



FOSTERING A POSITIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT THROUGH MINDFULNESS



Mindfulness and Self-Control

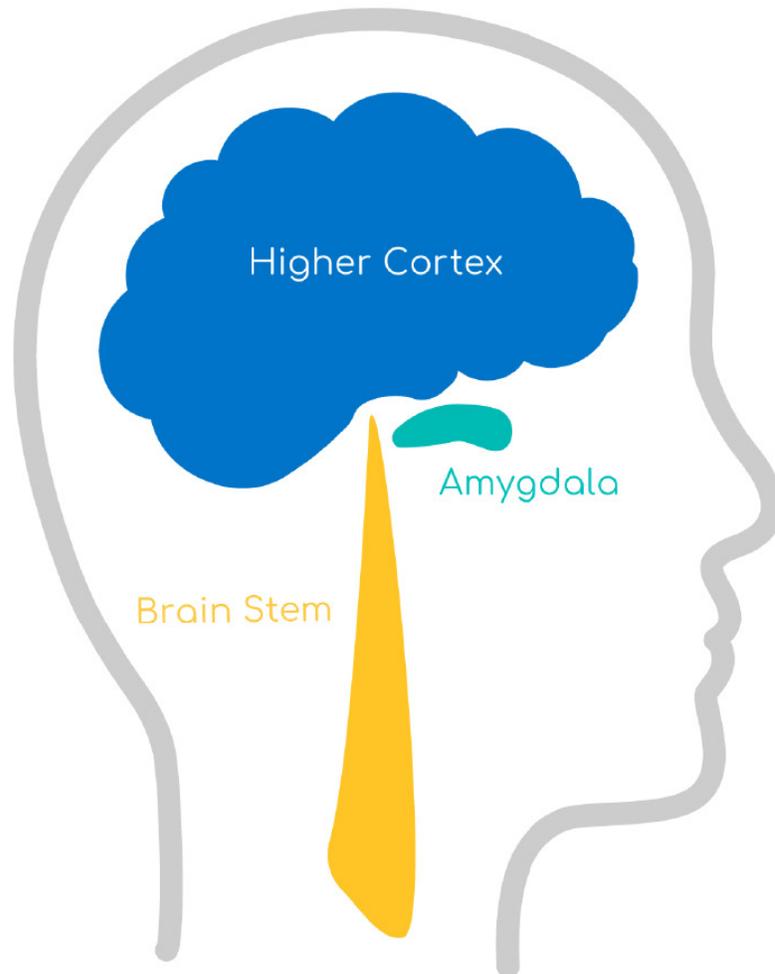
Mindfulness is the intentional practice of recognizing and managing uncomfortable feelings, thoughts, and emotions through the use of evidence-based tools and strategies such as breathing and maintaining focus on the present moment. Mindfulness also functions as a proactive discipline strategy that helps students develop self-control. Self-control is the ability to recognize and regulate one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in order to be successful in the moment and remain on a successful trajectory (Fly Five, 2021).

Students' ability to exhibit self-control helps them to manage their behavior and set the classroom up for effective learning and teaching to take place. Students that experience long-term stress can especially benefit from strengthening their self-control competence, since stress has the ability to impact students' development. Mindfulness helps students to develop the skills necessary to regulate and maintain control of their emotions and overcome the harmful effects of stress. There are three forms of self-control. Read the chart below to discover what they are and why they matter.

Form of Self-Control	Definition	Why It Is Important
Impulse Control	Ability to slow down and think through potential consequences before acting	Allows students to exercise restraint in order to follow class norms and meet expectations
Emotional Control	Ability to cope with and manage feelings	Allows students to work through overwhelming feelings that may arise and persevere through difficult tasks
Mental Control	Ability to slow down and think through potential consequences before acting	Gives students the ability to keep their hands to themselves and avoid distracting others with excessive moment; allows them to follow the classroom's behavioral norms

Each of the different forms of self-control helps students contribute to an orderly and positive classroom with few distractions or disruptions due to misbehavior and prepares students to face and work through challenges.

Using Mindfulness to Control Impulses



From time to time, we all experience strong emotions. Maybe someone cut you off in traffic, or someone said something you disagree with on social media. When we experience strong emotions, we feel an increased sense of urgency that can lead us to acting without thinking. When this happens, it is known as the “amygdala hijack,” and it impairs one’s ability to exhibit self-control (Curci et al., 2013). Mindful practices help us develop the ability to manage these strong emotions, which is essential for remaining in control of impulses. Regularly practicing mindfulness reduces the amount of activity we experience in the amygdala and decreases our risk of experiencing the “amygdala hijack” that pushes us to react to our impulses (Creswell et al., 2007). When students practice mindfulness as a proactive discipline strategy, they can experience greater self-awareness and fewer negative impacts of stress.



Mindfulness in the Classroom

In the classroom, children can discover and experience mindfulness in a number of ways. Consider the following mindfulness strategies that students can utilize in the classroom.

- **Guided breathing** exercises that involve breathing deeply to calm the mind and body.
- **Visualizations** in which students close their eyes while their teacher guides them in imagining a scene or scenario. This can be used to relax or energize students.
- **Movement**, such as guided poses, can be done whenever students need to get up and out of their seats and redirect their energy.

All of these strategies are good examples of ways that students can become more mindful and build important self-control skills to help them stay on track. Every student, educator, and parent can benefit from utilizing mindfulness as a tool to remain in control of their emotions. It only takes a few moments to pause, engage in a mindfulness exercise, and return to classroom work.

Students and teachers deserve to work in a classroom where positive experiences, learning, and growth can flourish. Mindfulness can play a significant role in creating the ideal learning environment where all of students' needs are addressed in order for them to reach their full potential.

References



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