

# GETTING STARTED WITH MINDFULNESS: A TOOLKIT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD ORGANIZATIONS



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**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION 1

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## MINDFULNESS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT 2

### Four Capacities Enhanced by Mindfulness 3

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## POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKPLACE 6

### Workforce Well-being 6

### Workplace Climate 7

### Mindfulness as a Promising Business Model 8

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## APPLICATION 9

### Start with Yourself 10

### Assess Interest 11

### Identify Internal Champions, Cultivate Buy-In 12

### Create Collective Intentions and Develop an Action Plan 14

### Special Focus: Mindfulness in Reflective Practice 16

### Implement Your Plan 18

### Monitor Progress, Adapt, Celebrate Success 20

---

## CONCLUSION 22

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 23

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS 24

---

## REFERENCES 26

---

## RESOURCES 28

### Tools for Inquiry and Reflection 29

- Key Questions for Leaders 29
- Brief Staff Survey Example 30
- Developing Emotional Competence Skills 31
- Plutchik Wheel of Emotion 32
- Temperament Quiz 33
- From Cultural Curiosity to Cultural Humility 35

### Internal Awareness Practices 36

- How Am I 36
- Three-Minute Breathing Space 37
- Extended Breath 38
- Calm Breath, Clear Mind 39

### Practices for Partners or Groups 41

- Mindful Meeting Opener 41
- Hand to Heart 42
- How to Use a Talking Piece 43
- Reflective Partnerships 44
- Just Like Me 45
- Sharing Feelings 47
- Moving Meditation 49
- Active Listening and Response 51

### Practices to do with Children 52

- Balloon Breath 52
- Starfish Breathing 53
- Calming Glitter Bottle 54
- Five Senses 55
- Pleasure Gazing 56

# MINDFULNESS TOOLKIT

## INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons to consider including mindfulness practices for staff in early childhood settings. Mindfulness programs have been used in business, technology, healthcare, and all levels of education. Research has shown mindfulness can increase productivity, reduce stress, improve workplace satisfaction, and lead to higher functioning teams. In this toolkit, learn more about the case for implementing mindfulness techniques into your daily work and organizational culture, try hands-on strategies for doing so, and learn more from organizations that have begun this journey.

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## WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

In this resource, mindfulness is thought of as intentional and non-judgmental present-moment awareness. This kind of awareness means we are purposefully paying attention to what is happening around us, what is happening inside us, what we are doing, and how we are doing and feeling without judging or analyzing. This ability to focus attention on the present and to maintain that focus is a foundational skill that underlies many other important capacities that we need for health, well-being, and connection with children, families, and others. When adults engage in focusing practices like mindfulness, it helps to build important mental, social, and emotional skills that they need to be responsive supports and effective models.



# MINDFULNESS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT

We often hear about the important role that a calm and responsive adult, and secure adult-child relationship, plays in helping young children learn and grow. We know that these relationships develop through attuned and sensitive care and interactions. What can early education professionals do to offer children consistent, nurturing care and responsiveness? How can we build our capacity to stay focused and attentive to all children and families in our care? What helps us notice and respond sensitively to a child's needs and emotions (while we are experiencing strong feelings too)? These are common challenges that arise in caring for children. Similar challenges arise when providing support to parents and professionals working with children. Through the work of scientists, psychologists, and child development specialists, we are discovering some answers to these questions and how mindfulness practice might help.

## Different definitions: *Mindfulness is...*

*"[I]ntending and developing the capacity to come back to center; to pay close attention to the internal experience of sensations, thoughts, and emotions with engaged curiosity, equanimity, deep compassion, and acceptance. Thus, mindfulness is defined as moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, characterized mainly by 'acceptance'—paying attention to thoughts and feelings without trying to distinguish whether they are right or wrong." (Shahmoon-Shanok & Carlton Stevenson 2015, p. 18)*

*"Paying attention here and now with kindness and curiosity." (Association for Mindfulness in Education)*

*"The act of being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling at every moment – without interpretation or judgment." (Mayo Clinic)*

*"Waking up from a life on automatic and being sensitive to novelty in our everyday experiences. With mindful awareness the flow of energy and information that is our mind enters our conscious attention and we can both appreciate its contents and come to regulate its flow in a new way." (Dan Siegel)*

*"Maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment." (Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley)*

*"The basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us." (mindful.org)*

*"The psychological process of bringing one's attention to the internal and external experiences occurring in the present moment, which can be developed through the practice of meditation and other training." (Wikipedia)*

*"The awareness that arises through paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally." (Jon Kabat-Zinn)*

*"Simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't)." (James Baraz).*

## FOUR CAPACITIES ENHANCED BY MINDFULNESS

In this toolkit, we highlight four distinct and related capacities that are critical in the early childhood workplace: attentional awareness, emotional regulation, perspective-taking, and self-compassion. All can be enhanced by mindfulness.

- Mindfulness training supports attentional awareness by helping us engage with important details, stay with present experience, and disengage with distracting information.
- There is growing evidence that mindfulness training improves emotional regulation skills (Baer et al 2009; Carmody et al 2009). Emotional regulation skills allow us to better model and scaffold a state of calmness, particularly in times of distress for children, families, and co-workers.
- Mindfulness can be used to expand our capacity for perspective-taking as we better understand our own emotions, intentions, and beliefs, we see others' more clearly as well.
- Self-compassion helps us shift from a stance of self-criticism and judgment to one of self-care, warmth and love. Rather than judge ourselves harshly, we can acknowledge our feelings in the moment (shame, frustration, anger, disappointment, etc.) and recognize that these moments are part of the shared human experience. Doing so can increase our capacity for resilience during moments of conflict, frustration, or upset.

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### **ATTENTIONAL AWARENESS: MINDFULNESS CAN IMPROVE FOCUS**

Mindfulness enables staff to bring their full presence to the demands of the workplace. Early childhood professionals are bombarded with the conflicting needs of the children and families they serve; the needs of colleagues; the stresses and pressures of the organization; and the demands of our fast-paced society. Too often, the expectation is that skilled staff can do more with less, and professionals are frequently asked to add more tasks to each day. Through the practice of focusing attention, mindfulness makes it possible to clarify what is essential and to slow the pace of our day. As we become more practiced in mindfulness, we are more likely to make conscious choices about where we should place our attention. We become more consistent with follow-through on necessary tasks that demand sustained attention.

A recent study by Norris et al (2018) using female undergraduates who had never been exposed to mindfulness meditation found that one brief 10-minute, audio-guided mindfulness meditation instruction period improved attention. Another recent study demonstrated that a two-week mindfulness training with undergraduate students was associated with improved reading comprehension scores on the Graduate Record Exam (Mrazek et al 2013). The ability to remain focused for sustained periods is also linked to positive emotions—satisfaction and happiness—and to improvements in creativity, problem solving, and psychological flexibility; (Killingsworth, Matthews & Gilbert 2010; Mrazek et al 2013).

## EMOTIONAL REGULATION IS ENHANCED THROUGH MINDFULNESS

Self-regulation, or the ability to intentionally manage one's cognitive and emotional resources to accomplish goals, is crucial for early childhood providers. Self-regulation helps providers respond to children with emotional attunement and calm consistency. Mindfulness may help practitioners self-regulate—which helps them provide the supportive, nurturing co-regulation that children need in order to develop a strong foundation of social-emotional skills. This ability to “share their calm” with parents strengthens the family-professional relationship as well. Mindfulness can be used by adults as a strategy to restore calm when they feel challenged. Research suggests that adults can use mindfulness techniques to change the way they interpret and react to critical and judgmental thoughts and negative emotions (Jacob and Holczer 2016), for example, when facing a child's challenging behavior. Mindfulness may also decrease emotional reactivity and rumination by increasing present-centered-attention (Guendelman et al 2017).

Early care providers need to focus on developing social and emotional skills in the children they care for. They must scaffold children's development and co-regulate with children until children have the skills to manage challenges on their own. Ideally, this transition proceeds through everyday caregiver-child interactions, which provide children with age-appropriate strategies for emotion regulation. At the most basic level, providers help children understand their feelings and become sensitive to the causes and consequences of their emotions. The next level involves adults demonstrating and modeling specific skills, such as soothing, to calm the body. At the third level, adult providers cue the child verbally to initiate emotional self-regulation. Each level builds on the previous one. Children need competent models to show them how to notice, name, and respond to their emotional states. Developing these skills comprise social-emotional competence. At each level, caregivers match their response to what is happening in the moment to reflect their understanding of what the child needs. This contingent responsiveness is an essential aspect of a secure relationship.

As providers develop sensitivity for understanding and working with their own emotions through mindfulness, they can extend this sensitivity and competence to support children and families. In a randomized control trial by Geschwind et al (2011), Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy was associated with increased experience of momentary positive emotions as well as greater appreciation of, and enhanced responsiveness to, pleasant daily-life activities. This study highlights the idea that increased access to positive emotional experiences may be one way to strengthen self-regulation and offset chronic stress early childhood professionals may face. In ZERO TO THREE's [2018 Mindfulness in Early Childhood Member Survey](#), respondents practicing mindfulness reported that it helps with their self-regulation, promotes calm and patience, and improves their ability to be present with children and families.

***“We ‘download our calm’ into the children and families we serve. When I am well, I can give my best to them and provide an environment conducive to mindfulness, self-care, and care for others.”***

## ***MINDFULNESS SUPPORTS NEW INSIGHT AND PERSPECTIVE TAKING***

When we practice mindfulness, it can become easier to take in new information, consider perspectives that are new or different from our own, and respond to our own or another person's experience empathetically and without judgment. The process of observing our own internal and external experiences non-judgmentally can enhance our ability to be more objective, recognize habitual patterns of thinking, and shift perspective. Through mindfulness we can thereby deepen skills for active and objective listening, receiving others' points of view without jumping to judgments or conclusions, and be better able to consider their perspective. Block-Lerner et al (2007) found that mindfulness interventions can increase empathic responding and support this type of healthy interpersonal functioning.

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## ***SELF-COMPASSION IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF WELL-BEING AND IS SUPPORTED BY MINDFULNESS***

According to researcher Kristen Neff, PhD, "What distinguishes self-compassion is that it goes beyond accepting our experience as it is and adds something more—embracing the experienter (i.e., ourselves) with warmth and tenderness when our experience is painful." Mindfulness helps us recognize when we are experiencing distress or being self-critical. We are then able to apply self-compassion. The recognition that we are all imperfect and make mistakes becomes a way to connect deeply with ourselves and others. There may be differences in our experience, yet there can also be a deep appreciation of similarity, even unity, of the human experience. In the practice of mindful self-compassion, we have an explicit way to broaden and expand our connection to self and other rather than contract and disconnect in the face of pain and suffering. We learn to cultivate openness to experience and, through this openness, we begin to discover a fuller range of responses in the face of challenge.

Increasingly, mindful self-compassion practices for health providers has become a focus of research. In a longitudinal study at a health care facility by Barsade (2014), a culture of compassionate love was associated with reduced employee emotional exhaustion and absenteeism, and with increased work engagement (i.e., teamwork and satisfaction). Recent research by Raab (2015) on the impact of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) for health care providers suggests that mindfulness interventions, particularly those with an added mindful self-compassion component, have the potential to increase self-compassion among health care workers. These studies as well as others (Frost 2003) suggest that cultivating compassion offers potential health and well-being benefits at the individual level, stronger interpersonal relationships, and greater collective responsiveness overall to the unavoidable suffering that unfolds in complex ways at work. Dutton et al (2007) suggest that by elevating individual acts of compassion organizations can spread compassion as a normal response to suffering and ultimately build cooperation.

# POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKPLACE

We now turn to an examination of the ways that mindfulness and self-compassion can benefit your workforce as a whole. There is a rapidly developing base of scientific evidence that supports the inclusion of mindfulness in the workplace. This qualitative research indicates that mindfulness training at work can lead to important shifts in organizational culture, including: 1) enhanced employee well-being, 2) improved relationships between co-workers, 3) developing leadership capacities and 4) better performance at work, including improved job and task performance, citizenship, and safety performance (The Mindfulness Initiative, 2016).

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## WORKFORCE WELL-BEING

All organizations face issues like absenteeism, burnout, and turnover. In addition to these factors, early childhood professionals often work with individuals and families who have experienced trauma. They may feel overwhelmed in the face of such great need. These feelings, coupled with very real resource inadequacies, may cause professionals to question the purpose of their work. Providers experiencing burnout often report a growing sense of doubt that they are making meaningful contributions. Due to the demands put on early childhood professionals, they too often feel unable to take the time for the self-care necessary to re-establish balance and connect with feelings of purpose and meaning.

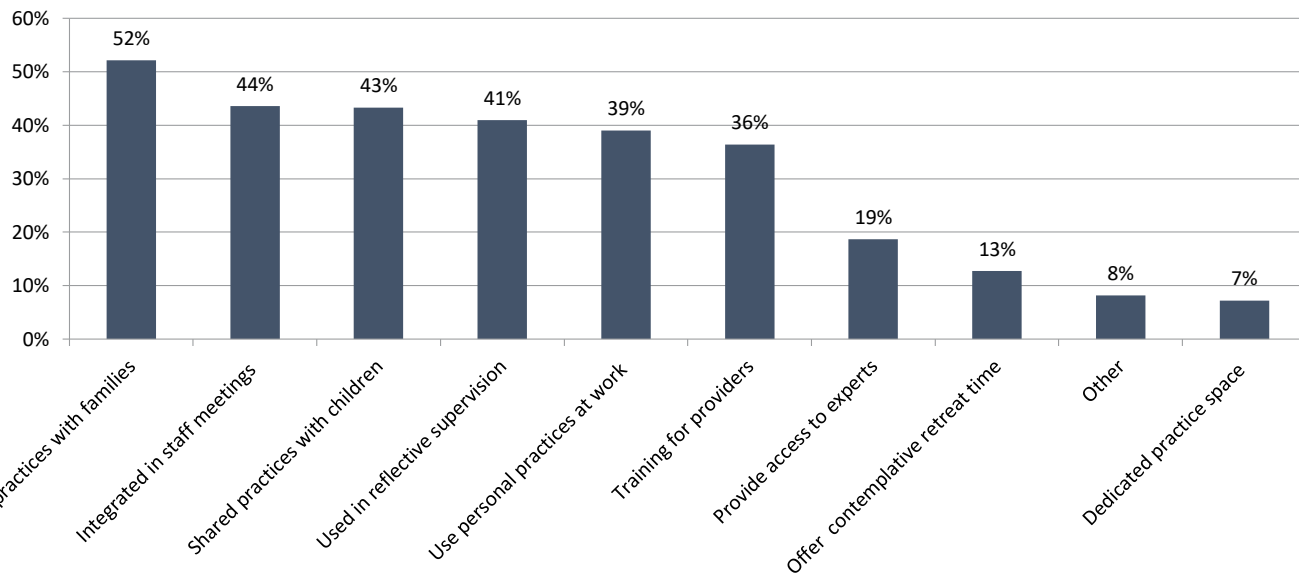
Secondary or vicarious trauma is a real concern for early childhood professionals. Vicarious trauma is characterized by extreme symptoms with persistent heightened arousal at one end and emotional numbing and withdrawal at the other. Making sure that staff have time and space to prioritize self-care, develop strategies to maintain healthy boundaries, and detect early symptoms are all ways to minimize the occurrence of vicarious trauma in this workforce. Supporting mindful and reflective practices within the work environment can promote the deepening of self-awareness and stress-reducing benefits, which are well-established and are particularly suited to prevent burnout and vicarious trauma.

Mindfulness Based Interventions are now being applied as a prevention approach for service providing organizations. In a recent analysis (Gilmartin et al 2017) of brief mindfulness-based interventions in health-care settings, nine of 14 studies reported positive changes in levels of stress, anxiety, mindfulness, resiliency, and burnout symptoms. Positive results like these provide encouragement for early childhood organizations to follow suit. Respondents to ZERO TO THREE's 2018 Mindfulness in Early Childhood Member Survey indicated they have used mindfulness or other contemplative practices within their work setting in many different ways, which are described in [Chart 1](#).



Chart 1

## How have you used these practices in your work? Select all that apply. n=246



## WORKPLACE CLIMATE

Let's consider the benefits of practicing mindfulness across a whole system to share a positive emotional climate characterized by compassion and healthy social interactions. Workplace climate reflects the degree to which employees feel supported, motivated, and valued. Warning signs of a negative climate include unhealthy communication patterns, a hyper-competitive culture, hyper-critical evaluations, social isolation, unclear or poorly implemented practices and policies, and reluctant or inconsistent leadership. Overall, a positive climate is associated with organizational effectiveness (Cameron et al 2011).

Mindfulness training programs and team-based reflective practices offer a reliable and systematic method for improving workplace climate. Mindfulness training programs can be used to incorporate regular interaction with employees using clear and direct communication in a group. Training programs that use mindfulness practices offer an opportunity to identify existing team values and generate new shared values. The group training provides a chance to establish and maintain healthy social norms for everyone participating and to openly reflect together.

When mindfulness is practiced in the workplace, teams can achieve more cohesion leading to:

- **More effective management**
- **Enhanced employer-employee and peer relationships**
- **Stronger, healthier team dynamics**
- **Fewer reactive, emotionally driven decisions**
- **Healthier strategies for preventing or addressing conflict when it comes up**
- **A more positive work environment**

Mindfulness training programs can be used to offer staff, children, and families a sense of psychological safety, which captures the extent to which a person believes others will give them the “benefit of the doubt” when taking risks (Edmondson 2004). It can take time and care to develop a sense of psychological safety among team members; individuals need to see that when they take healthy risks of self-expression, the group or team responds with support. Mindfulness can help us to be more intentional in our self-expression, be effective communicators, and increase our ability to consider others’ ideas and points of view with openness and acceptance.

Mindfulness may broaden our capacity to remain in the learning zone and enhance workplace performance. In one study, individuals who rated themselves as naturally possessing dispositional mindfulness were more likely to demonstrate greater flexibility in their responses to others and an enhanced capacity to pause and consider options/ consequences before acting (Kaplan 2018).

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## MINDFULNESS AS A PROMISING BUSINESS MODEL

Just as schools have been looking at the return on investment (ROI) of social emotional learning, companies have been considering the ROI of mindfulness for employees. There is a growing awareness of the costs of missing work, being ineffective at work, and staff turnover associated with staff stress and mental health challenges. Companies are using mindfulness as a feature for stress-reduction programs, to change organizational climate, and anticipate employee needs before they arise.

- Aetna recently opened the Mindfulness Center in Hartford, CT, to advance its commitment to mindfulness, which has been building since 2011 when the company offered its first mindfulness-based stress reduction program to associates. This program resulted in a 35% reduction in perceived stress and a 20% improvement in sleep.
- In Germany, the software company SAP launched a mindfulness pilot program in 2013 for its employees. This program has become very popular and more than 6,000 employees and executives have participated. The training consists of a two-day mindfulness course that focuses on meditations and includes components on self-mastery and compassion. The outcomes have been particularly impressive with participants in the SAP mindfulness program reporting increased well-being and higher creativity. Over time, the initial program has been expanded to include guided meditations during working hours and a multiweek mindfulness challenge. Meditation “micropractices” are taught by internal trainers and offer a unique practical feature of the program. One “micropractice” invites participants to tune out of a busy workday for a few minutes and tune into their breathing. “For many managers, it has become the new normal to open meetings with short meditations,” says Peter Bostelmann, the SAP’s global mindfulness practice director (Greiser & Martini 2018).
- Google’s “Search Inside Yourself” (SIY) mindfulness course has been taught since 2007. The course became popular as a contemplative training program to help people better relate to themselves and others and to foster emotional intelligence. It is now offered through the SIY Leadership Institute and has become a model for many other corporate programs.

# APPLICATION

Like the practice of mindfulness itself, integrating mindfulness in the workplace should be intentional, focused, kind, and open. It will take curiosity, patience, and practice. In this section, we present steps to bring mindfulness into the work environment. We offer a basic road map and some ideas to get you started. There are many opportunities to customize activities and approaches that will best suit your specific context. Selecting an approach and activities that meet the needs and interests of your organization will help ensure the success of your effort.

## ROADMAP FOR BRINGING MINDFULNESS TO WORK

### Steps for practical application and implementation in your organization



#### 1. Start with yourself

Develop an authentic experience with mindfulness and share from that experience.

#### 2. Assess interest

Ask questions to explore and discover what is already happening in your organization.

#### 3. Internal champions

Seek others to help you move the effort forward and share responsibility for success.

#### 4. Create collective intentions

Identify and connect to existing organizational values.

#### 5. Implement your action plan

Build on and extend current structures and practices of your team.

#### 6. Adapt your plan!

Make sure to acknowledge progress and learning as you continue to deepen your practices.

## STEP 1: START WITH YOURSELF

The first consideration is to explore mindfulness yourself. Any time we share ideas about mindfulness with others –colleagues, parents or children—it’s important that we have a solid understanding and authentic mindfulness experience. Examine your own existing ideas about mindfulness and other contemplative practices. If you haven’t already, develop a mindfulness practice. Discover for yourself how mindfulness impacts your own well-being and capacity to be present and attuned with others. You are building your capacity for calm presence and this will be the foundation for spreading the reach and impact of mindfulness throughout your organization. In a 2018 ZERO TO THREE Member Survey, we asked early childhood professionals what supported their use of mindfulness in the workplace; the number one response was personally experiencing the benefits of practice.

### To begin exploring mindfulness yourself:

- Try these brief, informal practices (included in the resources section)
  - [How am I?](#)
  - [3-minute breathing space](#)
  - [Extended Breath practice](#)
  - [Calm Breath, Clear Mind Meditation](#)
- Listen to free, guided meditations through one of many apps or web sources such as:
  - [Insight Timer](#)
  - [Stop, Breathe, Think](#)
  - [Calm](#)
  - [10% Happier](#)
  - [Mindful.org Guided Meditation](#)
  - [UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center Guided Meditations](#)
- Read a book about mindfulness or self-compassion
  - [The Little Book of Mindfulness](#) by Patrizia Collard
  - [10% Happier](#) by Dan Harris
  - [Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life](#) by Jon Kabat-Zinn
  - [Self-Compassion: The proven power of being kind to yourself](#) by Kristen Neff
  - [Mindfulness: A Practical Guide](#) by Mark Williams and Danny Penman
  - [The Mindfulness Revolution a book of essays](#) by various authors
- [Explore the diversity of contemplative practices](#)
- Try a class at a local meditation or other contemplative practice center or studio
- Try a mind-body movement class such as authentic movement, yoga, Qigong, Tai Chi, the Alexander Technique, etc.
- Look for other programs available in your community or online that will introduce you - to mindfulness such as:
  - [Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction](#)
  - [Free online MBSR course is available](#)
  - [Mindful Self Compassion \(MSC\)](#)
  - [Compassion Cultivation Training](#)



## STEP 2: ASSESS INTEREST

Before starting any major initiative with staff or colleagues, it is important to assess interest and motivation. Be curious! Start a conversation, share your story.

You can learn about what others in your workplace know about mindfulness and increase interest and motivation for integrating mindfulness into your workplace by starting with these questions.

- How do you care for yourself so you can do great work here at our organization?
- What concerns, if any, do you have about the wellness of our workforce?
- How do you check in with yourself from time to time at work?
- How do you take time to reflect back on your experiences at work?
- Do you have ideas for how we can build our own resilience and increase the resilience in the children and families that we work with?
- What desires or needs are there for improving team communication and cohesion?
- What have you heard about mindfulness?
- Do you have any interest in developing some ways for us to bring mindfulness into our organization?
- Are you interested in learning more about the neuroscience of mindfulness that supports it as a powerful way to build psychological health and flexibility?
- Do you have an interest in sharing mindfulness and contemplative practice with families or children you are serving?

There are many different perceptions about what mindfulness is, and some perceptions can be barriers to integration. Take time to consider the best language to use when talking about mindfulness with people in your organization. [Examples: creating healthy mental habits, being present and connected, brain training, skills to build self-awareness and emotion regulation, reflective practice, practices to support stress reduction and well-being]

It will also be important to determine the administration or leadership position around integrating mindfulness. Share this toolkit or other information about mindfulness to help leaders understand why this effort is important to you and how it can benefit the organization. As you begin this outreach—think about why mindfulness might be important in your specific context. Is workforce wellness or staff retention a concern? Are there desires or needs for improving team communication and cohesion? Is there an interest in sharing mindfulness and contemplative practice with families or children you are serving? There may be more than one reason that leadership and staff are interested. Understanding the current landscape in your workplace will give you helpful insights into making this effort successful. Make sure to include a diversity of voices in your exploration. Consider using the [Tree of Contemplative Practices from the Center for Mind in Society](#) to start the conversation or choose one of the other resources listed below.

To assess interest and motivation, you can:

- Use the previous questions to start a discussion at staff, team, or supervisory meetings
- Set up time to talk about this topic with administration or leadership [Key Questions for Leaders to Consider Handout in Resources]

- Implement a brief staff survey on mindfulness (Brief Staff Survey Example in Resources) or workforce wellness
- Share your own experience of mindfulness

After gathering information from staff, use the results from this effort to help guide your next steps and, be sure to report back what you have learned.



### STEP 3: IDENTIFY INTERNAL CHAMPIONS, CULTIVATE BUY-IN

Find others who share your commitment! Use results from your assessment process to identify colleagues who have an interest in mindfulness. Are there others who practice mindfulness or another contemplative practice? What resources can they bring? What experiences can they share? Remember the best advocates for mindfulness embody and model the qualities of mindfulness. Build a small group who will work together to bring mindfulness into your organization. Ideally, this group will reflect diverse voices including leadership and administrators. Start by sharing and discussing the results of your assessment and obtain a commitment from all members to work on creating a vision for mindfulness in your organization.

Finding a champion within organizational leadership is important. Not only are leaders positioned to be influencers across the organization, they can also make important links between organizational efforts and priorities. Leaders often hold the authority to create the time and space needed to make integration successful. So, plan special outreach if leadership is not part of your group working to integrate mindfulness. Share the first sections of this toolkit to help you make the case. Discuss the findings of your assessment. Align your message to leadership with any specific interests or needs of your organization. For example, if employee absenteeism or turnover is a concern, include research demonstrating how mindfulness increases workplace satisfaction and employee well-being.

To further develop interest and cultivate champions:

- Form a community of practice
- Host an informational brown bag lunch, or brief presentation at the start of a meeting to introduce mindfulness or a related concept for discussion. Try these:
  - o [ZTT resources](#)
  - o [Watching a snow globe settle](#)
  - o [Mindfulness is a Superpower](#)
  - o [Using the Barrel of Monkeys game as a metaphor for how our minds get caught up in our thoughts](#)
  - o [Harvard Business Review Article](#)



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- Provide basic information about mindfulness through internal newsletters or message boards
- Tell your story, share how mindfulness has impacted your own work and well-being
- Invite staff to share contemplative practices from their own cultures and traditions

**Case Example:** An interview with Dr. Holly Hatton-Bowers, Assistant Professor and Early Childhood Extension Specialist at University of Nebraska–Lincoln captured the insights and wisdom from her team offering the Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators (CHIME) program to early childhood educators in Nebraska. CHIME provides education and guidance on incorporating mindfulness, compassion, and reflective practice into daily routines, teaching, and caregiving to promote the psychological health, well-being, and social-emotional learning of both educators and young children.

The CHIME program consists of a two-hour overview followed by seven sessions for learning and reflection. Holly has been implementing this program with her co-leader, Nebraska Extension Educator Jaci Foged, for family home and center-based early childhood educators since 2017. Almost two years into this work, Holly is excited to share her team’s learning to inspire other organizations and programs.

Holly advocates starting with the adults, using compassion and mindfulness as an explicit relational tool, and cautions against a sole focus on sharing compassion and mindfulness activities with children. Many early care organizations have a clear commitment to reflective practice and supervision, so mindfulness can broaden the application of these practices throughout the organizational culture.

Holly recommends seeding compassion, mindfulness, and reflective practice into the culture of the organization. Once embedded, the culture can maintain the commitment to mindfulness and reflective practices without dependence on specific individuals. For example, when mindful moments have been modeled in meetings, leadership and staff feel more comfortable taking time for both group and self-reflection. When there are opportunities for institutional support such as ongoing professional training and reflective supervision, staff embrace these practices as part of their regular work approach. Additionally, taking an organizational approach ensures that we are not sending the message that educator well-being is the individual’s responsibility. To ensure early childhood educators are thriving, not merely surviving, a systems approach is essential.

Holly shared a story of how compassion and mindfulness can increase staff capacity to be present and respond to children’s needs. One infant teacher in the CHIME program expressed their anxiety and lack of confidence in caring

for a refugee infant who was suffering from failure to thrive. The infant teacher was feeling frustrated and felt that the mother did not seem to treat this as an important issue. Through reflection and practicing compassion for self and the family, as well as mindfulness, the infant teacher identified ways to be more responsive instead of reactive. A mindful breathing technique helped the infant teacher relax during the bottle feeding. The infant teacher subsequently reported feeling calmer and more confident in supporting this child, which promoted effective feeding and weight gain for the child.

After completing CHIME, educators commented that they learned how to better manage their emotions, listen more, and communicate with co-workers more effectively. They also feel they have a calmer classroom and are finding more joy in their day-to-day work. As one educator wrote, “CHIME helped me find different ways to help regulate my emotions during frustrating situations. CHIME has also helped my classroom become a calmer atmosphere.” After completing CHIME, another educator wrote, “The class has been a huge source of information for taking care of myself in many ways. All the practices to learn to live in the moment and practice gratitude each day have been beneficial. The listening practices with classmates each week helped me develop better listening skills. I have more awareness of thinking before speaking.”

Through her experiences, and the preliminary data of delivering CHIME to 93 early childhood educators, Holly has identified effective strategies for implementing mindfulness-training at the organizational level:

- Begin with an internal champion who has a strong commitment to bring compassion and mindfulness to the organization as well as a solid, authentic relationship to mindfulness.
- Train leadership first. Without adequate trust in leadership and a positive rationale for doing the work, staff may be neither adequately prepared nor invested.
- Follow up with direct staff training and provide ongoing support for continued practice.
  - Provide ample time and space for training and ongoing implementation.
  - Mindfulness groups work best during work hours as opposed to after hours.
  - Pay staff to attend and offer mindfulness training as a way to invest in educators and support their well-being.

- Integrate mindfulness into organizational culture through the following:
  - Practicing reflective supervision.
  - Instituting collective mindfulness practice at the start and end of meetings.
  - Creating a space for educators to practice self-compassion and mindfulness, such as a wellness room, that conveys commitment to educator well-being.
- Compassion and mindfulness-based programs may not be acceptable to all educators. There are other ways to promote educator well-being. Be open to having different approaches to ensure that a program doesn't send the message that mindfulness is the only way to promote well-being.

Holly adds, "People liked it when we linked mindfulness to compassion. This connection was helpful because the idea of mindfulness didn't initially resonate with everyone. Compassion resonated with people who felt hesitant to focus just on themselves and their emotional experience."

Holly offers these reflective questions to consider before implementing a mindfulness training program:

- What is your understanding of mindfulness and what are your expectations for how it will impact your organization?
- How will you build psychological safety as a foundation for the mindfulness training? Is there committed leadership within the organization?
- Do internal champions have a solid personal practice and authentic relationship to mindfulness?
- Will it be possible to train a cohort of educators together? How will you provide your staff with time away from their work and a clear space free from distractions? What incentives can you provide?
- How have you prepared to provide emotional and psychological support for educators who have experienced trauma?

## STEP 4: CREATE COLLECTIVE INTENTIONS AND DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

Using mindfulness in the workplace should be based in clear intentions for focused, kind and open engagement. Clarify your purpose! Once you have a committed group, develop your shared vision for integrating mindfulness into your workplace. Consider what you learned from your assessment process as well as any existing workplace initiatives or special projects. Are you focused on bringing mindfulness to a particular area of practice, for example, with caseload-carrying staff? Or, is the goal to shift the workplace culture toward more mindfulness where all staff have access and support for practice? Set goals that are connected to your current organizational values and build on existing structures and practices.

Create an action plan. Your action plan should include small meaningful steps that bring your larger vision to life. Describe where and how you will begin integrating mindfulness into your workplace activities. Bringing mindfulness into your workplace does not need to be time-consuming or expensive. Mindfulness practices can be brief, informal, and used at any time and with any activity during the day. Take time to identify opportunities within your current workplace structure and practice where mindfulness activities can easily be integrated. Make it easy and accessible for staff.

Anticipate barriers and have a plan for addressing them as they arise. Information from your assessment may be helpful in identifying potential obstacles. You may want to pilot the plan with willing volunteers, a small group, or for a limited time period—then integrate feedback from participants before introducing activities to the larger community. As part of your plan, describe what success looks like—and how you will know if you've achieved it.

Continue or extend the activities you initiated to gain buy-in and cultivate champions.



More ideas to consider are listed below.

- Create time and space for individuals to practice
  - [Secure a dedicated space for silent, contemplative practice](#)
  - [Give explicit permission for staff to take mindful breaks, protecting this time in the schedule](#)
  - [Offer contemplative retreat time as a professional development opportunity](#)
- Bring mindfulness into meetings. Use the following tools (in Resources):
  - [Mindful Minute Meeting Opener](#)
  - [Hand-to-Heart Practice](#)
  - [How to Use a Talking Piece](#)
  - [Create collaborative agreements for team meetings that support a compassionate environment for open sharing and discussion such as:](#)
    - Curiosity is encouraged
    - There is ample time and space for process
    - All feelings, beliefs and perspectives are considered and respected
    - Individuals recognize their behavior impacts others and are committed to understanding those impacts
    - Common ground and shared values are sought.
- Create a mindful partnership with a colleague or across your team. These exercises can help cultivate mindfulness and compassion with partners or groups:
  - [Reflective Partnerships](#)
  - [Just Like Me](#)
  - [Sharing Feelings](#)
  - [Moving Meditation: Felt Sense of Resilience](#)
  - [Active Listening and Response](#)
- Periodically host mindful breaks
  - [Silent “savor your lunch” break](#)
  - [Mindful morning walk break](#)
  - [Mindful movement break](#)
- Integrate informal mindfulness practices that staff can do with children
  - [Balloon Breath](#)
  - [Starfish Breath](#)
  - [Calming Glitter Bottle](#)
  - [Five Senses](#)
  - [Pleasure Gazing](#)

- Begin supervision meetings or case conferences with a mindfulness practice
  - [How Am I?](#)
  - [Mindful Minute Meeting Opener](#)
  - [Hand-to-Heart Practice](#)
- Start a mindfulness-based reflective practice group

**Case Example:** Simone Van Reeuyk, an Infant Development Specialist at the Developmental Disabilities Association in Vancouver, British Columbia, highlights the importance of collaboration around efforts to integrate mindfulness within an organization. In 2018, Simone initiated a mindfulness-based reflective practice group in her organization. The voluntary group meets monthly to practice together and discuss their work through a mindfulness lens. Simone shares, “Discussing what you want the mindfulness space to be like is important. Coming together to create a shared vision and inviting people to express what they are hoping for, helps create a space where people feel more comfortable being open and vulnerable in the group.” For Simone and her colleagues, this meant developing ground rules, which are reviewed at each meeting and edited as needed. Simone found starting the group this way helped make the environment safer and more inviting for collaboration. Simone adds that taking an inclusive and collaborative approach from the very beginning also helps others see a place for themselves in the group. Her recommendation: start with staff feedback to make sure your approach is a fit for your setting.

- Sponsor a mindfulness-based training in your workplace
  - [Contact ZTT to discuss customized opportunities](#)
- Bring in local mindfulness experts to speak to staff or as part of an event
- Attend a professional retreat as a group to gain insights and momentum for your plan.

## SPECIAL FOCUS: MINDFULNESS IN REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

If you are already engaged in formal reflective practice (supervision or groups), there are many opportunities to bring a fresh focus by adding mindfulness. A hallmark of reflective practice is to step back and see things as they actually are—to perceive what’s present within the context of the environment and as part of the holistic experience of a person (child, parent, provider). This act of stepping back—examining things as they really are - takes practice.

One way that early childhood settings are creating opportunities for providers to strengthen emotional regulation and reflective practice is through reflective supervision. Mindfulness in reflective supervision expands self-awareness and strengthens providers’ emotional regulation. Your organization may already be committed to reflective supervision as a distinct form of competency-based professional development. Emerging from a multitude of fields such as pediatrics, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and infant mental health, reflective supervision acknowledges that all early learning occurs in the context of relationships. In reflective supervision, the goal is to support the unique needs of the young child through relationships with competent adults. Attention is placed on all the relationships (supervisor and provider, provider and parent, and parent and child) that form a web of support around the child.

Parallel process is a foundational concept in reflective supervision and it recognizes that providers are growing alongside of the families they serve. Reflective supervision creates a supportive space, a holding environment, for understanding the simultaneous impact and influence of professional and personal experiences. On a practical level, reflective supervision means providers are given time to reflect on and consider conscious feelings, thoughts, and associations in the presence of a competent supervisor. It takes time to uncover and process unconscious material. Ongoing reflective supervision is well-suited for this task. Mindfulness is a powerful tool that allows thoughts, feelings, and interpretations to emerge in a non-judgmental context so they can be accepted and integrated. Supervisors can use mindfulness in the context of reflective supervision to help providers become skillful as they process and attend to the emotional material they naturally experience through caring for children and working with families.

When mindfulness practices are incorporated into reflective supervision, organizations lay a foundation for creating and sustaining nurturing environments, which gives children the warmth and security they need to feel safe. Nurturing environments allow children to discover themselves and their unique contributions to the collective. Nurturing environments support children as well as their families, care providers, and teachers. Promoting mindful, flexible, pro-social values is one of the four key principles of nurturing environments, according to researcher Biglan (2015). When organizations take the time and allocate the space adults need to explore and practice mindfulness and build their emotional regulation skills, these organizations are investing in children.

Resources and Tools to help bring mindfulness into Reflective Supervision with staff:

- [Emotional Competence Skills](#)
- [Hand-to-Heart practice](#)
- [How am I? Check-in](#)
- [Sharing Feelings](#)
- [Plutchik Wheel of Emotion](#)
- [Temperament Quiz](#)
- [Cultural Curiosity Handout](#)

**Case Example:** The Division of Community and Family Support within the Colorado Office of Early Childhood (DCFS) offers an inspiring example of integrating mindfulness in a comprehensive way in a public institution. DCFS is demonstrating that relationship-based reflective practice can be embraced in a government setting.

The DCFS journey to integrate mindfulness and reflective practice started with reflection and strong leadership. Almost all of the programs supported by this division have model fidelity requirements that reflective supervision be practiced. “The first thing that caught my attention,” reflects Mary Martin former Director of DCFS, “was the understanding of parallel process.” Mary adds, “if this is what we are requiring of supervisors and managers in the field as a best practice—why are we not doing

it for each other here in this office?” The second piece Mary noted was mindfulness. As an Infant Mental Health Practitioner, Mary found mindfulness a sensible option for workforce well-being.

Findings from an annual employee satisfaction survey showed a high degree of satisfaction at DCFS, but also evidence of work-related frustration and stress. Leaders in DCFS sought ways to improve. Jordana Ash, Director of Early Childhood Mental Health noticed a missing piece—ways of being present and reflective with each other. Jordana agreed with Mary, “reflective practice—was something we were promoting in the field, but we also wanted to use mindfulness and reflection to encourage and promote employee well-being internally in the office.”

DCFS approached the innovation from a staff well-being perspective. In an administrative and governmental context, mindfulness and reflective practice concepts required a lot of translation for staff whose responsibilities do not include direct practice. DCFS used their continuous quality improvement process to get everyone on board. Heather Craiglow, Director of Colorado’s Head Start Collaboration Office, offered, “Data was a critical component. We strongly believe in data and assessment of process, so using our data made sense and helped motivate staff.” The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine publication, *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation*, also helped make their case around the importance of staff well-being.

Leaders within DCFS did a lot of work ahead of a pilot period to introduce foundational concepts of mindfulness and reflective practice. The staff who were providing reflective practice met weekly to learn about the topics through readings and discussions. During the one-year pilot period staff were asked to schedule dedicated time for reflective practice along with their regular twice-monthly 30 minutes of supervision time. Jordana added, “We did a lot of education, then let go. We truly believed that everyone has the capacity to do this. We believed in the potential for human growth and development—that staff would come along. We embraced a mindful approach to the process, allowing response flexibility, time, and space.”

DCFS staff shared aspects they believe have been critical to the success of their project:

- Executive leadership support—executive leadership was fully informed about what the Division intended to do, expected outcomes, the level of commitment needed, as well as costs. The plan was framed as a recruitment and retention strategy, which was important to executive leadership. These senior leaders were then able to emphasize their support for the project.
- The DCFS Director was respected and trusted by DCFS staff.
- “Relationship-relationship-relationship”—there were already strong relationships across staff and a general awareness of the importance of relationships. This understanding created readiness.
- Diverse internal champions from across the organization—this helped sustain momentum.
- Gentle roll out—staff were not required to try practices if they weren’t comfortable doing so, but they were expected to participate in the presentations and discussions.
- Dialogue leaders shared why mindfulness is important,—what the value is for both individuals and DCFS as a whole, and then listened. One particular aspect that resonated with all staff was around the “busyness” everyone was experiencing. Mindfulness came to be recognized as a way for people to “slow down individually to move faster as a group”—reflecting the idea that presence and focus increases efficiency and efficacy.

To roll out the pilot project, all staff received an introductory presentation lasting a few hours conducted by Mary, Jordana, and Heather, all of whom have experience providing reflective supervision. A breakout session at a staff retreat furthered staff understanding. Mary reflects, “[staff] hearts were in the right place, but some struggled with the process. One unit lead couldn’t get past some resistance to reflective practice. I just decided it was going to be OK—that we wouldn’t make a big deal about it and the slowing down and reflection emerged at a different pace.”

The biggest barriers for DCFS were time and space. Effective practice requires privacy. For example, in one coaching group (for supervisors supervising other supervisors) confidentiality was hard to manage. This group shifted to using external scenarios, videos, and readings instead of internal cases. One-on-one sessions with leadership were made available to retain confidentiality while continuing to reinforce the practice.

DCFS leadership continues to be reflective of the process. Because the employee satisfaction survey started with such a high baseline, staff are working through how to best measure and capture changes. They continue to explore questions about the utility of this approach. Ultimately, DCFS leaders agree, the project has helped everyone dig deeper into resilience and their own team relationships. Ways this project is in action at DCFS today:

- Meetings begin with a mindful moment or centering activity
- Staff participate in reflective groups
- Information about reflective supervision and mindfulness in DCFS are included in orientation and onboarding materials.
- Reflective supervision is a support for staff up and down the organizational chart (including for administrative assistants, communication technicians, and legislative and financial staff)

What does it look like when mindfulness and reflective practice are part of a culture? Mary offered, "I began to hear managers incorporating a reflective stance within their regular check-ins. Across staff, the language of slowing down is heard and mindfulness is modeled. Some Unit Directors have written in their own self-assessments how useful practicing mindfulness and reflection has been for them. DCFS leaders also see the appetite for these kinds of practices growing."

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## STEP 5: IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN

You are ready! Once you have articulated your collective intention for integrating mindfulness and identified the mindful activities you will introduce into your workplace, it's time to try it. Remember, practicing mindfulness requires slowing down and tuning in. This can feel unfamiliar and strange in our typically hectic and distracted work environments. Be patient, kind, and open with colleagues and staff as this process unfolds. Be the calm you are working to cultivate.

As you try different ways to integrate mindfulness into your workplace environment, consider the following checklist of tips and traps for bringing mindfulness to your organization:

- **Tip:** Celebrate the diversity of ways and the diversity of the people who practice and experience mindfulness.
  - **Trap:** Focusing on one specific practice as the way to be mindful and one dominant culture.
- 
- **Tip:** Create a physical space that is safe, secure and free from external distraction for staff to practice meditation or another silent contemplative practice.
  - **Trap:** Bringing mindfulness into a physical space that doesn't feel safe or supportive, or has significant noise or distraction.
- 
- **Tip:** Make time for mindfulness and reflection in supervision or reflective groups, and in meetings or other shared work activities. Take moments to pause, notice, acknowledge, and reflect together.
  - **Trap:** Inserting mindfulness into a situation where employee performance is being evaluated.
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- **Tip:** Offer space for mindful lunch or break time, including access to time in nature or getting outside of the building.
  - **Trap:** Inserting mindfulness in a way that feels rushed, pressured, or forced and doesn't involve consent.

- **Tip:** Be clear in framing concepts within the context of your existing organizational values.
  - **Trap:** Framing mindfulness as something that people should do without explaining why.
- 
- **Tip:** Start your meetings with an opening activity to fully arrive, focus attention on a shared intention or value to become present to the current environment, and set the tone for a productive meeting.
  - **Trap:** Having the mindful opening encroach upon valuable time that was scheduled for productive team work.
- 
- **Tip:** Start small and make it simple. Bringing mindful practices to the workplace does not have to be a special, separate activity from what is already happening.
  - **Trap:** Working too hard or moving too quickly.
- 
- **Tip:** Use mindfulness as a tool to explore challenging emotions with curiosity and compassion, and without judgment about ourselves or others.
  - **Trap:** Presenting mindfulness as the tool that will remove unpleasant emotions, such as anxiety, fear, or anger, instead of staying present with these emotions non-judgmentally.
- 
- **Tip:** Mindfulness practices have been shown to support healing from trauma and reduce stress. However, some mindfulness practices can be triggering. Emphasize safety and be trauma-sensitive.
  - **Trap:** Believing that mindfulness will automatically lead to a sense of peacefulness and calm, and not planning for the possibility that mindfulness practices could be triggering for those suffering from trauma or mental health conditions.
- 
- **Tip:** Consider mindfulness as a tool for transformation of people and systems as we engage, teach, learn, and make ethical decisions together.
  - **Trap:** Using mindfulness to temporarily alleviate individual suffering or build individual capacities without a framework for shared values and ethics to guide action.
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## Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness

Some mindfulness practices can be triggering for trauma survivors or those coping with extreme stress—particularly sitting meditation and some breath practices. It’s important, whenever we offer mindfulness practices, to have this in mind. Ways to help ensure mindfulness offerings at your work are safe and effective for everyone:

- Practicing should always be voluntary, never forced.
- Offer options for practices—for example, eyes open or closed, standing instead of sitting. If certain practices produce anxiety, offer alternative places to focus (listening to sounds instead of following the breath)
- Let everyone know that it’s always ok to modify (opening the eyes, practicing for shorter time periods, or taking breaks during an exercise) or stop the practice if they are becoming dysregulated.
- Learn more about mindfulness and trauma, visit [davidtreleaven.com](http://davidtreleaven.com).

## STEP 6: MONITOR PROGRESS, ADAPT, CELEBRATE SUCCESS

To make mindfulness a sustainable part of your organizational or team practice and culture, make sure that you acknowledge progress along the way. This goes beyond merely accepting all levels of progress. It involves the understanding that cultural differences in the pace and ways we embrace mindful practices will exist because we live in a multicultural world. Periodically assess results and share what you learn. Celebrate success and honor any obstacles as teaching moments. Revisit your plan and make adaptations as needed. Information about a variety of mindfulness scales and measurement tools can be found [here](#).

Consider expanding your organizational commitment to mindfulness, connecting to a larger network or professional organization, or presenting at a conference to share what you have accomplished.

Once mindfulness is being practiced consistently by staff, consider ways to expand the reach by sharing practices with families and children.



### Case Example:

Victor, a multi-site non-profit organization in California, is composed of two agencies that provide a wide array of services and support for people of all ages, including families with young children. Their services include early identification and intervention, wraparound services for children and youth with complex needs, Family Resource Centers, and many behavioral health programs. Victor has a long history of focusing on provider health and wellness and is committed to be a learning organization. In addition, there were several advocates for mindfulness across the organization. These factors helped create readiness for bringing mindfulness into this workplace.

One of the champions, Debbie Reno-Smith, LMFT, IFECMH-SP/RPM, Executive Director, was initially introduced to mindfulness through a colleague at Victor. After attending a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, Debbie developed a personal mindfulness practice and experienced many benefits, such as stress reduction. Debbie continued to develop her mindfulness practice and training skills by attending additional MBSR programming as well as a course in Mindful Self Compassion. During this journey and with the support of leadership, Debbie began to plant the seeds of mindfulness within her workplace by sharing information, including the science behind these practices.

Debbie began to talk about her experience with mindfulness to other staff. She shared information or a brief video during all staff meetings or opened the meeting with a few moments of mindfulness. This gradual introduction of concepts began to pique the interest of others. Debbie then created a program for staff, Work Life Integration, that was adapted from the MBSR curriculum. During the eight-week program, staff meet as a group for 90 minutes each week to learn about mindfulness as a tool for stress reduction in the workplace. Debbie explained, "Our staff are exposed to the many trauma stories of our families and I feel strongly about responding to the impact of this trauma exposure on staff. I find, time and time again, that support for the providers is what makes it possible for them to keep doing their jobs in the face of stress." Since its inception about six years ago, the Work Life Integration Program has been implemented five times across different Victor sites. The program fits well with the organization's strong focus on health, wellness, and continuous learning, and it's well-received by staff. Some have taken the program multiple times and others report continuing the mindful practices at work and in their personal life.

Dawn Fisher, LCSW, Executive Director of Victor Community Support Services - Victorville, explains that she was initially skeptical about mindfulness and wasn't sure it was a good fit for her. But, after hearing about Debbie's experience, she agreed to try it. "Once I took MBSR, mindfulness became valuable to me on a personal level." Dawn believes that others really need to experience the practice to understand the benefits.

Several staff who completed the Work Life Integration Program have gone on to be trained in the Mindful Schools curriculum and deliver that program in groups or during one-on-one work. Dawn reflects on the results for children who have participated in the Mindful Schools curriculum: “Their ability to settle, participate, and even lead is remarkably improved. Kids talk about using the practices at home to help with sleep, in moments when they feel anxious, or teaching [practices] to parents and siblings.”

Debbie and Dawn offered tips for others interested in integrating mindfulness in their own organization:

- Make it voluntary—focus on folks who are interested.
- Carefully consider how it’s presented—share the science and potential benefits.
- Respect the diversity in your workplace. Ensure everyone feels included and that their personal values are being respected.
- Share the effort with colleagues—it’s hard for one person to carry the torch.
- Balance education with experiential opportunities—offer videos, readings, and opportunities for discussion as well as time to slow down and focus.
- Be creative and offer a variety of practices, including kindness and gratitude (which help team cohesion and morale), breathing, and mindful movement in the work setting on a day-to-day basis. At Victor, the practices are always linked to science and options are offered.
- Start with staff first, then expand to sharing with children and families.

## INTEGRATING MINDFULNESS AT VICTOR



### 1. Create Interest

Provide information about the science behind mindfulness and meditation. After informational videos or reading, share our experience of mindfulness.



### 2. Create a venue for workforce participation

Include informal, daily experiences and a formal learning program, *Work Life Intergration*.



### 3. Train staff to deliver a mindfulness intervention with clients

Staff were required to complete *Work Life Intergration* and have an established personal practice prior to attending Mindful Schools training.



### 4. Continue ongoing practice of mindfulness with staff and clients

# CONCLUSION

Whether you are just thinking about bringing mindfulness to your early childhood organization, or you have an already established program, we hope this toolkit offers helpful information and resources to support your efforts. We know that workplaces thrive when the health and well-being of staff is prioritized. And, that staff well-being is crucial to delivering effective services that support child and family well-being. The integration of mindfulness and compassion into the workplace is a powerful tool for creating and supporting healthy, high-performing teams and an organizational culture infused with awareness, intention, and success.

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# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## **Burnout:**

A state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and reduced professional efficacy as a result of chronic work-related stress and/or vicarious trauma.

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## **Co-regulation:**

A reciprocal process between child and caregiver characterized by warm, responsive interactions. Co-regulation is the process by which children develop social and emotional capacities via the caregiving relationship. Close physical contact, calming touch, supportive vocalizations and modeling are primary modes of co-regulation. Over time and with support, a child internalizes the caregiver's regulatory capacities through practice and reinforcement.

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## **Contingent Responsiveness:**

When a care provider's response is related to and dependent upon something a child says or does. Children's behavior can be seen as a bid for attention and contingent responsiveness is a way for the care provider to let the child know that they are seen, heard and valued, often shortened to 'responsiveness'.

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## **Common Humanity:**

The recognition of and compassion for our shared experience as mortal, vulnerable and imperfect human beings.

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## **Contemplative Practice:**

Activities that include deep, reflective thought with an aim to foster self-awareness and/or presence to experience.

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## **Emotional Attunement:**

Being aware of and responsive to emotional needs and moods of another, creating a sense of connectedness and reciprocal understanding.

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## **Emotional Climate:**

The prevailing mood, attitudes and tone experienced within a setting (team, workplace, classroom etc.)

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## **Mindful Self-compassion (MSC):**

As described by Christopher Germer, PhD, and Kristen Neff, PhD, MSC has three elements that relate to how we see ourselves, others and the experience of emotions. MSC emphasizes self-kindness rather than self-judgment, common humanity rather than isolation and mindful perspective rather than over-identification with our emotions. MSC teaches that suffering is part of the human experience and can be a gateway to our shared humanity as well as a foundation for emotional intelligence.

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## **Parallel Process:**

Recognition that relationships are a mirror and also that one relationship influences other relationships, for example the relationship between the provider and parent impacts the relationship between parent and child. As providers we offer ourselves as a model so that others can imitate, learn and be inspired through our professional presence at the same time we are experiencing growth, learning and inspiration from the relationship with our own supervisor.

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## **Psychological Safety:**

When one feels confident sharing views, ideas and concerns without fear of embarrassment, rejection or punishment. A feeling of safety being oneself.

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### **Psychological Flexibility:**

The ability to adapt to changing demands including shifting perspective and balancing competing needs and desires - acting on chosen values rather than short-term impulses.

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### **Response Flexibility:**

The ability to create space between a stimulus and response that allows us to behave in adaptive ways to evolving circumstances. It includes the skill of integrating emotional, behavioral and cognitive information to see options, and problem solve.

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### **Reflective Functioning:**

The capacity to understand our own and others' behavior in light of thoughts, feelings and intentions.

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### **Reflective Practice:**

Thinking deeply and talking about behavior with an aim to understand the underlying beliefs, assumptions and motivations that affect responses. In the work context, reflective practices help to establish and maintain best standards of professional practice and also help to ensure accountability and support for each individual to develop the skills they need to do their best work.

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### **Scaffolding:**

A competent adult or older youth provides the encouragement and the guidance to enable a child to reach beyond their current capacity. The model must be competent in order for the child to develop the skill.

### **Self-regulation:**

The capacity to be aware of and manage emotions to maintain a state and sense of calm. Self-regulation includes a wide range of internal processing such as inhibiting, initiating and modulating of emotions and then choosing behaviors that make sense for the given situation. It can be a process of anticipating and planning ahead as well as a process of responding in the moment to unexpected situations. Through being aware of the full range of emotions and exercising the capacity to remain present to what is happening, self-regulation becomes a powerful tool for demonstrating social and emotional competence.

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### **Team Cohesion:**

A unifying force binding a team together that is built through identifying common values to enhance the perception of unity and the experience of effectively working through challenges.

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### **Toxic Stress:**

Unrelenting, pervasive stress that one can't impact or influence. It undermines functioning. Toxic stress is particularly damaging to children and those already vulnerable.

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### **Vicarious Trauma:**

A specific type of trauma that results when caregiving professionals are repeatedly exposed to the traumatic experiences or trauma stories of the clients they care for. Characterized by extreme symptoms with persistent heightened arousal at one end and emotional numbing and withdrawal at the other.

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# RESOURCES

There are different types of resources within this section. There are some resources to support reflection and inquiry. There are also mindfulness practice resources. Some are internal awareness practices while others are exercises meant to be done with a partner or group. There are also practices that can be done with children.

The internal awareness practices can be tried a variety of ways:

- **Read through the practice first, then try it.**
- **Try the practice as you read.**
- **Have another person read the script to you.**
- **Read the script to a group.**
- **Record yourself reading the script, then play it back and practice along.**

The practices and exercises have approximate time frames which can be adapted to your own needs. Prior to starting, it's helpful to let participants know approximately how long each practice will take, particularly when guiding internal awareness practices. Becoming still and focusing inward can feel unfamiliar so also remember to go slowly, be gentle and give options:

- Practicing should always be voluntary, never forced.
- Offer options for practices – for example, eyes open or closed, standing instead of sitting. If certain practices produce anxiety offer alternative places to focus (listening to sounds instead of following the breath).
- Let everyone know that it's always ok to modify (opening the eyes, practicing for shorter time periods, or taking breaks during an exercise) or stop the practice if they are becoming dysregulated.

After a practice, check in with participants and ask if anyone feels comfortable sharing how the practice felt. This is an opportunity to model open, non-judgmental acceptance of the experience.

# RESOURCES TO SUPPORT INQUIRY AND REFLECTION

## Key Questions for Leaders to Consider about Mindfulness in the Workplace

- What sparked my interest in mindfulness?
- How can our motivation spread to include others and build internal champions? How can we include different motivations to build a broad base of support?
- What problems are we trying to solve with mindfulness? What are the consequences of not incorporating mindfulness into our program?
- What are best practices for creating a mindfulness program in an early care setting?
- What is the science/research that we need to pay attention to? What are trends and movements that are relevant?
- What are the specific, situational considerations for introducing a successful and sustainable mindfulness program in our organization?
- What obstacles are we likely to encounter? How have we dealt with obstacles in the past?
- What is the risk? What is our tolerance for risk?
- What fears are present for us? What fears do we anticipate among leadership and administration and how can we plan to address these fears?
- What would the outcome look and feel like if we were wildly successful?
- What core values will guide this effort?
- How will we measure success?



## Brief Staff Survey Example

- What does mindfulness mean to you?
- How do you think mindfulness and self-compassion relate to the work we do with young children and their families?
- How do you use mindfulness, self-compassion or other contemplative practices in your work?
  - How have these practices impacted you and your work?
  - What has helped you integrate these practices in your work environment?
  - What has been most successful?
  - What are the biggest challenges or barriers you have experienced?
- What other cultural or traditional contemplative practices do you/have you used to focus on the present moment, find calm, or support your well-being?
- How would you like to integrate or further integrate mindfulness or other contemplative practices into your work?
- What information or experiences would help you begin or expand the use of these practices in your work?



## Developing Emotional Competence Skills

Within the context of reflective supervision, explore these emotional competence skills. Consider and discuss how mindfulness and compassion practices enhance skills.

**Emotional awareness:** I am aware of my emotional states including mixed emotions. I understand unconscious dynamics (perceptions, past experiences, biases, etc.) may impact my awareness of or attention to certain emotions.

**Understanding of emotion:** I understand my emotions as well as others' feelings based on situational and expressive cues that are consistent with my community.

**Emotional vocabulary:** I use the vocabulary of emotion from my culture and use language that links emotion with social roles in my community.

**Empathy and sympathy:** Other people's emotional experiences provide an opportunity for me to feel empathy and sympathy even if there is a difference in our cultures.

**Self-presentation:** I recognize that inner emotional experience may not correspond to outward expression in myself and others. I may present myself in ways that are incongruent to how I feel inside because I recognize the needs of others.

**Self-regulation:** I can manage my emotions using strategies that decrease stress in situations where I feel uncomfortable or have difficulty staying present.

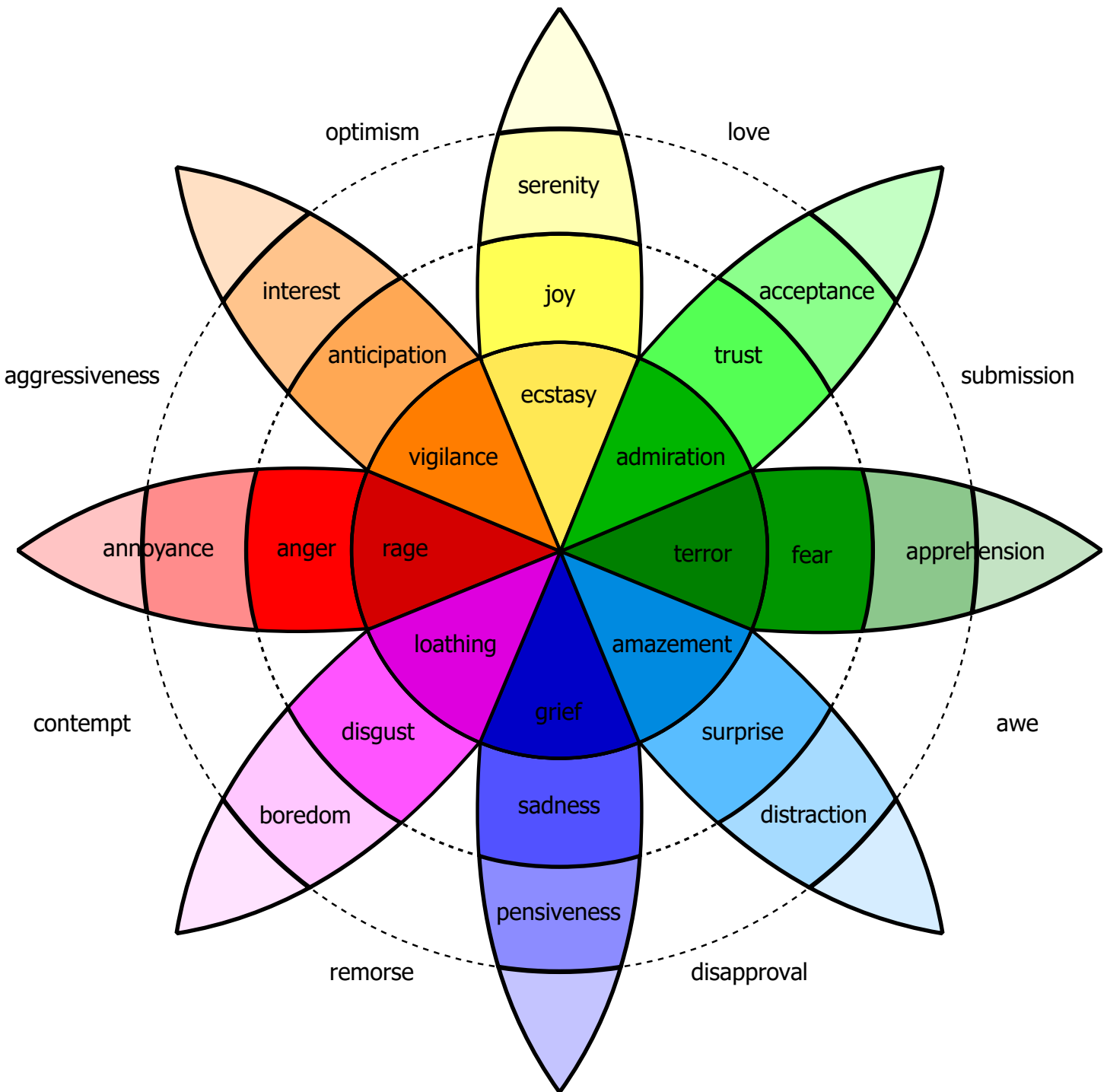
**Relational awareness:** I recognize that there are relationships that are equal and there are relationships where there is a power imbalance. When I am in a position of power, I can alter my expression of emotion accordingly and be an active listener so that I am not inflicting harm.

**Self-efficacy:** Overall, I feel able to accept my emotional experience and to maintain emotional balance based on my personal beliefs regarding my health and wellness.

Based on Saarni, C. (2000). Emotional competence: A developmental perspective. In R. Bar-On & J. D. A. Parker (Eds.), *The handbook of emotional intelligence: Theory, development, assessment, and application at home, school, and in the workplace* (pp. 68-91). San Francisco, CA, US: Jossey-Bass.

## Plutchik Wheel of Emotion

Use this wheel as a tool to explore emotions and increase emotional competence skills. The wheel can help you visualize and understand which combination of emotions are contributing to your emotional state in different situations as well as increase your emotional vocabulary.



## Temperament Quiz

Use the temperament quiz as a tool for self-reflection as you build curiosity and compassion for yourself. The mindfulness practices outlined in the toolkit can be used to expand your capacity for self-awareness, including understanding your temperament.

You can also use the temperament quiz to understand others and to build a bridge of compassion and respect across differences in temperament.

### **REFLECTIVE PARTNERSHIP OR TEAM:**

Consider sharing the quiz within your reflective partnership or team to deepen your connection with colleagues. Talking together about how you each experience the world may highlight ways you can better support each other in your professional role.

### **REFLECTIVE SUPERVISION:**

Using the quiz in reflective supervision may be another way to deepen your reflective capacities, with support from your supervisor, and understand your strengths and areas for growth.

Use this temperament quiz to build understanding in your organization about children's temperaments, the way they approach and react to the world. Every child that your organization serves has a unique temperament. How a child's temperament is expressed is influenced by multiple factors including genetics and environmental resources as well as the family's cultural values and parenting styles. Understanding a child's temperament—and the influence of these other important factors—can help providers and families better understand how young children react and relate to the world. This understanding also helps adults to identify children's strengths and what resources each child may need to grow and learn. Another aspect of temperament to explore is how an individual child's temperament matches that of the caregiver, this "goodness of fit" can also impact co-regulation and how attachment forms.

## Temperament Quiz

Temperament shapes the way we experience the world and interact with others. It is the collection of characteristics that makes each of us unique. Please give yourself a rating for each of the following questions by circling the number that describes you best. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers here! All aspects of your temperament are valuable in different circumstances, so please hold yourself with compassion as you self-reflect.

1. Sensitivity - How sensitive are you to noise, smell, sounds, taste and touch? How much discomfort do you experience with loud noises and how do you tolerate this discomfort?

**VERY SENSITIVE**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY TOLERANT**

---

2. Activity level - Do you enjoy a lot of physical activity or do you prefer sedentary activity?

**VERY SEDENTARY**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY ACTIVE**

---

3. Intensity - How much energy do you put into a response? For example, do you show a big reaction when you are upset or do others have difficulty guessing how you feel?

**VERY SUBDUED**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY RESPONSIVE**

---

4. Regularity - Do you enjoy a regular schedule, or do you thrive on being spontaneous?

**VERY REGULAR**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY SPONTANEOUS**

---

5. Adaptability - How do you handle change? Do you jump right into a new situation or do you take time to assess a situation before stepping in?

**SLOW TO ADAPT**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY ADAPTABLE**

---

6. Persistence - How long do you stick with a task? Are you likely to move from one activity to another without finishing or do you stick with one task until it is done?

**VERY MOBILE**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY PERSISTENT**

---

7. Distractibility - How long is your attention span and how easily do you get distracted?

**VERY DISTRACTABLE**      1      2      3      4      5      **HIGHLY FOCUSED**

## From Cultural Curiosity to Cultural Humility

Cultural curiosity is a practice of inquiry and reflection. It is powerful because it brings down the barriers to multicultural communication and encompasses taking an active role learning about and from others who we perceive as culturally different from ourselves. Continually opening to other perspectives paves the way to understanding those we intersect with. Cultural curiosity can deepen to cultural humility, a life-long process of becoming aware of our biases, perceptions, and respectfully appreciating the experiences of others. Cultural humility helps us recognize and challenge power imbalances.

- Recognize individuals, practices and programs are embedded in culture.
- Understand that organizational mindfulness practices can embrace and respect families' cultural values, attitudes and beliefs.
- Use mindfulness to experience feelings in less judgmental ways, fostering a more inclusive environment
- Cultural curiosity is built through relationship. Begin by asking: "Whose voice may be missing from the conversation?" and "What can we do to create and maintain inclusive communities of practice?"
- Embrace cultural traditions and history as authentic means to promote the retention of home language and culture as part of a nurturing environment.
- Appreciate and honor that tribal nations and underrepresented racial and ethnic groups--families and those who serve children--have important insight and wisdom to share.
- Reflect on your personal beliefs and acknowledgment of cultural differences.
- Appreciate and honor diversity and act to reduce personal biases and racism.
- Advance equity and support underrepresented racial and ethnic groups by understanding the needs and experiences of diverse communities and co-creating ethical action.

# INTERNAL AWARENESS PRACTICES

## How am I? (3-4 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

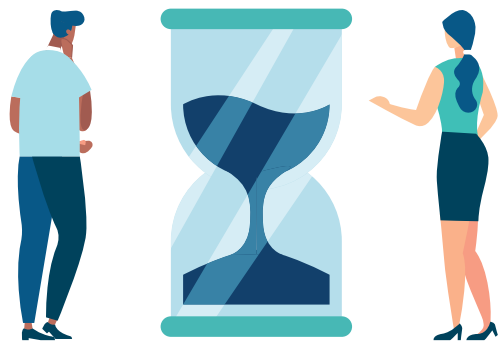
At ZERO TO THREE, we often share a quote by Jeree Pawl, “How you are is as important as what you do.” This quote conveys the understanding that the quality of our presence with others is important. The quote also recognizes that how we are doing internally impacts our ability to be open and present with others. In order to effectively work with others, it’s helpful to have a clear sense of how we are doing in the moment. This practice helps us tune in to ourselves.

- Sitting or standing, take an intentional posture that is relaxed and upright. Allow your posture to express a sense of being present, at ease and awake. Soften your gaze or close your eyes if that’s more comfortable.
- Take a few deep breaths and slowly exhale.
- Focusing your attention on physical sensations in your body, what do you notice? Are there any areas of tension or discomfort? What parts of your body feel relaxed and at ease? Can you sense areas that feel alive with energy or areas that feel dull or numb? Over the next several moments, notice how these sensations may change as you give them your attention.
- Now, bringing your attention to your mind, notice how active or settled your mind is right now. Can you notice thoughts as they pass through? Is your mind holding on to any particular thoughts or is it calm and quiet? Thoughts will always arise—that is natural. See if you can observe these thoughts come and go without getting attached or caught up in them.
- Now bringing your awareness to your emotions, notice the predominant feeling you have in this moment. Can you label that emotion? What other emotions are present? Are these feelings positive, negative or neutral? Try to notice your emotions without judging or analyzing them. Can you just be present to what you are feeling right now?
- Notice for a moment how all these factors that make up your physical, mental and emotional states are working together right now, influencing each other, and creating how you are in this moment. As best you can, bring a sense of acceptance and kindness to how you are doing right now without judging yourself.

## Three-Minute Breathing Space (3 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

This practice comes from Zindel Segel, PhD, a Co-Founder of Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. It's an internal, grounding practice that helps us shift between a narrow, single-pointed focus, and a wider focus that integrates more information. It's a brief practice that can be used any time, especially when we need a minute to check in with our self.



1. Preparation: Sitting or standing, take an intentional posture that is relaxed and upright. Allow your posture to express a sense of being present, at ease and awake. You may close your eyes if it is comfortable for you.
2. Becoming Aware (1-minute): Bring your awareness to your inner experience, asking – what is my experience right now? What thoughts are going through my mind? What emotions am I experiencing? Checking in with your body, ask what sensations are here.
3. Gathering (1-minute): Direct your attention to the sensations of breathing in the belly, focusing on the movement of the belly with each in and out breath. Gather yourself at the belly, allowing the breath to anchor you in this moment. When your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the belly, noticing breathing breath by breath.
4. Expanding (1-minute) Expand the field of your awareness around the sensations of breathing at the belly to include the whole body. As best you can, bring this anchored sense of awareness into your next moments, noticing all body sensations. Finishing by bringing this centered awareness as you extend your focus to the external environment around you.

## Extended Breath (4-5 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

When we take long, slow, relaxing breaths that expand our diaphragm, we shift our nervous system engagement from sympathetic (fight/flight/freeze) to parasympathetic (rest/digest). The longer exhalation also helps slow our heart rate. When we use our breathing to cultivate these sensations of calm in our body, our brain's executive functions work better. We are better able to attend to what's happening, learn new things, and problem solve.

- Begin by taking a comfortable and upright seat with your shoulders over your hips. Close your eyes if that's comfortable or gently lowering your gaze. Sit tall to make space in your body for taking deep breaths.
- Taking in a deep breath down into your belly, then slowly exhale. Focusing your attention on the breath in your belly, noticing the sensations of breathing — the waves of expansion and contraction.
- Staying with this deep belly breathing for a few breaths (pause).
- Now begin counting your breath. Noting how many counts it takes to inhale. Noting how many counts it takes to exhale.
- Staying with this natural pattern of your breath, continuing to notice the sensations of breathing in your body (pause).
- On your next breath, begin to direct your breathing, using the same count for your inhalation but extending your exhalation 2 counts longer than your original count. For example, if your exhalation count was 4, it will now be 6.
- You may need to slow the action of your exhalation or engage your abdomen to extend the exhalation.
- Our goal is to work toward extending our exhale at least two counts longer than our inhale. For example, if your inhale count was 5, your exhale count should be 7. Over the next several breaths, work toward or with this extended exhale breath.
- If this feels challenging today, you can work with an equal count of inhalations and exhalations.
- If this feels easy today, you can work toward extending your exhalations to double your inhalations. For example, if your inhalation count is 5, your exhalation count will be 10.
- Stay with your extended exhalation for a few more breaths (pause).
- Now, letting go of the controlled breathing and coming back to a free, natural breath.
- Notice how you feel after this practice. Have there been any changes in your body sensations, your feelings, or thoughts?



[Mindfulness Breathing Exercise gif](#)



## Calm breath, Clear Mind (5-10 Minutes)

As we become calm, we cultivate presence and refine our perceptions. We see that the mind is always changing. Learning to calm the breath and create stillness, we can begin to see our minds more clearly. This practice of calm presence prepares us for the difficult work of seeing the way we distort the truth. As we become more adept at seeing our perceptions with clarity, our capacity to make choices instead of simply reacting emerges. We can be more skillful in our choices, more able to discern when unconscious perceptions are directing our actions, and more likely to direct our will with intelligence.

- Find a comfortable seat with your spine tall and extending upward. Close your eyes or allow them to remain open with a soft gaze looking down in front of you. Elongate the back of your neck so that you can feel the length of your spine from the tailbone all the way up your back to the top of your head, straight and tall.
- Be aware that you are in a safe space. Take a moment to appreciate this opportunity for self-care. Recognize that you have everything you need in this moment.
- Make any small adjustments in your posture to feel completely relaxed and supported and then come into a soft stillness. For the next several minutes, commit to being focused on the present as you explore your internal landscape. Set aside thoughts of the past or the future.
- Allow your focus to turn inward to the sensation of your breath moving in and out of your nose. Feel the movement of the breath along the skin of your nostrils.
- Now bring your focus further down into the body as you place a hand on your belly. Hold your attention on this point of connection between hand and belly. Feel the warmth of your hand and notice the hand as it rises when your breath moves into your belly and moves closer to the spine as the breath flows out and your belly contracts inward.
- Welcome each inhalation and the moment when it turns into an exhalation. Take delight in the subtle shift when your in-breath becomes your out-breath. This is your resting breath. Settle into this space of ease. This is your normal resting breath – the breath that breathes itself. If your mind begins to wander, return to the point of contact where your hand rests on your belly.
- Silently count the rhythm of your inhalation. Once you have this number, make your exhalation the same length as your inhalation. Settle into this new symmetrical rhythm. Allow your attention to stay with your breath as you explore the experience of this new rhythm. See if you can even out any pauses so that your breath is smooth and even. Allow this to be effortless and comfortable.
- If you feel stress or strain at any point, return to the resting breath and the sensation of your hand on your belly.
- Notice the quality of your mind. To continue to build on your capacity for calm, add a count of one to each part of the breath so that you continue to hold the symmetry, but you have expanded the capacity. Your breath should remain smooth and even with a rhythmic flow reflecting a quality of calm and ease.
- As you continue with this practice, bring the image of a calm clear lake into your mind. Focus on the stillness of this lake. See the full moon over the lake and see the reflection of the moon clearly reflected in the calm still water. Hold this image in your mind as you continue with the rhythmic breath practice. Remain in silence for a few moments to allow this practice to have its full effect. (Pause.)

- Let go of any efforts to alter your breath. Return to your resting breath.
- Bring your hands together and rub them back and forth quickly to create heat and then cup your palms over your eyes. Allow your eyes to open and adjust. Feel the sensation of your hands on your face.
- When you are ready to transition, remove your hands slowly and blink your eyes a few times. Allow yourself time to notice the effects of this practice. Be aware of the quality of your mind as well as the overall sense of energy in your body. What lingers from this practice?



# PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS OR GROUPS

## Mindful Meeting Opener (3-5 Minutes)

Facilitator can read this script or adapt to your own words. Speak slowly and clearly.

- Let's take a moment to set an intention for today's meeting.
- Find a comfortable and upright seat. You can close your eyes if that's comfortable or soften your gaze.
- Take a moment to settle - sitting with your shoulders over your hips and your head centered between your shoulders.
- Begin by noticing your breath, gently following your inhale and exhale. (Pause)
- Stay with your breath, paying attention to where you feel your breath most strongly in your body. You may feel the sensation of air moving in and out of your nostrils, or the rise and fall of your chest, or the expansion of your belly. (Pause)
- When your mind wanders, which it probably will, just gently bring your attention back to sensations of breath. (Pause)
- Now ask yourself "Why am I here today?" "What intentions do I have for today's meeting?" (Pause, repeat questions and pause again)
- As you connect with your intention, notice how your body feels. Do any emotions arise?
- When you notice you've become distracted at any point in the meeting you might use your intention to bring back your focus.
- Gently end the practice and open your eyes.

## Hand-to-Heart (4-5 Minutes)

*This is a meditation practice co-developed by Dr. Hackbert with Drs. Fitzgerald and Shipman at the Center for Resilience and Well-being at CU Boulder. It is part of a larger program called Let's Connect.*

Tune in - by placing one hand over your heart to recognize your emotional state and tap into the quality of your presence. This is a gesture of self-care and self-compassion. Close your eyes or adopt a soft gaze. Notice what you are feeling right now. Ask yourself: "What am I feeling?" and "What do I need?"

Pause to connect to the feelings and needs arising in this moment.

Reach out - with both hands extended palms facing out and up. This is a gesture of receptivity to the people around you. This is an opportunity to become aware of the feelings and needs of others. With soft eyes looking outward at the people in your circle, ask yourself: "What might others be feeling? What do others need? What perspectives do they bring to this experience?"

Pause and become aware of the feelings, needs and perspectives of others arising in this moment.

Connect - your two hands together interlocking them and bringing them into your chest just below our ribs. This is a gesture for successful connection. Take this opportunity to feel confident that you have the resources you need to care for yourself. With eyes soft or eyes closed, feel confident that you have resources to offer to the people around you now and in the future. You can deepen and strengthen your connection to yourself and others.

Pause and notice the sensations, feelings and thoughts emerging through this practice.

Take a few moments to share a thought, feeling or observation from this practice. If you are alone, you can write this down, and if you are in a group take this time so each person can share.

*Every successful connection now builds our resilience for the future.*

## How to Use a Talking Piece: Making Space for All Voices

Any handheld object that is easy to pass between people can be used as a talking piece. You might select something that has meaning to your group or organization, or represents the trust, openness and compassion you are seeking to build. Ideas include objects from nature, a heart-shaped object, or a small doll that brings to mind the children and families being served.

- **The person with the talking piece has the floor**
- **This piece reminds us to be intentional with what we share**
- **The talking piece provides an opportunity to focus on listening**
- **Some practice stepping back and sharing their voice less**
- **Some practice stepping forward to contribute their voice more**
- **When the piece comes to you, you can pass**
- **If you do pass, you will be given a second opportunity to share**

Although it can take time to develop comfort and ease with this practice of using a talking piece, you may be surprised by the depth of the collective wisdom that emerges through this process.

## Reflective Partnerships

What is a Reflective Partnership?

A Reflective Partnership is an intentional relationship when two individuals commit to a cooperative effort to:

- **observe and listen to each other**
- **discuss experiences and observations**
- **honor these reflections, interpretations and observations**
- **gain compassion, insight and wisdom**
- **use insight gained to develop and extend each person's sphere of influence**

What are the benefits?

On a practical level, reflective partnerships help us to see ourselves more clearly, identify habitual patterns, approach our challenges and create action plans for change. Reflective partnerships acknowledge that we all have blind spots, defense mechanisms, personal biases and cognitive distortions that impact how we see ourselves and others and influence our actions.

On a deeper level, reflective partnerships can help to satisfy our psychological and emotional needs to be seen and valued. They can also help to generate truth and satisfy our needs for deep experiences such as a sense of purpose and meaning derived from our life work.

What is different about this approach?

Reflective partnerships are non-hierarchical. They require trust and transparent communication and result in a co-creation of knowledge that challenges authoritarian systems of external control.

How to get started:

- Find a partner to work with and discuss the opportunity to formalize this intention.
- Decide on the length of time you will commit to for your reflective partnership.
- Agree on the parameters including the focus of your reflections, how you will transition between roles of observer and speaker and where and when you will meet.
- Create written guidelines that reference what outcomes you are seeking to achieve and agree to these.
- Get started with your meetings.
- Be open to conversations about modifying the parameters as needed. Remain committed to the terms that you outlined initially.

## Just Like Me (5 -7 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

This exercise can be done in pairs or in a circle where individuals can all see each other and feel connected as a group. Depending on group size and space limitations it can be done in two lines facing each other, or with participants seated at tables or in classroom style seating. Adjust cues as need for different group size and seating arrangements.

An important part of well-being is connectedness. Recognizing that we are all part of the human race, that we all experience human emotions and similar experiences across our lifetimes can help us find resilience and compassion when we need it. This exercise aims to help us connect with our common humanity.

Take a moment to look around at your partner/everyone in the room.

During this exercise, feel free to close your eyes or look at your partner/peers, whatever feels comfortable for you. I am going to say a series of phrases and you can repeat them silently to yourself.

First, bring to mind the person who is standing to your right. Say to yourself:

- **They want to be happy, just like me.**
- **This person has suffered with illness or injury, just like me.**
- **Just like me, they have regrets.**
- **This person has hopes and wishes for the future, just like me.**

Now, bring to mind the person to your left. Say to yourself:

- **They have responsibilities and sometimes feels pressure and stress just like me.**
- **This person has beliefs, perspectives and opinions just like me.**
- **They want their loved ones to be safe and healthy, just like me.**
- **Just like me, they have vulnerabilities and have made mistakes.**
- **Sometimes, they feel afraid of letting people down, just like me.**
- **And, just like me, they feel gratitude and joy.**

Now, bring to mind the person standing across from you. Say to yourself:

- They have experienced grief and loss, just like me.
- They want to feel secure and cared for, just like me.
- This person wants to find ease and well-being in their life, just like me.
- Just like me, they are growing older and will die one day.

Now, bring to mind everyone in the room. Say to yourself:

- They feel lonely at times, just like me.
- They want to feel respected, appreciated and competent, just like me.
- Just like me, they want to do their best.
- Just like me, this person wants to feel loved.

Now, open your eyes if they are closed and look again at the people in the room.



## Sharing Feelings (20 minutes)

*Adapted from Linda Graham, MFT: [Reading and Conveying Emotions Fluently](#)*

Emotions are universal, meaning all humans experience emotions. But how emotions are experienced, and the expression of emotion is influenced by many factors including culture. Cultural and other differences in emotion expression can create barriers to attunement with others or even lead to misunderstandings. This practice helps increase understanding of how you express your own emotions and builds your capacity to recognize others' emotional states.

Most emotional communication happens through non-verbal means like facial expressions and body language. So, this exercise is performed without words to strengthen your ability to perceive and interpret non-verbal expressions as communicative signals without the assistance of the language processing centers of the brain. Practicing with core emotions (anger, joy, sadness, fear, surprise) builds your capacity for attunement, which you can then refine in order to read more nuanced emotions such as disappointment, jealousy, guilt, and curiosity.

1. Find a partner to participate in this exercise with you.
2. Decide which person will take the role of "emotion expresser." The other person will be the "emotion interpreter."
3. If you are the "emotion expresser":
  - o Without telling your partner, select three of the following basic emotions: anger, joy, sadness, fear, surprise.
  - o Decide the order in which you will evoke the three selected emotions.
  - o Tune in to your own experience of your first chosen emotion; recalling a previous experience of the emotion is a quick and easy way for you to experience the emotion again internally.
  - o Let your body wordlessly display the chosen emotion for ten seconds. You can use gestures, facial expressions, and sounds—just not words. You may find yourself exaggerating your expressions at first, that's okay.
  - o Notice what happens inside of you—your self-attunement—as you communicate your feelings to someone else.
  - o Notice during this interaction if your felt sense of the emotion increases, decreases, or changes into something else.

If you are the "emotion interpreter":

- o Observe your partner.
  - o Notice which emotion can be interpreted from your partner's expression but don't disclose it yet.
  - o Notice what signals you pay attention to in order to distinguish one emotion from another.
  - o Notice what happens inside of you—your self-attunement—as you pay attention to someone else's feelings.
  - o Notice if your own emotions shift during this interaction.
4. Next, if you are the "emotion expresser," display the second selected emotion:
    - o Without discussion, turn your attention inward.
    - o Release the emotion you've been expressing with a few gentle, deep breaths.
    - o Pause to regain balance.
    - o Now, evoke the next emotion on your list.
    - o Display that second emotion to your partner for ten seconds.
    - o Notice what happens inside of you—your self-attunement—as you communicate your feelings to someone else.
    - o Notice during this interaction if your felt sense of the emotion increases, decreases, or changes into something else.

If you are the “emotion interpreter”:

- Again, observe your partner and notice your internal experience.
  - Notice which emotion can be interpreted from your partner’s expression but don’t disclose it yet.
5. Repeat this process with the third selected emotion.
  6. Before the first “emotion interpreter” shares his best guesses at the emotions expressed, switch roles and repeat steps 3 through 5.
  7. Once each partner has displayed three emotions in sequence, share your best guesses at the emotions the other one was trying to convey and reveal how you each identified each emotion.
  8. If all of the guesses were accurate, congratulations to both of you! You’re building your emotional competence skills. If there were discrepancies, take the opportunity to discuss what you perceived in each other’s expression of emotion that led you to a different interpretation. Doing so creates a foundation for building more competence in communicating what you need, developing skills you need to get those needs met, and for responding with empathy to the needs of others.



## Moving Meditation: Felt Sense of Resilience (10 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

The term “felt sense” arose out of the work of psychologist and researcher, Eugene Gendlin, PhD. In his work as a clinician, he noticed that clients who were able to attend to their internal experience and then articulate this awareness were more successful in therapy. He then developed The Focusing Process to teach people how to attend to their “felt sense” and then use this skill to deepen their experience of personal meaning and create more satisfying relationships. Gendlin argued that our capacity to access intuition is an innate human birthright, although this competence can be developed through practice and nurtured by others. Building individual resilience begins by accessing what we are experiencing, knowing what we need and communicating our needs effectively to access appropriate resources. Focusing is a practice of checking in. The self-knowledge that comes through focusing helps develop an inner compass.

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### THIS MOVING MEDITATION PRACTICE WILL INVOLVE TWO MOVEMENT GESTURES IN A CIRCLE FOLLOWED BY QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION:

The first movement gesture is simply walking in and out in the circle: very slowly approach the center of the circle. When you get close to others pause without touching. Stand still for a moment with eyes closed or hold a soft gaze. Tune into the felt sense of the experience.

The second movement gesture is to open the circle to more spontaneous movement: begin to walk very slowly around the room and become aware of how your felt sense changes as you approach, come closer and then move away from each person in the circle. Notice the felt sense that arises through eye contact and closer proximity.

- Begin by standing. If you are with a group, please stand in a circle.
- As you stand still and listen to my voice, turn your focus inward. Notice the sensations that are present for you right now. Let’s start with a focus on your abdomen. Say hello to what you are sensing right now. How it is for you right now in this moment? In silence, offer yourself words, image, gesture or sound to captures the felt sense in your abdomen. Shifting your attention inward in this way, you may be aware that the “felt sense” in your abdomen right now is fuzzy, unclear, or even mixed up with other feelings and thoughts that you are having. Place a hand onto your abdomen to see what feelings arise as you connect with touch. This process of tuning into your body may be unfamiliar. There is no right or wrong felt sense.
- Try rocking a bit side to side or bring in some other comforting rhythmic movement. Gentle, repetitive movement may help you feel your way into what is present for you right now. Hold your focus on the abdomen, feeling your way into the felt sense and being patient with the process.
- Begin with the first movement gesture. Walk slowly toward the center of the circle and then pause before you touch anyone. Please move slowly inward toward the center of the circle. Move slowly as if you are moving through water and pay attention to your inner landscape (abdomen, torso, heart, throat). Notice the shifts that occur as you come closer to another person. What is your felt sense and does it shift or change as you move closer?
- Proceed to the second movement gesture. Open the circle to freer movement as you slowly walk through the space of the room. Become aware of how your felt sense changes as you approach, come closer, and then move away from each person in the space. Notice the felt sense that arises through eye contact and closer proximity.
- Pause and return to the simple practice of just focusing your awareness on your abdomen.

FINAL QUESTIONS FOR SELF-REFLECTION AS YOU MOVE THROUGH  
THE COMMUNAL SPACE:

- Is it okay for me stay with the felt sense as it arises?
- Can I turn toward the variety of sensations that I am noticing?
- Can I cultivate curiosity and compassion toward my inner experience?
- Am I aware of resistance, contraction or tension in my body?

## Active Listening and Response (15-20 minutes)

A few notes about this practice: Active listening can benefit team communication, support conflict resolution, and produce similar benefits for work with families. When we practice actively listening with children, parents, or colleagues—we build the capacity to listen closely and carefully, paying attention to the feelings that are being expressed as well as the words. We also practice listening openly—not interjecting, judging, or resisting what we are hearing. Capacity for this takes effort and practice.

1. Find a partner to participate in this exercise with you. Decide who will be the first speaker. The other partner will be the first listener.
2. Both the speaker and listener should pay attention to how they are doing internally throughout this exercise. Notice any thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations that arise.
3. The first speaker will spend two minutes responding to a question or describing an experience. (Develop a question or topic relevant to the gathering.)
4. The first listener will pay careful attention, without interrupting. The listener can offer gestures of actively listening with non-verbal cues, but may not speak.
5. At the end of the 2 minutes, the listener should share a summary of what they heard from the speaker. This reflection should just paraphrase what was shared, without including any judgments, analysis, or responses to what was shared. The listener should ask if their summary is accurate, if they covered everything, for clarification if something was not clear or ask if the speaker has more to share. The speaker can politely clarify or amend as necessary at this point.
6. To conclude the summary, the listener will now validate the speaker, using phrases like, *“What you shared makes sense to me because...”* or *“I can see how you think...”* This is a cognitive validation.
7. The final step is for the listener to empathize with the speaker, with phrases like, *“Based on what you shared, I can imagine you might feel....”* Or *“I can see how you would feel ...about this.”* And then check in with the speaker, *“Am I getting this right?”* or *“Am I understanding correctly?”* to determine if you got the feelings right. This is an emotional or empathetic validation.
8. Switch roles and repeat the exercise.
9. Even though this was a staged exercise, how we experience being heard when we share something of importance has an impact on our internal state. If we feel misunderstood, we might choose to repress feelings or express them too strongly. This exercise can assist with finding the correct balance in a shared way. Talk with your partner about the experience:
  - Was it difficult to pay close attention for 2 minutes, did your mind wander at all? What helped you stay engaged?
  - Were there any times that your internal thoughts or feelings made listening difficult? How so?
  - At what points did you feel particularly attuned to the speaker while you were listening? What helped you feel this way?
  - As the speaker, did you feel heard and understood? What helped or hindered this?

## PRACTICES TO DO WITH CHILDREN

### Balloon Breath (2 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

Synching body movement, even small movement, with our breathing helps us slow down, focus, and return to the present moment. In this practice we use deep breathing and movement together to settle our mind. When we are in the presence of children, it can be helpful (and fun!) to model and engage them in the practice.

Sitting or standing, place both hands on top of your head.

As you breathe in, slowly and deeply, raise your hands above your head, matching the movement to your breath, like you are blowing up a balloon. When you get to the top of your inhale breath, your arms should resemble a big, round balloon on top of your head.

As you exhale, slowly bring your hands toward your head, again, matching the movement to your breath. Continue with this breath and arm movement 2-4 more times.

Then, for a final breath, as you exhale, forcefully blow the air out through pressed lips, making a silly sound like a horse.

## Starfish Breathing (3 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

Synching body movement, even small movement, with our breathing helps us slow down, focus, and return to the present moment. In this practice we use the sensations of breathing and touch to settle our mind. When we are in the presence of children, it can be helpful (and fun!) to model and engage them in the practice.

Choose a hand to be your starfish, and extend this hand, palm out with fingers spread widely – like a starfish.

Use the pointer finger from your other hand, to trace the starfish in sync with your breath. Start at your thumb, and as you breathe in deeply, trace up your thumb to the top. Do this carefully, so your movement matches your inhale.

Now, with your out breath, trace down the inside of your thumb. Again, move slowly paying attention to keeping the breath and movement together.

Continue breathing up and down each finger, paying careful attention to match your movement with your breath. As you breathe and trace, notice the sensations of movement in your body – your chest and belly moving in and out and your finger moving up and down.

When you come to the base of your wrist below your little finger, rest for a moment. Check in with yourself. Notice how you are feeling without analyzing or judging.

Then continue the practice switching hands.

## Calming Glitter Bottle (1-5 minutes)

When we shake up a glitter bottle, the water becomes cloudy with all the colorful and sparkly contents swirling around quickly. This can resemble how our mind and emotions feel when we are worrying, angry or stressed.

Watching the water inside the bottle become calm and clear as all the little bits of glitter fall slowly and gently to the bottom, helps us find calm. When we sit quietly and just watch the settling, we give ourselves time and space to regain a sense of control and ease. Watching the glitter engages our senses and brings us into the present moment. This works with children and adults.

Seeing how the water becomes clear, when all the contents are resting quietly, also reflects our ability to see more clearly when we are in this calm and emotionally regulated state.

Make your own calming glitter bottle:

- Find a bottle or jar - rigid plastic or glass works best as lighter, thinner plastic may warp with the introduction of warm water.
- Fill the jar  $\frac{1}{8}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  full with glue (Elmer's Clear School Glue or similar, or you can use pre-mixed glitter glue). The more glue, the slower the objects will settle after shaking.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons of glitter and other small objects if you like – a small funnel is very helpful for this step.
- Fill the bottle the rest of the way with very warm water
- Add food coloring (optional)
- Glue cap on bottle. Let the bottle rest to allow sealing glue to fully harden or the bottle may leak. You could use hot glue for a stronger seal.
- You can also mix the ingredients in a bowl before transferring the mixture into the bottle.



## Five Senses Exercise (2-3 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

One effective way to shift habitual thinking patterns, is to get out of our heads and more in touch with the present-moment experience of our bodies. We can do this by engaging our senses. This brief practice can be done any time we want to refocus on the present or when we are having a stressful moment and need to re-center ourselves quickly.

- Notice five things that you can see. Look around you, notice and name five things that you can see.
- Notice four things that you can feel. Tune in to your sense of touch, notice and describe the texture of four things you can touch.
- Notice three things you can hear. Listen carefully, notice and name three sounds you hear in your environment.
- Notice two things you can smell. Notice and name two smells you recognize.
- Notice one thing you can taste. Focus and name one thing that you can taste right now. You can take a sip or bite of something, or just notice the current taste in your mouth.

## Pleasure Gazing (5-10 minutes)

A few notes about this practice:

This exercise helps you engage your sense of sight in an intentional way to foster calm, co-regulation and present moment awareness. If you are in a setting working with infants and toddlers, bringing your full attention to your interaction with a child, paying close attention to them as well as your internal responses is a way to share mindfulness. As you tune in to the interaction and your internal responses, it is important to bring a sense of open curiosity, not analysis or judgment.

Start by taking a few deep breaths and notice how your body feels. You can use long, slow exhales, or even an audible sigh to help you ease any tension.

Now, orient yourself toward baby with kindness and curiosity. You might ask their permission to initiate this interaction, noticing if they give cues that they are interested in engagement.

Start by using your sense of sight. Gaze onto baby--what do you see? Offer them a gentle smile. Look closely at the features of their face. What are all the different colors you see in their eyes? What is the exact shape of their smile? Look at their fingers and toes, taking time to notice small things you haven't noticed before. Go slowly, feature by feature. Notice what features you delight in and the warm connected feelings that may arise through this visual interaction.

Once complete, take a few deep breaths in and out and notice how you are feeling now.

