



Transcript for the video:

Mindfulness for Early Educators

This video has captions. You can turn them on by clicking the captions icon at the bottom of the video.

Niloufar Rezai, Director, Child and Family Development Resource Center: When educators practice mindfulness, the payoffs are very beneficial to both themselves and the children that they're working with.

Martha Goldstein-Schultz, Ph.D., Eastern Connecticut State University: Mindfulness has been shown to lower the body's stress response, to decrease symptoms of anxiety, depression, insomnia. It has also been shown to increase empathy and compassion and reduce implicit bias.

The Benefits of Mindfulness for Early Educators (0:23)

Niloufar Rezai: As an educator, it's so easy to find ourselves feeling a lot of stress. When you are in a classroom with so many children, all with different needs, everyone wants you at the same time, it seems like—especially when you're working with young children—there are physical demands, emotional demands on educators. And when you practice mindfulness, it's so beneficial, because you realize, "I will get to everyone's needs once I am able to take care of my own basic needs."

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: When the body is in stress mode, that's fight or flight, and that's the sympathetic nervous system. So the heart rate increases, blood pressure increases, cortisol is released, et cetera. And so fight or flight had its place when we were cave dwellers. If there was a lion at our cave door, we needed to either fight it or run from it. So fight or flight made sense. But what happens is that we are now continually in fight or flight with stress surrounding our lives. And that impact over time really wears down on the body's system, in particular the body's immune system. So mindfulness engages the parasympathetic nervous system—rest or digest—where the heart rate lowers and blood pressure lowers, and the mind is able to calm and, and restore, essentially. And so the more that we can practice mindfulness as educators, there's really massive health benefits to that, as well as just having calm in the day when you're in a sea of chaos.

Teacher: Whoa!!

Erin Trudeau, 3rd Grade Teacher, North Windham Elementary School: We have very stressful jobs as teachers. The more coping skills and the more positive and mindful practices and things that we have for ourselves, the more that we're able to show up in our lives and in our work and in our classrooms. I know for myself, when I make the extra five minutes or whatever it is to listen to a relaxing podcast on the way to work, or maybe practice yoga or take a walk

outside or make myself a cup of tea, or whatever it is for me, that is like that mindful moment or that pause, and I've taken that time for myself and been able to like, breathe, I notice that my patience isn't so short. During the day when my students are being really loud, I can tolerate it a little bit more. I almost feel lighter and brighter.

Niloufar Rezai: It does positively affect my interactions with my colleagues, my interactions with children, because the focus becomes on the here and now when you're with the children, and being present for them.

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: So there's the benefits for yourself, as a human being and as an educator. And then there's the benefits for students.

Erin Trudeau: Students see the way that you hold yourself. Students see the way that you take a moment before responding so that you can compose yourself and figure out your words. They're watching every single thing you do. When you take a deep breath before you reply, or you take time to compose yourself, they pick up on all of the little things. And with my students, they know that when they see me take a minute and take a couple deep breaths, they're like, "Oh, Senora Trudeau is frustrated, like she needs a second." [Laughs]

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: If we can model some of those practices for students to take that break from the stress and come back into our bodies, it's really a key piece of this, and students may mirror that.

What is Mindfulness? (4:20)

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: Mindfulness is a real, present-moment awareness, becoming aware of our thoughts, our emotions, our patterns of reactivity, and anchoring ourselves in the present moment.

Erin Trudeau: Mindfulness to me is about getting out of your head for a little bit and getting into the present moment. Mindfulness is quieting a little bit of the mind chatter that we always have going on.

Kathy Novak, LCSW, In-Home Therapist: Mindfulness in and of itself is a therapeutic model, but it is adapted for anybody who wants to learn it. We can call it relaxation. We can call it diaphragmatic breathing, when we use our bellies instead of our chests. We can call yoga relaxation. We can call breathing mixed with belly breath and concentrating on the breath, meditation.

Dr. Goldstein-Schultz: And I invite you to begin with just following the flow of the breath. In and out of the body.

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: So mindfulness and meditation are nearly synonymous, and yet they're not interchangeable. Meditation is actually the formal practice of sitting, anchoring the breath, and anchoring the attention on either a mantra or counting the breath.

Dr. Goldstein-Schultz: Inhale one, two, three, and exhale one, two, three.

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: If we have that opportunity to take a step back and do a few breaths to try a practice like 54321, you know, 5 things I can see, four things I can hear, three things I can touch, et cetera, it's re-anchoring you in your body, and giving you a break from just the busy sort of ruminating mind.

Erin Trudeau: Mindfulness can mean a lot of different things. Maybe for you, that's nature and some quiet or stillness.

Niloufar Rezai: There are some people that really find some mindfulness in activities like coloring books. Knitting, anything that could also be repetitive in motion, where you're keeping your hands busy and yet it requires a little bit of focus, is a great way to quiet your mind and just be in the here and now. I first started to learn how to be mindful through my yoga practice. When you're on that mat, you realize how quickly your mind wanders. I realized that I wasn't thinking about what was going on in the moment while I was actually on the mat. And that includes things like being aware of your immediate surroundings, the sounds that you hear. As you practice yoga, you realize it's not just about the postures, but instead it's about being able to breathe and just enjoy the moments.

Getting Started with Mindfulness (7:41)

Niloufar Rezai: My advice to teachers would be to find what they're interested in, and follow that. So find a hobby that serves you, and go with it.

Erin Trudeau: I guess my biggest advice is to try a whole bunch of different things, because ultimately with yoga, with spirituality, whatever it is, one of my favorite quotes about that is that it's different paths all up the same mountain. Right, we're all trying to reach that same relaxed, more blissful state. We're all trying to be a better version of ourselves. So that's the goal, and it might take us all different ways to get there.

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: If going into a yoga studio feels too daunting, then downloading one of the meditation apps—that's something you could do in the privacy of your own home.

Kathy Novak: Okay and anybody can learn about mindfulness techniques. It greatly helps us to focus on the present moment and to be present right now, in this moment and to realize that only this moment is life. That's self-care. You know, that's healthy selfishness.

Martha Goldstein-Schultz: The benefits of meditation and mindfulness are really just, the sky's the limit. So, if you're willing to step into and begin that practice, over time, you do start to notice some of those changes. As a teacher and a parent, I notice an increase in patience—especially for my children as well as my students—an increase in empathy, and really understanding a lot about yourself, just that self-awareness of who you are and how you show up in the world. It's just part of that growth and journey, as a human being that I feel that meditation can really aid in that process and helping you become more self-aware.

Erin Trudeau: You hear it all the time, but if your cup isn't full, if you're not taking time to fill your own cup, then you can't pour into anybody else's. You deserve to do it for you as a teacher and as an educator and as anybody who works in a school, right now and all the time.