

## Mindfulness and Social Emotional Learning

### **Mindful Walking for Walk (and Bike) to School Week**

Whether you already have a mindfulness practice, or if you are an absolute beginner, explore these adult mindful walking practices for a healthy mind, body and spirit. After experiencing these for yourself, then try the lessons that follow with your students.

*“Mindfulness is not really about sitting in the full lotus, like pretending you’re a statue in the British museum. It’s about living your life as if it really mattered, moment by moment by moment.” —Jon Kabat-Zinn, the founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*

### **Mindful Walking Exercises and Resources for Adults**

Mindful walking is one of the ways to practice mindfulness of movement. Practice mindful walking on its own and then see where you can incorporate the practice throughout your day; while walking to your car, walking down the halls at work, walking from one room to the next at home, taking a walk outside, or even using the stairs.

Find a quiet place where you can walk alone and will not be disturbed. You can choose a long path or even a room at home or at work where you can take several steps in one direction and then turn around to walk in the other direction. Begin by standing up. Balance evenly on both feet. Notice how you feel. Start walking and pay attention to your body. Ask yourself, how does my body feel? Are there any places where I feel tension or stress? Are there any aches or pains? Are there any places in the body where it feels good to be moving?

Focus your attention on your feet as they touch the ground. Notice your stride, is it long or short. Are you walking fast or slow? No need to change the pace or the stride, just notice it and start to become curious.

Pay attention to the rhythm of the heel to toe movement. Notice when one foot lifts and the next foot touches the ground. What part of the foot strikes the ground first? Then which part follows? Notice how your ankle moves with each step. Observe the bend in your knee. How are your thighs and hips moving? Draw your attention to the swing of your arms. How much or how little are they swinging?

Now change your pace and speed up. Observe how the rhythm changes and if the swing of your arms change. Notice if there is a change in the heart rate. If you are walking in an area where you are walking back and forth, take the opportunity to pause when you get to the end of the walk and have to turn around. Notice what it feels like to stop, pause, turn and then continue walking.

Now slow down. What do you notice? What can you observe?

Resume your normal speed. See if you can match your breath with the each step. Breath in, as you lift your right foot, breath out, as you lift your left foot.

You can use your body movement awareness as an anchor, which you can always return to during this mindful walking experience.

Continue by moving your awareness away from your body & start observing your surroundings.

What do you see? Simply note what you see without judging or creating a story. “I see a tree.” “I see a path.” “snow” “car” Just note each thing your eyes land on without labeling. You might notice that your mind will begin to make associations and judgements. For example, rather than just noting, “I see a car.” Your mind could work like this, “I see a car. Oh, that’s a Honda. It looks like mine. I like the color of mine better. I wonder what year it is. I see it has a roof rack, that’s what I need for our camping trip this summer. I can’t wait to be in the mountains in Wyoming. Last summer’s trip was great. I sure did get cold though, I’m glad I have a warmer sleeping bag.” Does this sound familiar to you, one minute you are thinking of a car the next thing you know you are setting up camp on a cold night in Wyoming. When you catch the mind wandering off like this, be kind to yourself and gently guide your thoughts back to your anchor, your body. Feel the contact of your feet against the ground. Then when you are ready, resume asking yourself what you see along your path.

After you have practiced with opening your awareness to the sights, do the same practice of noting with the other senses.

What do you hear? What do you feel? What do you smell? What do you taste?

When you are ready to stop, stand still, take three deep breaths and send love and gratitude to your body for all the amazing things it can do.

For further exploration of mindful walking check out these links.

[Savoring Walk](#) “Take a different walk, this time being mindful of all the sights, sounds, and smells around you—and discover a newfound appreciation for your surroundings.” Be sure to click the tabs on the left hand side for more information and to take a quiz.

[How to Cultivate Awe with a Walking Meditation](#) “An Awe Walk is a walk within a place of meaning and beauty, where your sole task is to encounter something that amazes and transcends, be it big or small.”

[The Mindful Practice Podcast: Walking Meditation](#) A podcast with mindful walking instructions

[No Time for Mindfulness? Try This On-the-Go Walking Meditation](#) Elisha Goldstein offers a simple walking meditation in four steps.

## **Mindful Walking Lessons for Students**

The literature is overwhelmingly in favor of adults nurturing their own mindfulness practice before bringing the practices to their students. Here's why:

[Mindfulness in Schools: Research-Based Support for Teacher Training](#)

[Can Mindfulness Make Us Better Teachers?](#)

[Seven Ways Mindfulness Can Help Teachers](#)

After you've practiced mindful walking for yourself, consider what opportunities there are for teaching your students body awareness through mindful walking.

"...when a mindful teacher invites students to join him or her in learning mindfulness practices for themselves. The results are profound as students are empowered as they learn to calm themselves, focus their attention and extend kindness to their classmates. But the next and most important step is the mindful teacher; without that, mindfulness for students is just another activity that will be supplanted when a newer, shinier silver bullet is offered as the panacea to a deeply complex social reality." Rona Wilens

## **Mindful Walking Lessons for Students**

You know your students best. How you begin to teach mindful walking will depend on your students, their age and their experience with mindfulness.

You might want to start with the why? Why is it useful to be able to be mindful when we walk? Body awareness and awareness of the environment are key, then you may want to explore why body awareness and awareness of the environment are important. When can you practice mindful walking? (moving from centers in the classroom, in the hallway, at recess, in the lunchroom, walking to buses)

You can practice mindful walking indoors or outside. I would recommend practicing in the classroom first. Depending on your students you can walk in a walk in a circle, back and forth in the classroom, or you can have them walk freely around the room.

### **1. Mindful Body Movement**

- a. [The Practice of Walking](#) in this Mindful Schools article we learn how to bring mindfulness into our daily lives through the act of walking.
- b. [Walking Meditation for Kids](#) originally from Little Flower Yoga, this article give simple instructions for teaching mindful walking to children along with ideas for how to mix it up if children find it challenging.

### **2. Mindful Awareness of the Environment**

- a. [Mindful Walking with Cosmic Kids](#) in this video we learn how to pay attention to our surroundings as we walk on an autumn day.
- b. [Playful Mindfulness - Walk on a Rainbow](#) is a variation of walking meditation focusing on paying attention to the environment around you as you walk.

### 3. Mindful Breathing

- a. When you practice mindful awareness of the environment outside, you may see a flower. Have students stop, take three deep breaths, then practice **Flower Breathing**. Hold hands in front of chin with the ends of the palms together, fingers spread out like the petals of a flower. Pretending that your hands are a flower, inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth making an “ah” sound. With each inhale extend the fingers/petals out wider like a blooming flower and with each exhale draw the fingers/petals together.
- b. If you are lucky enough to see a flying insect you can stop, take three deep breaths and then practice **Insect Breathing**. On the inhale pretend you are an insect sucking nectar from a flower and on the out breath with a buzzing sound. Repeat 3x.
- c. When you see a butterfly you can practice **Butterfly Breathing**. Hold your palms, wrists, forearms and elbows together in front of you on the in-breath. Keeping your palms touching in front of you, on the outbreath lift your elbows. On the outbreath, bring your elbows back towards each other until they are touching again. Repeat several times.

While much of mindful walking is about self-awareness through body awareness, there are many opportunities to intentionally teach other Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skills while practicing mindful walking. These skills can be extended for group bicycle rides as well.

~ Self Awareness ~ Self Management ~ Social Awareness ~ Relationship Skills ~ Responsible Decision Making ~

**Buddy walking** – After students have practiced mindful walking individually, practice buddy walking. If it is appropriate for your students, invite them to walk arm in arm or hand in hand while they practice the same mindful walking. Invite them to notice what changes when they are walking with a buddy, challenge them to get in sync with each other by walking in stride with one another. (stride, pacing, speed, friendliness, smile, fun, awkwardness, shy, wanting to talk, giggle)