

Student Activity

Mindfully Compassionate



Happiness Skill: Mindfulness

Time

60 minutes

Overview

In this activity, students will explore the link between mindfulness and compassion. Once they understand the meaning of compassion, students create a brief script that describes a time in which they had trouble showing it. They then shift gears as they read an article and watch a video that introduces the concept of mindfulness. After discussing how mindfulness can help their relationship with themselves and others, students will rewrite their original script as they consider how the situation could have gone differently if they had been more mindful. As a concluding activity, student pairs investigate the brain science behind sustained mindfulness. Once students understand the behavioral shifts and brain change that mindfulness can produce, they set tangible goals intended to increase their compassion through mindfulness practices.

Objectives

Students will:

- Define compassion and analyze their own compassion
- Explain mindfulness, how it can be practiced, and the brain science behind it
- Consider mindfulness connection to compassion
- Create tangible goals to increase their mindfulness

Materials

- Device with the ability to play and project video
- Compassion Script handout, one per student
- Mindfulness Notes handout, one per student
- Discover Your Happy Mindfulness [video](#), to project
- “What is Mindfulness?” [article](#), one per student
- Brain Science [article](#), one per student
- Goal Sheet, one per student
- Scissors, at least several pairs for the class to share

Standards

National Health Education Standards

- Standard 1: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- Standard 6: Students will demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.

Next Generation Science Standards

- MS-LS1-8 From Molecules to Organisms
 - Structures and Processes: LS1.D: Information Processing: Each sense receptor responds to different inputs (electromagnetic, mechanical, chemical), transmitting them as signals that travel along nerve cells to the brain. The signals are then processed in the brain, resulting in immediate behaviors or memories.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards

Reading

- R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Writing:

- W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Speaking & Listening:

- SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Procedure

1. Begin the activity by defining *compassion*. Explain that compassion is the feeling you get when you experience someone else's suffering and you feel motivated to help. Compassion differs from empathy. When you are empathetic, you step into someone else's shoes and feel their emotions. When you are compassionate, you may step into someone else's shoes in order to understand their suffering, but you also feel a desire to help!
2. Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss: In what circumstances do you find it easy to be compassionate? In what circumstance do you find it more difficult to have or show compassion?
3. Explain that there are many reasons why it can be hard to have compassion. For instance:
 - We may find the suffering of others to be uncomfortable and want to leave the situation instead of help it.
 - We may think that others should be taking responsibility for their own lives and that we shouldn't have to help.
 - We may be too stressed, tired, or concerned with our own problems to focus on others.
4. Then pass out one Compassion Script handout to each student, and review the directions and example provided. Explain that students will spend the next 15 minutes writing a brief script that outlines a time where they had trouble showing compassion.
5. Once students have wrapped up their scripts, instruct the class to put them aside in a safe place. Explain that they are about to shift gears to learn about a practice that may help them have more compassion.
6. Distribute one Mindfulness Notes handout to each student, and explain that they are about to watch a video and read an article that describes mindfulness. As they do, they should use this handout to jot responses to the two questions: *What is mindfulness?* and *How can we practice it?* Explain that students can use the handout to take notes however they would like to as long as they record notes related to these two questions.
7. Begin by projecting the Discover Your Happy Mindfulness [video](#). It may be helpful to pause the video at least once midway through to give students a chance to take notes.
8. When the video is complete, distribute one "What is Mindfulness?" [article](#) to each student and give the class time to read the article (either independently or in pairs) and continue taking notes on their handout.
9. Then reassemble the class and guide them through a discussion that connects mindfulness to compassion. Discuss:
 - How can mindfulness help you better accept yourself?
 - How can mindfulness help your relationship with others?
 - How can mindfulness help you be more compassionate to those around you?
10. Next, instruct students to take a look back at their script. Ask: How could this situation have gone differently if you had been more mindful? Give students time to briefly revise and/or rewrite the scene as they consider how mindfulness could have affected its outcome.

11. Explain that while it's important for students to understand that mindfulness could have helped them be more compassionate, it's also important for them to understand *why* this is the case. Tell the class that it all comes down to science!
12. Distribute one brain science [article](#) to each student, and explain that this article contains an interview with a neuroscientist at Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. Encourage students to read the article with a partner and annotate (highlight or underline) for details that answer the focus question: How does mindfulness change the brain?
13. When students have finished reading and annotating, discuss the focus question as a whole group. Be sure students understand that mindfulness, in the form of meditation, can:
 - Increase the size and strengthen four key areas of the brain:
 - The posterior cingulate, which is an inner part of the brain that is involved when our mind wanders.
 - The left hippocampus, which is involved in learning, memory, and regulating our emotions.
 - The temporal parietal junction (or TPJ), which is located near the posterior cingulate and is involved with empathy and compassion.
 - The pons, which is part of the brain stem and helps regulate body functions like sleep and breathing.
 - Reduce the size of the amygdala, which is the part of our brain involved in fear, anxiety, and stress.
14. Wrap up the discussion by ensuring students understand that while mindfulness is not a stand-alone solution for our problems, it can produce behavioral shifts and brain changes! Therefore, in an effort to act more compassionately, incorporating mindful practices into our day can be a good place to start.
15. Conclude by passing out one Goal Sheet handout to each student. Review the directions provided, and encourage students to spend the time remaining in class to create goals centered around increasing mindfulness in their daily lives.
16. Wrap up the class session by encouraging students to follow through on these goals. In upcoming class sessions, try to check in periodically to see how their goals are progressing.



GOAL SHEET: INCREASING COMPASSION THROUGH MINDFULNESS

HANDOUT

Directions: As you have learned, practicing mindfulness can be an effective way to increase compassion. Review your Mindfulness Notes and consider how you can incorporate mindfulness into your everyday life. Then, in the space below, create at least two SMART goals* designed to increase your mindfulness. Once your goals are complete, cut them out and tape them in a place where you will see them often.

* When a goal is SMART, it is:

- **S**pecific (clear)
- **M**easurable (easy to tell if it has been achieved)
- **A**chievable (possible and attainable)
- **R**elevant (related to increasing your mindfulness)
- **T**ime-bound (explains how long you will work toward this goal)

For instance: Every night before I sleep for the next month, I will use an app to help me meditate for 15 minutes.



Goal #1

Goal #2
