

# Why mindfulness should be taught in schools



When you consider the many skills we acquire in the classroom from a very young age, everything from reading and writing, not to mention the lessons we learn about behaviour and interacting with each other, and the difference between right and wrong, it makes sense that mindfulness should also be included in the mix of disciplines we're taught as kids given the important role it has to play in our ongoing psychological wellbeing.

One person who strongly believes mindfulness should be part of the school curriculum is **Felicia Huppert**, an international expert in wellbeing and author of *The Science of Well-Being* who presents on the topic at [Happiness & Its Causes 2014](#). But before Huppert refers to some of the terrific work being done by the [Mindfulness in Schools Project](#), a non-profit organisation in the UK whose aim is to encourage, support and research the teaching of secular mindfulness in schools, she shares her "understanding of mindfulness" including some of its benefits.

She says, "Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to our ongoing experience" through learning how to focus our attention, for example, on our breath, as well as how to broaden it to encompass all our thoughts including the ones we don't like, or our body sensations, or the many different sounds in our environment.

During this process, Huppert adds, one of the most important realisations we'll have is "that our minds wander. It's just what minds do. So with the best will in the world, we might be trying to sustain our attention but our mind goes off on a journey on its own. So we need to acknowledge that and bring it back gently to whatever it is we're trying to attend to."

Huppert says many people make the mistake of thinking mindfulness is about present moment awareness alone when, in fact, intention and attitude are also very important components. She defines intention as "choosing what we're going to pay attention to ... because we're trying to understand our experiences." Our attitude, she explains, should be to *not* judge the thoughts, feelings and sensations that endlessly arise but "just notice them with curiosity and interest.

"Because in the West we're particularly good at giving ourselves a hard time. There are

those recurrent thoughts – ‘I’m not good enough’, ‘I can’t’, ‘I won’t’ – but part of the awareness is noticing we’re having those thoughts. And not feeding those thoughts and then those thoughts won’t grow and the underlying neurons that are activated won’t get stronger.”

Being more mindful also gives us a greater capacity to savour positive experiences, to manage painful and difficult ones, and to more clearly see our neurotic patterns, which makes us better at self-regulating and decision-making.

Indeed, there are just so many reasons why we should all make mindfulness a daily part of our lives. *Everyone* stands to gain from paying more attention to their inner and our worlds, including even very young people. Which is why Huppert is such a strong advocate of mindfulness training in schools where “some wonderful systematic reviews” have shown the benefits in terms of cognitive, academic and social skills; emotional regulation, self-esteem, improvements in mood, and decreases in psychological symptoms. She asks, “What could be more foundational than learning how to pay attention, self-regulate and be kind to yourself and then to others?”

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