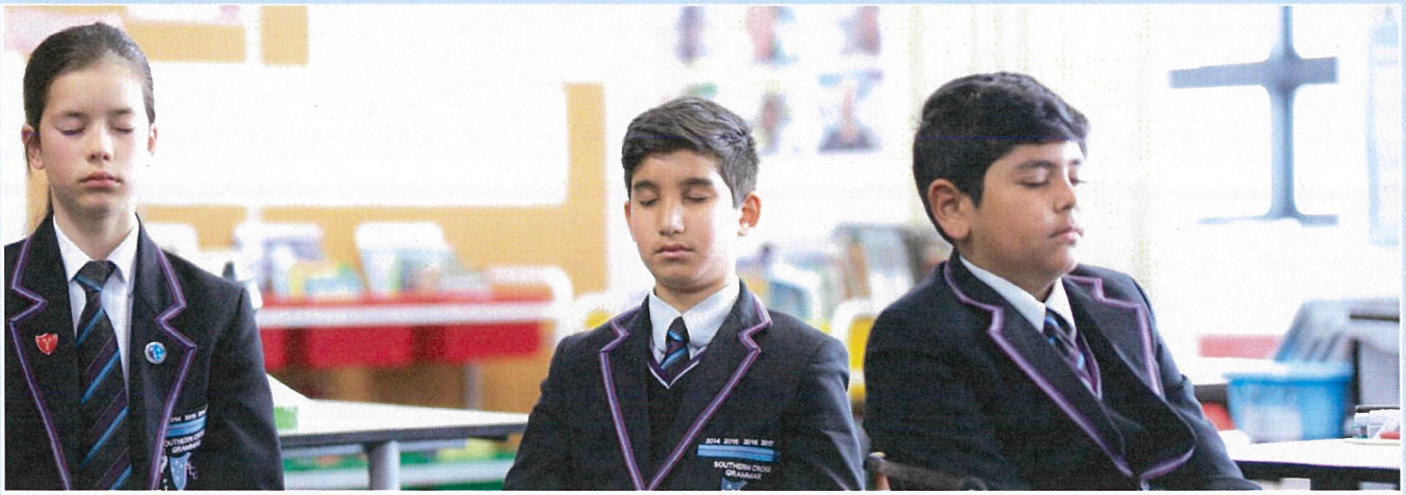

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a proven technique used to reduce stress, improve mental health and help people cope with tough times.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness involves training our attention and attitude.

Being mindful means awareness of your own moment-to-moment internal and external experiences, with gentleness and acceptance and without judgment. It's a state of being that encourages us to slow down, focus on the present, accept things as they are, and act with discernment. When we do this, we're less distracted by thoughts of the future and the past, which can often make us worry and stop us from enjoying the present moment.

What does it mean to be unmindful?

To better understand what it means to be mindful, it helps to understand what it means to be 'unmindful'. When we're inattentive, distracted and disengaged from the present moment, the mind habitually and unconsciously slips into what's called 'default mode' – we're physically doing one thing but the mind is somewhere else. For example, someone might be speaking to us, but we're not listening, or we might be reading a book but not taking in the words on the page.

Much default mental activity involves things such as worry or rumination about the past and future, which is one of the main reasons there's so much default mental activity in states like anxiety and depression.

Mindfulness is very simple

It's a practical way to notice thoughts, physical sensations, sights, sounds, smells, or anything that you might not normally notice. The moment we re-engage attention with the present moment, we switch off default mode. It gets us back on task, helps the body to relax, and helps us to respond to the moment. Despite this simplicity, mindfulness doesn't come easily to us.

You've probably noticed that children and young people are much better at being mindful – it's natural to them. While we might be hurrying them to get to school on time, they'll stop to look at butterflies, flowers or bugs and be immersed in that moment, with no worries about the past or future. As adults, however, we're often thinking about what we need to do next or what we wish we'd done differently.

Read about how you can practise mindfulness here.

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Mindfulness takes practice

Mindfulness is about learning to make a conscious and discerning choice where our attention lies, rather than allowing it to be dominated by concerns which take us away from experiencing the present moment. It allows us to stay open, curious and flexible about the moment that we're in.

What are the benefits?

Mindfulness is a proven technique to support your mental health and wellbeing.

Research has found that mindfulness can help you feel calmer, bring clarity and enhance your creativity and awareness. Other benefits, include:

- reduced rumination (continuously thinking about upsetting situations and things)
- reduced stress, including occupational stress, anxiety and depression
- improved focus and working memory (being able to recall and use relevant information)
- improved health through better immune function (resistance to disease) and slower ageing
- increased self-awareness, social awareness and self-confidence
- greater emotional intelligence, compassion (to self and others) and prosocial behaviours
- better and more flexible problem-solving abilities
- stimulating new connections and cell growth in the brain
- better resilience and coping with pain and life challenges.

Why should educators practise mindfulness?

Educators who adopt a mindfulness practice bring a present-moment awareness into the classroom.

The modern world is full of distraction and disconnection for children and young people through the overuse and misuse of technology and social media. Mindfulness, on the other hand, naturally translates to supporting children and young people's wellbeing and increasing connection. Educators can positively influence wellbeing and learning by understanding, modelling and embedding mindfulness principles within learning communities.

Gently redirecting children and young people to the present moment and self-awareness benefits them by:

- improving resilience (building skills to cope better with stress)
- increasing their ability to self-regulate emotions through breathing and other grounding techniques, especially difficult emotions such as fear and anger
- improving empathy (their ability to understand how another person is feeling, which helps them to build positive relationships) and prosocial behaviours
- supporting learning and academic performance, including reducing exam anxiety.

By practising mindfulness, you can support your own wellbeing and that of the whole learning community.

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External links

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