

# **Cultivating Calmness, Concentration and Coping Skills**



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**AbleNet University Webinar    May 2, 2023**

# Agenda

**Introduction - 5 Minutes**  
**Why - Cultivate Calmness,  
Concentration and Coping Skills**

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**Building Learner's Emotional  
Literacy and Competence - 20 Min.**

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**Calming Strategies - Mindfulness  
Practices (Breathing and  
Movement) - 20 Minutes**

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**Positive Affirmations and Self-  
Soothing - 5 Minutes**

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**Summary and Conclusion  
Plus, Q and A - 10 Minutes**

# Cultivate Calmness, Concentration, and Coping Skills - The Why?

## Research Tells us:

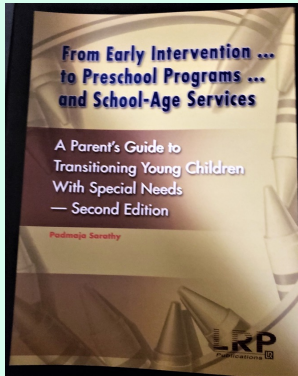
- Kindergarten behaviors – attentiveness, aggression and friendliness – predicts adult learning potential (Lillian Mongeau, July 16, 2019, Hechinger report).
- “Children will need to pay attention, how to focus and concentrate, how to listen and learn and how to be in wise relationships, including with themselves, - their thoughts and emotions – and with others” (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).
- **For success in school and life, children need to:**
  - Communicate emotions effectively.
  - Develop friendship skills and have good relationships with peers.
  - Be cooperative when engaging in group activities during play/work.
  - Concentrate and persist on tasks.
  - Develop problem solving and coping skills.



## **Session Focus: Learning Objectives**

### **Learn How to Strengthen Children's Calmness, Concentration and Coping Skills.**

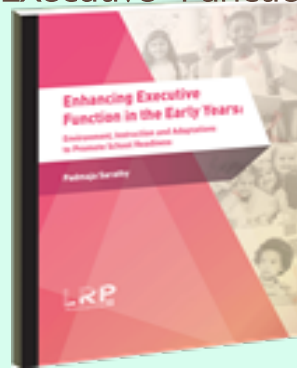
- **Coach and guide children to:**
  - **Identify, and label emotions and express them safely.**
  - **Build focus and attentional control for learning activities.**
  - **Develop self-regulation and coping skills.**
- **Embed engaging and fun mindfulness practices within daily routines.**
  - **Practicing Calming Mindful Breaths and Yoga-Movement Postures**
- **Gain skills in how to:**
  - **Increase use of highly motivating and engaging activities**
  - **Provide positive strokes to children.**
  - **Gain self-soothing skills.**



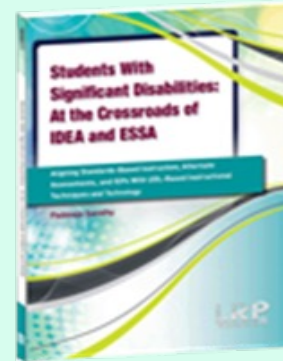
Early Childhood Transition Guide



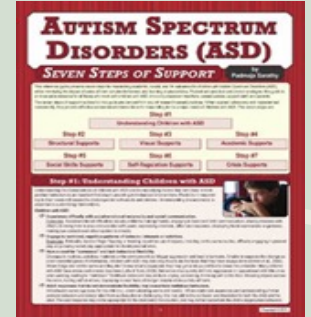
Executive Function



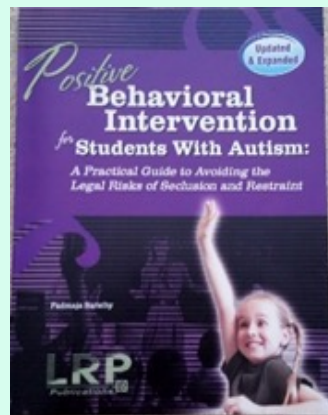
Padmaja's Sarathy' Books and Publications



Severe & Multiple Disabilities



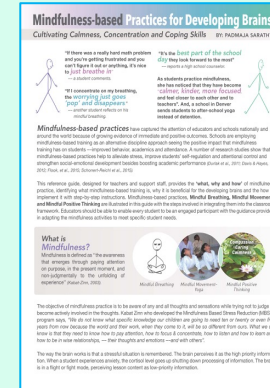
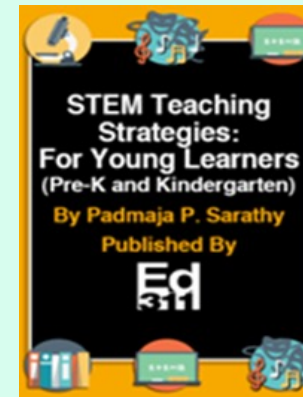
- ❑ Autism: Support Strategies & Interventions, Autism Seven Steps of Support; Music CD – Transitions
- ❑ Behavior Guide (Preventive and Positive Approaches) and Mindfulness Guide
- ❑ Early Childhood: Transition; Parenting Guide; Executive Function - Early Years; and STEM Teaching Strategies
- ❑ Paraeducator Training Guide and DVD
- ❑ Severe and Multiple Disabilities; Significant Disabilities and ESSA



Autism Spectrum Disorders



Behavior Guide



Mindfulness Guide





# The Main Resources - Books and Mini-Guides

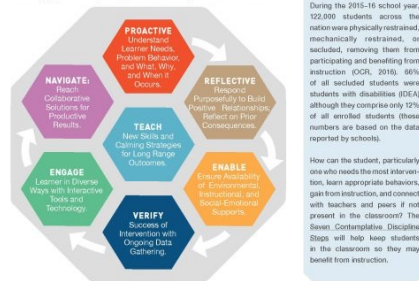
## P.R.E.V.E.N.T. Problem Behaviors SEVEN CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLINE STEPS

*This reference guide, designed to aid teachers and support staff, presents preventive strategies and personalized solutions to respond proactively to behaviorally challenged students. Problem behaviors impact the academic performance and future school outcomes of these students. When students have difficulty regulating their emotions, they can become confrontational and disrupt classroom instruction. Schools and educators struggle with these difficult behaviors and often respond reactively. They frequently pursue a punitive, "get-tough" zero tolerance approach using in-school and out-of-school suspensions for minor infractions. Despite these consequences, the student repeats the negative behavior. Research shows that punishing problem behaviors without a proactive support system is associated with increased aggression, diminished trust, and dropping out (Stuebe & Horne, 2008).*

**THIS GUIDE OFFERS Seven Contemplative Discipline Steps— P.R.E.V.E.N.T. (Proactive, Reflective, Enable, Verify, Engage, Navigate, and Teach)—**within a systematic and coordinated framework to address problem behaviors. Augmented with student-specific scenarios, the P.R.E.V.E.N.T. steps are rooted in positive behavior supports and restorative discipline practices (see Resources section).

You will be able to deliver intensive, student-focused interventions paired with the scaffolds necessary to teach students to practice appropriate and constructive behaviors. When implemented with consistency and rigor, the seven contemplative discipline steps (see graphics below) will help create a positive and productive learning environment, keeping students engaged, learning, and present in the classroom.

**Seven Contemplative Discipline Steps: P.R.E.V.E.N.T.**  
The P.R.E.V.E.N.T. steps (shown below) are designed for cohesive implementation. To illustrate the synchronized application of the seven steps in addressing challenging behavioral episodes, the same case study is woven into each.



**WHY PURSUE PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE?**

During the 2015-16 school year, 122,000 students across the nation were physically restrained, mechanically restrained, or secluded, removing them from participating and benefiting from instruction (OIGL, 2016). 96% of all secluded students were students with disabilities (SWD) although they comprise only 12% of all enrolled students (these numbers are based on the data reported by schools).

How can the student, particularly one who needs the most intervention, learn appropriate behaviors, gain from instruction, and connect with teachers and peers if not present in the classroom? The Seven, Contemplative, Discipline Steps will help keep students in the classroom so they may benefit from instruction.

## Mindfulness-based Practices for Developing Brains: Cultivating Calmness, Concentration and Coping Skills

BY: PADMAJA SARATHY

"If there was a really hard math problem and you're getting frustrated and you can't figure it out or anything, it's nice to just breathe in."  
— a student comments.

"If I concentrate on my breathing, the worrying just goes 'pop' and disappears."  
— another student reflects on his mindful breathing.

"It's the best part of the school day they look forward to the most!"  
— reports a high school counselor.

As students practice mindfulness, she has noticed that they have become "calmer, kinder, more focused and feel closer to each other and to teachers". And, a school in Denver sends students to after-school yoga instead of detention.

**Mindfulness-based practices** have captured the attention of educators and schools nationally and around the world because of growing evidence of immediate and positive outcomes. Schools are employing mindfulness-based training as an alternative discipline approach seeing the positive impact that mindfulness training has on students—improved behavior, academics and attendance. A number of research studies show that mindfulness-based practices help to alleviate stress, improve students' self-regulation and attentional control and strengthen social-emotional development besides boosting academic performance (Jurnal et al., 2017; Davis & Hayes, 2012; Flook, et al., 2015; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015).

This reference guide, designed for teachers and support staff, provides the "what, why and how" of mindfulness practice, identifying what mindfulness-based training is, why it is beneficial for the developing brains and the how to implement it with step-by-step instructions. Mindfulness-based practices, **Mindful Breathing, Mindful Movement, and Mindful Positive Thinking** are illustrated in this guide with the steps involved in integrating them into the classroom framework. Educators should be able to enable every student to be an engaged participant with the guidance provided in adapting the mindfulness activities to meet specific student needs.

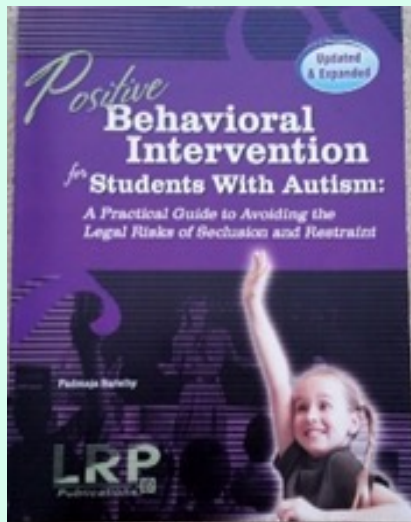
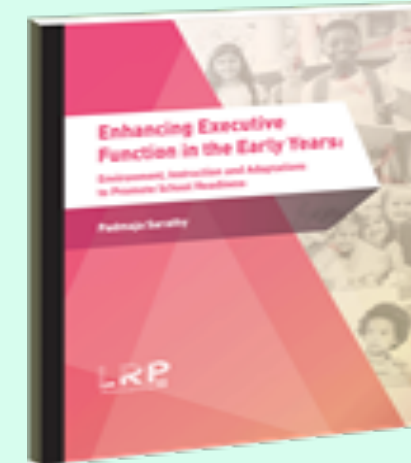
### What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is defined as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003).



The objective of mindfulness practice is to be aware of any and all thoughts and sensations while trying not to judge or become actively involved in the thoughts. Kabat Zinn who developed the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program says, "We do not know what specific knowledge our children are going to need ten or twenty or even five years from now because the world and their work, when they come to it, will be so different from ours. What we do know is that they need to know how to pay attention, how to focus & concentrate, how to listen and how to learn and how to be in wise relationships, — their thoughts and emotions — and with others".

The way the brain works is that a stressful situation is remembered. The brain perceives it as the high priority information. When a student experiences anxiety, the cortisol level goes up shutting down processing of information. The brain is in a fight or flight mode, perceiving lesson content as low-priority information.



## Mindfulness-based Practices for Developing Brains: Cultivating Calmness, Concentration and Coping Skills

by Padmaja Sarathy  
March, 2020. Published by ED311, Austin, Texas.

<https://ed311.com/product/mindfulnessguide/>



# Impulse Control - Self-regulation

**To Think and Act, Apply Focus and Concentration, Cope with Challenging Tasks**

- ❑ Impulse Control is the skill we use to master and filter our thoughts and impulses so we can resist temptations, distractions, and to pause and think before we act.
- ❑ What are some ways children exhibit impulse control, self-regulation and coping skills?
  - Thinking about the consequences before reacting to a situation
  - Controlling aggressive behaviors and outbursts
  - Understanding the thoughts, feelings and intentions of others
  - Letting go of frustration or accepting mistakes.
  - Waiting until they are called on (when they know the answer) or have to wait their turn in a game or to speak in a group.
  - Resisting distractions and stay on task in school and while doing work at home.
  - Persisting on a task even if it is perceived as being difficult.

(Adapted from Enhancing Executive Function by P. Sarathy, LRP Publications)

## **Behavioral Difficulties You May Have Observed in Children Related to Calmness, Concentration, and Coping Skills**

- **Children experiencing difficulties with self-regulation and coping skills may exhibit the following behaviors.**
  - During instruction, student may start wandering around the classroom or start playing with objects or touching the person seated next to them.
  - May not wait their turn in a game or to answer a question during group instruction.
  - Grab items (toys, books, swing in the playground, etc.) from a peer without asking/making a request.
  - Get frustrated when experiencing difficulty with a task -- may start crying or throw puzzle pieces when attempting to complete the puzzle.
  - Start crying or screaming when another child accidentally bumps into them.



## Participant Poll - 1

**Which instructional activities do you routinely use with your learners to build their emotional literacy and competence?**

- Play games to practice emotional vocabulary.
- Use storytelling to illustrate emotions and how to respond (express emotions safely).
- Use puppets to roleplay situations.
- Music and Movement Activities to relax and lower anxiety and stress.
- Use positive strokes and affirmative statements routinely.

# Cultivating Emotional Competence, Problem-solving, Self-regulation and Calming



Use social-emotional teaching strategies to build emotional competence, to cultivate calming skills, and self-regulation.

Teach, Model, and encourage problem-solving strategies to develop calming, coping and self-regulation.

Teach and practice 'Calming Techniques'

Teach and Practice Turtle Technique.

Teach and Practice Mindfulness Practices

Mindful Breathing Exercises

Mindful Movement Yoga

Positive Thoughts and Self-affirmations

Pursue Role-play and Drama.

Engage in sharing and turn-taking activities.

Play Games.

Incorporate Music and Movement

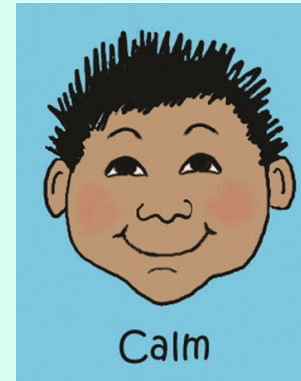
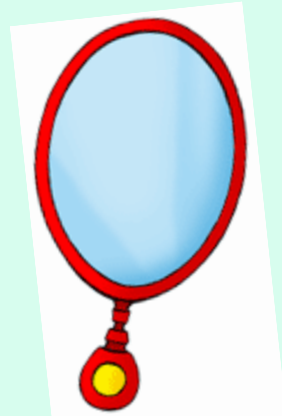
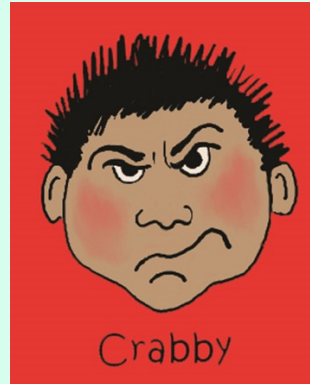
Play 'Charades'.

Play Musical Chairs with a twist.

Do the Freeze Dance.

Make up your own version of "If you are happy and you know it...."

## Play The Mirror Game



**Build Social-Emotional  
Literacy**

**Children sit in a Circle. Teach emotion words  
playing the mirror game.**

**Have children make feeling faces using a hand-held  
mirror, taking turns. They pass the mirror to the  
next child.**

***Mirror, Mirror in my hand,  
Tell me, tell me the feeling I show.  
Is it angry? Is it sad?  
Is it happy? Is it scared?***

**Teach Children to Label Emotions.**

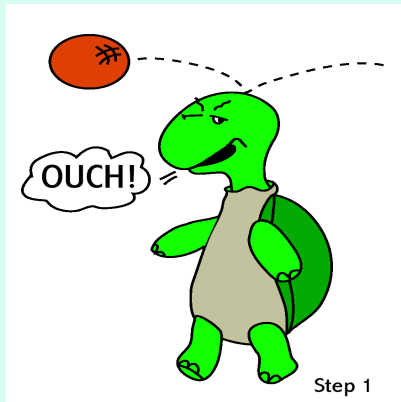
**Guide them to Express Emotions Safely.**

# Use Puppets to Roleplay Stories and Situations

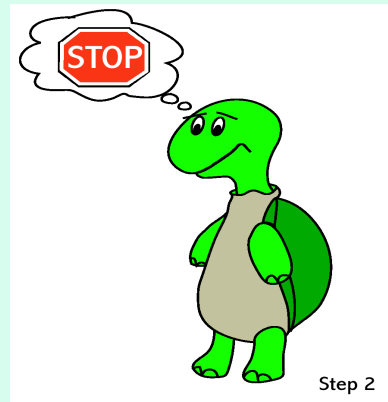


# Anger and Impulse Control - The Turtle Technique

- Children need to learn to recognize and regulate their own emotional responses and stress levels.
- The “turtle technique” a CBI strategy, helps children self-manage anger and disappointment. Has been successfully used with preschool and kindergarten age children (cited in Joseph and Strain, 2010) .



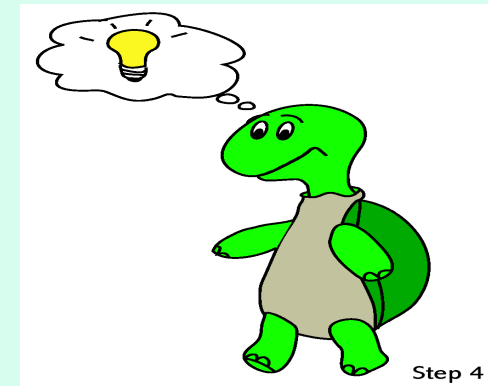
Recognizing that you feel angry



Thinking 'Stop'



Going into the shell, taking deep breaths, calming down



Coming out of shell when calm, and think of solutions to problem

Adapted from Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) Web address: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/>



# Teach Problem-solving Strategies To Develop Coping and Calmness

- Model thinking process to use when student is feeling agitated – to think of alternative solutions.
- Demonstrate how to develop emotional scripts when dealing with situations that provoke strong emotions.
- Provide cues and hints to shape behaviors. With repeated practice, it becomes instinctive. Gradually, withdraw the additional prompts.
- Promote opportunities for problem-solving through naturally occurring events during daily routines.
- Some need additional, intensive, explicit and systematic instruction to practice & develop self-regulation.
  - ***Identify the triggers for emotional issues.***
  - ***Break the strategy into manageable and simple steps.***
  - ***Pre-teach just before the situation that will trigger impulsive behavior.***
  - ***Teach and reinforce the steps and process when child is calmer.***
  - ***Plan and provide for communication difficulties -reduce frustration issues.***

Circle  
Time



Recess



(Adapted from Enhancing Executive Function...by P. Sarathy, LRP publications)

## Student Scenario

- **Student has trouble persisting with a task, controlling her frustration and turns aggressive.**
  - *Begin the session with taking calming breaths.*
  - *Build tolerance for activity by limiting the amount of time student has to work on the activity.*
  - *Make it a small group activity -Include others who can model calmness/self-control.*
  - *Make activity highly engaging - add novelty and multi-sensory items to spark interest.*
  - *Include few minutes of physical movement activity at the end (e.g., yoga postures/music) before moving onto the next activity . Ensure the activity is not a distraction/disruption to others.*

(Adapted from Enhancing Executive Function...by P. Sarathy, LRP publications)

## Student Scenario

- **Student wanders and runs around classroom during instruction and tries to run out of classroom.**

- *Give a role to play at the beginning of group instruction. Involve student to share/show his prop at specific points during the lesson.*
- *Limit the amount of time student has to participate in group, gradually building his tolerance. Provide short breaks - help him learn to practice calming breaths.*
- *Extend the time for sitting and attending as his self-regulation, coping and concentration improves/increases.*
- *Provide visual cues or reminders to stay focused and seated.*
- *Coach using games to learn to apply rules and inhibit impulsive actions and gradually increase concentration.*
- *Provide timed encouraging feedback.*

(Adapted from Enhancing Executive Function...by P. Sarathy, LRP publications)



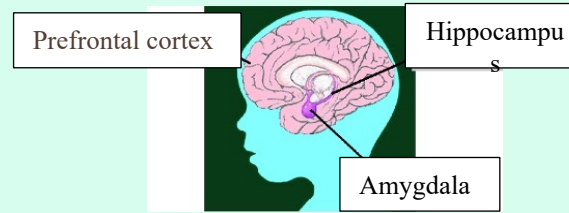
## Strengthen Self-Regulation and Concentration Skills Teach Calming Strategies



- Mindfulness activities help children to develop calmness and strengthen attention control.
  - To reduce anxiety and stress levels, increase positive emotion, and improve coping skills
  - To develop self-regulation, build focus for learning and boost academic performance.
  - To assist and support children with self-regulation difficulties – children experiencing behavioral difficulties.
- Pursuing Mindful Practices offer children simple, positive, and fun tools for life.
  - Breathing Exercises
  - Yoga Postures
- Add Positive Reflections.

**Increases Positive Feelings  
(Endorphins up);  
Decreases stress level**

## Parts of the Brain – Relevant to Being Mindful



### Amygdala

- **This part of the brain is all about feelings. It doesn't really have a way to communicate, it just reacts.**
- **It is always working and everything that feels uncomfortable or annoying starts a reaction in our body.**
- **The amygdala wants to help, but it can be too helpful at times and our feelings of negativity, anxiety or anger can go on and on.**

### The prefrontal cortex

- **It is the part of the brain that is logical and uses reasoning. It helps the amygdala calm down. It slows down our actions and gives us a minute to think about how we want to react.**
- **When we do mindfulness activities, this part of the brain gets stronger so that the amygdala doesn't work overtime.**
- **Promotes the skills that are controlled in the prefrontal cortex, like focus & cognitive control. Has a positive impact on the development of self-regulation, judgment, & patience during childhood.**



# Mindful Breathing

Breathe in, deeply and slowly expanding your tummy and chest.



Breathe out, blow out the air calmly, contracting your tummy and chest



The breathing ball captivates attention of children.

Model for the children how slow, deep and rhythmical breathing works. Practice with them.



## **A Few Minutes of Mindful Breathing Throughout the Day Helps to Calm Down.**

- Infuse mindfulness throughout the day with multiple opportunities to practice paying attention – breathing, looking and listening – as we shift focus between activities.
- Taking a moment to focus on your breathing can help to manage stress, listen more deeply, and defuse tense situations.
- Teaching mindfulness to children embedded within daily routines “has the potential... to neurologically enhance children’s ability to self-regulate” says Erwin et al., (2015).



## Movement and Mindfulness Activities



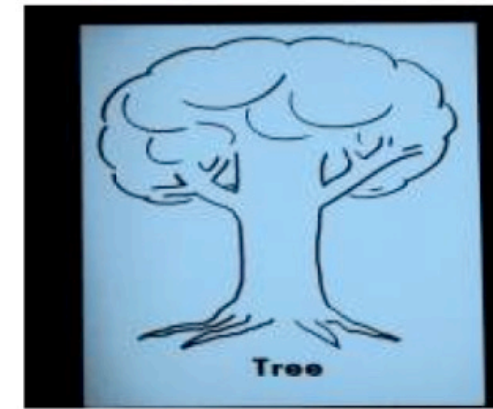
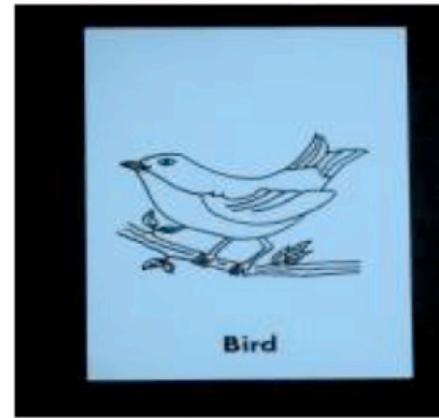
- Infuse physical activity as part of the daily routine.
  - Incorporate movement activities. Findings of a study indicate physical activities help children to have better self-control (van der Niet et al. 2014).
- Integrate yoga exercise and mindfulness-based practices into the routine.
  - Evidence emerging on the benefits of incorporating yoga exercises as part of your daily routine (Erwin et al. 2015)
- Practice breathing exercises for calming down and to increase focus.
  - Model for the children how to take deep mindful breaths - how to breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth (Sarathy, 2017).

# Connect Movement-Yoga Poses with Stories and Concept-Building Activities -Role-Play, Drama and Art

## Picture Books

Examples:

- Planting A Rainbow
- Are You My Mother
- The Giving Tree



## Science Books (National Geographic Books):

- Tree Grows Up
- Seed to Plant
- Plants
- First Big Book of Birds
- Animal Books





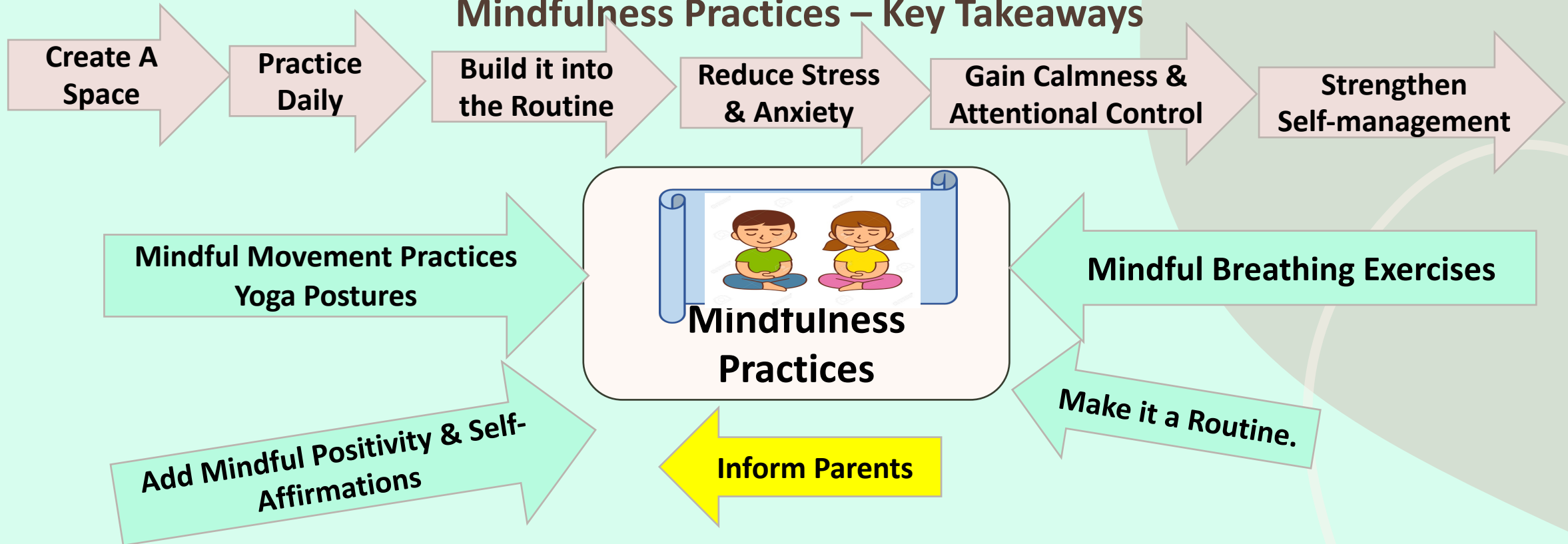
## Connect Yoga-Movement Postures with Concepts, Stories, Role-Play, Drama and Art



- Balloon Breath - Connect with art – drawing and painting balloons and making a collage as a small group activity.
- Bird Posture – Connect with the story of 'Are You My Mother'.  
During shared- book-reading, invite children to perform/role-play the characters of mother and baby bird at specific points in the story.
- Tree Posture – Connect with the story of 'Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom and 'The Giving Tree'.  
Draw, paint and build a tree. At the Science Center, set up a mini tree to teach concept/vocabulary associated with trees.
- Flower Posture – Connect with the science concepts of flower. Read the book, Planting A Rainbow. Make flowers as an art/craft activity.



## Mindfulness Practices – Key Takeaways



**ZERO TO THREE offers a Mindfulness Toolkit – Look for Practices To Do with Children.**

**The Five Senses Exercise will be highly appealing.**

**Five things to See**

**Four things to Feel**

**Three things to Hear**

**Five things to Smell**

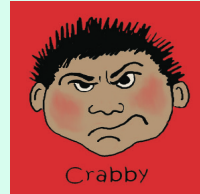
**One things to taste**



## Mindfulness Videos

- “Just Breathe” is a short film from filmmakers Julie Bayer Salzman and Josh Salzman. They talked to children about how their emotions affect them and how they feel physically. The film shows how helpful the practice of mindfulness is in keeping kids emotionally healthy.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVA2N6tX2cg&feature=youtu.be>
- Mindfulness Practice - Still Quiet Place: <http://www.stillquietplace.com/practice-videos/>
- Mental Health Skills for High School Students : Video from Child Mind Institute  
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVcVMFNvrLc&t=15s>

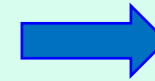
# A few AT tools to assist with Self-Calming for Students with Communication Issues



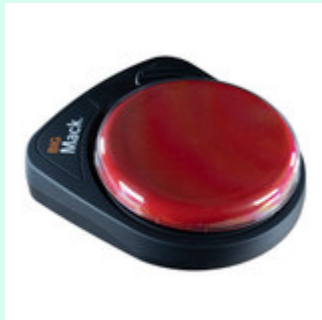
You can use the **Red Brix** at the frustrated-crabby stage.

Talking Brix Communicator

Next, the student moves to the **Coping Green** Brix stage.



The goal is to move to the calm stage (**The Blue Brix Stage**).



A pre-recorded message on a Big Mack can assist with taking calming breaths and practice mindfulness.



## Mindfulness helps both adults and children.

Research suggests that adults can use mindfulness techniques to change the way they interpret and react to critical and judgmental thoughts and negative emotions when facing a child's challenging behavior. (Jacob and Holczer, 2016)

- Mindfulness can help service providers to develop sensitivity for understanding and working with their own emotions.
  - They can then extend this sensitivity and competence to support children and families.
- Mindfulness may help practitioners to self-regulate themselves.
  - Helps them to provide the supportive, nurturing co-regulation that children need in order to develop a strong foundation of social-emotional skills.
- Mindfulness may also decrease emotional reactivity and rumination by increasing present-centered-attention (Guendelman et al 2017).





## Calming, Self-Regulation and Self-Soothing Across All Ages For Stress Reduction

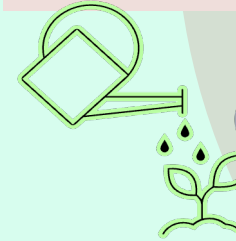
- **Depleting emotions** (frustration, anxiety, and feeling overwhelmed): **Sap your energy.**
- **Renewing emotions** (compassion, caring, and appreciation): **Enable you to solve problems more readily, be more creative, and improve self-regulation.**
- **To help to calm down:**
  - **Focus attention on the breath.**
  - **Take deep breaths.**
  - **Focus on something positive.**
  - **Reduce your stress level and build your resilience.**
- **Benefits: Improves concentration skills; Be less impulsive.**
  - **Have some control over the inner world without rejecting or repressing anything.**



## Nurture Yourself with Self-Soothing!

- Applaud Yourself whenever you react calmly and positively to your student's behaviors. It is your "Aha" moment.
- Provide Positive Strokes to your students..
  - "Awesome, Brian! "You picked up all the pieces and put the puzzle away."
  - "Wow!" What a nice job you did walking back to the classroom from recess.
  - "Great, Tara!" "You remembered what happened in the story".
  - Super! "You remembered the rule about keeping your hands to yourself".
- Engage in Self-Talk.
  - Work out difficult problems talking through the steps to promote problem solving and growth. Then, focus on the planning process.
- Teach your students to make positive – self-affirmation – statements.
- Give yourself a pat on the back whenever you find a reasonable solution to the problem.

Engage in Mindful Positive Thoughts.  
Teach Self-Affirmations.



**I am calm.**

**I am strong.**

**I am resilient.**

**I am friendly.**

**I will succeed.**





## Participant Poll - 2

- **Which of the following activities do you plan to pursue to cultivate concentration, calmness and coping skills of the learners you serve?**
  - ❑ Embedding the Practice of Daily Calming Breaths
  - ❑ Yoga-Movement-based Activities
  - ❑ Practice Positive Thinking and Self-affirmations
  - ❑ Pursuing Emotional Literacy Building with Problem-solving Situations
  - ❑ Incorporate Role Play and Drama Activities

## Cultivate Calmness, Concentration, and Coping Skills To Enable Learners to Bloom

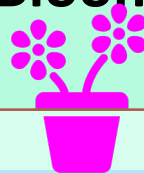
- Communicate with children tuning in and taking turns.
- Be a Model for Calmness, Concentration and Coping.
- Use positive discipline approaches. Provide positive strokes.

Build & Strengthen Emotional Literacy.

Stimulate and challenge while  
having fun and joyful time.



**Help Children  
Bloom**



Foster Executive Function Skills: Grit,  
Persistence, Self-control and  
Problem-solving.

Set High Expectations.

Cultivate positivity and affirmative thinking.

- Practice Self-compassion. It helps us to move from self-criticism and judgment to one of self-care, warmth and love.

*Raise your words, not your voice!  
It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder! (Rumi)*

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# Thank You.

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Upcoming Webinar:

September (Date to be determined), 2023 @ 11:00 AM (CT):