practicing the gentle return of attention to the present experience) constantly refreshes perception and strengthens awareness of all sensory components in the present moment. This gives a constant aliveness to the here and now.

Non-judgmentally...

Paying attention non-judgmentally cultivates the ability to acknowledge the constantly changing, arising and passing, expanding and contracting of experience with an attitude of accepting things as they really are. This shifts the usual mode of striving to fix problem to a mode of seeing more deeply into the actuality of experience. The non-judgmental approach is not passive -- it is an accepting, open, and kind curiosity towards one’s own experience and that of others. This requires patience, working with experience as it is right now, a letting go of the conditioned tendency to grasp onto the pleasant, ignore the neutral, and avoid the unpleasant.

(Adapted from Jon Kabat-Zinn, Diane Reibel, Don McCown, Shinzen Young – see resource list for references)