

Resiliency Lesson Summaries

Grades K-5

Unit I: Getting Focused (Lessons 1-3)

Introduce brain physiology and the concept of mindful attention; establish daily Core Practice

1. How Our Brains Work – Our brains can serve as a map for showing us how to learn and why we behave the way we do. Neuroscience provides a wealth of information that can help us and our children become better thinkers and healthier people.

Children are fascinated by facts about their brains. Sharing scientific information about how the brain processes information and is wired to react under stress is a great way to introduce a challenge to your children: How can we learn to react differently, helping our brain make wise choices about our words and actions? As children become more familiar with three key parts of the brain involved in thinking and learning, they'll begin to understand how their feelings arise – and that they have the ability to change what they do in response. This understanding lays the groundwork for them to monitor and regulate their behavior by calming themselves in the face of anxiety, focusing their attention, and taking control of their learning.

2. Mindful Awareness – Attending to the here and now – other people, the environment, a concern or challenge – in a considerate, nonjudgmental way is called mindful awareness. It is a skill that can be developed by paying close attention to our present situation and our role in it. By reflecting on our thoughts and actions, we can decide how to make better choices when appropriate.

Learning to be mindfully in tune with what's happening in the moment prepares children to make sound decisions rather than be ruled by their emotions. In Lesson 1, children learned that their brains can produce a well-thought-out reaction by way of the reflective prefrontal cortex or trigger a thoughtless one through the reflexive amygdala. In this lesson, children further explore those contrasting styles of response, using the terms mindful and unmindful to sort out important thoughts and actions in their own lives. They also discuss the benefits of mindful awareness and learn a focusing strategy for being more mindful. This lesson provides the language of self-awareness, self-control, and compassionate action that undergirds the rest of the curriculum.

3. Focused Awareness: The Core Practice – Pause. Listen. Breathe. It can take less than a minute to cue our minds to relax and focus. A short listening and breathing exercise introduced in this lesson – the Core Practice – helps children quiet their minds and get ready to learn.

Designed to be used several times a day – especially during transitions when children need help settling down to work or shifting their attention between subjects or tasks – the Core Practice is the signature daily routine of the program. The Core Practice puts children in control of their mental and physical energy. By concentrating on the sensations of a resonant sound and then of their breathing, children calm their minds and get ready to focus on the next part of their day. For the individual child, the Core Practice supports self-regulation and mindful action. For the class community, The Core Practice becomes a time for setting the tone and getting everyone – teacher and children - to achieve a state of mind in which they can all participate purposefully and thoughtfully.

Unit II: Sharpening Your Senses (Lessons 4-9)

Experience the relationship between our senses, our moving bodies, and the way we think

4. Mindful Listening – From the buzz of a cell phone to the wail of a siren, sounds are all around us. Mindful listening helps us choose which sounds to focus our attention on and helps us to be thoughtful in the way we hear and respond to the words of others.

Research suggests that children become more focused and responsive to their environment by participating in mindful listening activities, such as Guess That Sound in this lesson. In fact, training our brains to concentrate on specific sounds helps heighten our sensory awareness. As children monitor their own auditory experience – noting what they choose to focus on and /or respond to – they build self-awareness and self-management skills. Mindful listening also lays the groundwork for social awareness and effective communication – an important part of the Common Core State Standards.

Being able to listen in a focused way to what others say and to hone in on important words and phrases give the young listener more context for understanding what’s being said and a better idea for how to respond. This work helps prepare children for following directions, resolving conflicts through discussion, building friendships, and listening for important details in texts read aloud.

5. Mindful Seeing – Crimson or ruby? Ovoid or oblong? Smile or smirk? Our ability to visually distinguish precise details has given rise to a very rich and precise descriptive vocabulary. Mindful seeing enables us to better observe ourselves, other people and our surroundings to more fully enjoy and learn from them.

As with mindful listening, mindful seeing helps children sharpen their focus by calling on one sense to very purposefully observe an object. This lesson also takes advantage of children’s natural visual curiosity about people and things in the environment – and their desire to share their observations. As children practice mindful seeing exercises, children become increasingly attuned to observing details by slowing down and focusing their attention. We can build on these skills of observation by encouraging children to apply their curiosity and perceptiveness to their academic work. In fact, sharpening visual discrimination skills can help improve skills critical in almost any subject area; for example, when children are using phonics skills to decode a word. And in the area of social-emotional learning, these skills can be tied to reading social cues and acting perceptively in response to the facial expressions and body language of others.

6. Mindful Smelling – Just by catching a whiff of a familiar scent, our brain can call to mind the people, places or things we associate with it. Mindful smelling – using our sense of smell to be more aware of our environment – can help us to keenly observe our world and sharpen our memory.

Practicing focused awareness with a new sense, smell continues to broaden children’s ability to observe and enjoy their experiences. As they slow down to study and take notes on several distinct aromas during the lesson, children practice taking in new information without jumping too quickly to judgment – deciding for example, that a smell is “gross” without further consideration. By prompting them to stay with their observations, we give children an opportunity to be fully engaged in what they’re doing and to reflect on their experiences, which bolsters their sense of self-awareness and self-control. In this lesson, children also discover how memories and important information can be attached to and triggered by smells, because the smell and memory centers in the

brain are close to each other, providing another tool for learning new material as well as recognizing and regulating emotional responses that may be triggered by a sense memory.

7. Mindful Tasting – To fully appreciate the food we eat – whether it’s a complex treat, such as sweet grilled corn with hot chili and sour lime or a simple bowl of oatmeal – requires mindful tasting, or slowing down to savor our food and notice its flavor, texture, and temperature.

Eating is something that is hardly ever done mindfully by young people. This makes mindful tasting a valuable task for demonstrating mindful awareness. A simple exercise of savoring and describing a morsel of food helps children understand the changes that can occur when an everyday act is performed slowly and with conscious attention to the experience. Mindful tasting helps children identify discrete taste sensations, build descriptive skills, and approach food with a healthy outlook. It may even make them connect healthful eating to success at schoolwork and interactions in the classroom. The exercise cues children to think carefully about what they’re tasting and supports good digestion as they chew slowly and deliberately. With practice, children may be willing to try foods that are not part of their usual diet and make healthy food choices. Key social-emotional outcomes are building self-regulation skills and being accepting of new foods, which may lay the foundation for tolerance of cultural traditions outside of one’s own.

8. Mindful Movement I – How often are we conscious of putting weight on each part of the sole of our foot as we walk? Being alert to the sensations of the body, whether we are active or at rest, is a fundamental step in increasing mindful awareness.

Our body and brain are partners. We get burned and the nerve cells in our skin send a signal to our brain that registers pain. We get nervous and tense about an important test and our brain sends a signal to our body to sweat and cool down. To move mindfully is to pay close attention to the sensations of our body when it is at rest and when it is active – the body gives us signals we can easily recognize to help us monitor physical and mental states such as exertion and stress. In this lesson, children compare the signals their body sends after physical exertion and relaxation. They begin to learn simple self-regulation skills by controlling their breathing and heart rate. Developing an understanding of the brain-body relationship helps children become better able to identify the signals their body is sending and to manage their emotions and behaviors in response.

9. Mindful Movement II – Mindful movement begins with the awareness of our constantly changing physical sensations, as described in Lesson 8. We can build on this awareness by using movement challenges to help our brains focus and work more efficiently.

In this second lesson on mindful movement, children continue to deepen their awareness of physical sensations they often overlook. From their Mindful Relaxing and Mindful Moving activity in the last lesson, children learned how to exercise vigorously to accelerate their heart rate and use breathing to calm their heart; they discovered that they could both mindfully observe and help control their physical responses. With this understanding, children are ready to try a set of physical challenges that require focus and concentration in order to maintain their balance. Participating in the balancing activity helps children deepen their brain-body connection and build self-regulation skills as they work to control their physical and emotional responses to stay steady.

Unit III: It’s All About Attitude (Lessons 10-12)

Understand the role of our mind-set in how we learn and progress

10. Perspective Taking – We live in a “small world” with as many different ways of seeing things as there are people. Perspective taking allows us to consider more than one way of understanding a behavior, event, or situation. This skill is particularly useful on a global scale as our ability to communicate and our need to share resources with other people and cultures expands.

On the most practical level, children who are able to accept that other classmates may behave or think differently than they do are much better equipped to tolerate and find ways to get along with peers. These children can talk out a problem and find a solution that is mutually agreeable. Perspective taking, like the Core Practice and other mindful skills, simply takes practice to develop. As children routinely identify other perspectives, they learn to think with “open mind” – to pause and consider other viewpoints mindfully. This increasing ability to consider a situation in multiple ways has social benefits, such as reducing conflicts among children, facilitating group work, and cultivating an inclusive peer community. Perspective taking is an essential skill for problem solving in all subject areas, from understanding conflict in literature to finding strategies for problem solving in math and science.

11. Choosing Optimism – Optimism is a way of seeing life hopefully and having an expectation of success and well-being. It correlates strongly with good health and effective coping strategies. Optimism is a learned trait and if practiced, can become a way of thinking.

Choosing to view life optimistically can increase our brain capacity; it relaxes our amygdala, creates chemical balance in our brains, and allows our prefrontal cortex to take charge. In this frame of mind, children learn that they can make much better choices than if they take a negative or pessimistic approach, which effectively shuts down their higher-level thinking. Practicing optimism also makes it easier to learn – optimistic thinkers prime their brains to be ready to focus and make more room for new information to be absorbed and new ideas to stretch their wings. Socially, practicing optimism allows children to strengthen their perspective-taking skills and accept viewpoints different from their own, as well as connect with other people. In this lesson, children explore the benefits of optimism and see how pessimism can negatively affect their ability to think and learn, make friends, and solve common problems. With pessimism, a person gets bogged down and limits his or her ability to solve problems.

12. Appreciating Happy Experiences – We can make ourselves laugh over the memory of a hilarious situation shared with friends or flood ourselves with a feeling of warmth by recalling the hug of a beloved grandparent. To remember a happy experience fully and mindfully is to appreciate it and reap the physical, emotional, and cognitive benefits.

Remembering a happy memory releases the “feel-good” chemicals in our brain that flooded it at the time of the actual experience. We can practice mindfully recalling favorite memories as a strategy to achieve a variety of goals, including cultivating optimism, alleviating negativity including boredom and worry, priming our brain for learning new material, generating ideas from past experiences, and boosting our physical health. Children can learn to appreciate happy memories to help overcome specific negative feelings, such as sadness or insecurity. You can also integrate the concept into your teaching by creating learning experiences that are engaging and involve positive interactions and laughter, when possible. Those memories will be prioritized and easy for children to recall and build background from.

Unit IV: Taking Action Mindfully (Lessons 13-15)

Apply mindful behaviors to our interactions with our community and the world

13. Expressing Gratitude – Gratitude is a feeling of thankfulness and joy we feel in response to something we've received, whether the gift is tangible, such as a book we look forward to reading, or intangible, such as a smile of encouragement from a loved one or a breathtaking view of a landscape.

Simply focusing for a minute on the experiences in our lives we're grateful for shifts our thinking to a calmer, more content perspective, which can immediately uplift and comfort us. When we make the expression of gratitude a regular practice – whether we make a daily written list or a mental tally of things we're grateful for as we start or end each day – we train our brain to shift to a positive mind-set more efficiently and maintain a healthier, more optimistic perspective. This lesson gives children the opportunity to identify and share with peers expressions of gratitude for people, events, and things in their lives. This sharing forges stronger connections and trust among peers. The mindful listening required in the lesson also cultivates children's empathy, laying the foundation for planning and performing acts of kindness over the course of the final two lessons.

14. Performing Acts of Kindness - Good deeds... and gestures of generosity... paying it forward. These expressions describe mindful action intended to help another living thing. Participating in such an action constitutes an act of kindness. Acts of kindness can be big or small, spontaneous or well planned.

Think back to a time when someone helped you out unexpectedly or gave you a compliment. Memories like this have intense staying power (in fact, they may be part of a larger happy memory) and often remind us that we can act in the same way to help, encourage, or comfort someone else. Socially, acts of kindness cultivate shared happiness, build relationships, and give people a sense of connectedness to a group, community, or place – they are an excellent way to build a classroom community full of good will and optimism. In this lesson, children plan several acts of kindness, which not only benefit the larger community but also help develop the neural networks that build their sense of compassion and empathy. The more people practice acts of kindness, the more likely they are to recognize and act on situations in which others are in need.

15. Taking Mindful Action in the World – Whether they involve one or many individuals, mindful actions are purposefully planned activities that create a healthier, happier world and set a precedent for other people to follow. You might say that mindful actions take acts of kindness to the world beyond the classroom.

At this point in their learning journey, children have a range of optimism-building strategies to call on. They are beginning to feel confident in their ability to monitor and nurture themselves and to be receptive to the perspectives and needs of others. They are ready to expand kindness practice to make a bigger “ripple effect” in their world. In this culminating lesson, children work together to select, plan, and execute a group act of kindness for the school, larger community, or the world. Through actions like this, children are able to see themselves as part of a larger community – they glimpse the big picture of the world around them, and link their own peace of mind to a more generalized sense of peace. Their role as active participants in building that community fosters a sense of comfort, belonging, and optimism and increases their desire to make thoughtful, ethical decisions both independently and with others.

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