

# Mindfulness, Yoga and Breathing Practices To Help Children Learn Calming Techniques and Attention Control



**Padmaja Sarathy**  
Author and Educational Consultant  
[www.infinitepossibilities-sped.com](http://www.infinitepossibilities-sped.com)

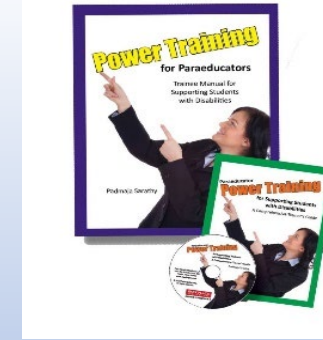
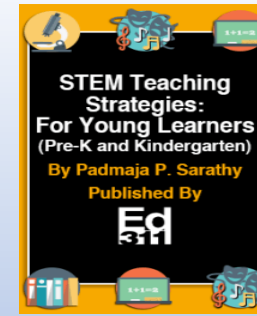
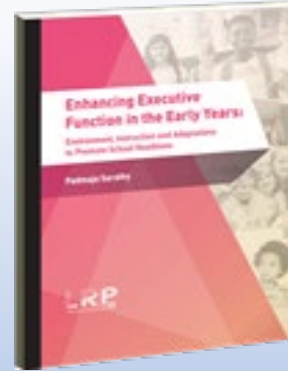
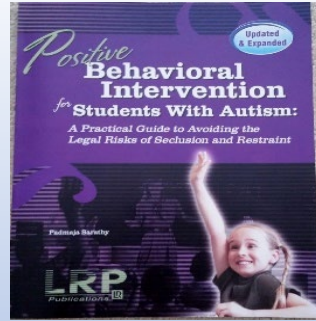
**AbleNet University Webinar**  
**November 29, 2018**

# Learner Outcomes

- Increase your awareness of mindfulness-based practices:
  - Mindful breathing exercises
  - Mindful yoga practices and
  - Mindful Positive Thinking
- To help children to develop self-regulation to reduce their stress levels, and build focus and attentional control for learning activities.
- Learn strategies to embed engaging and fun mindfulness and yoga practices within your academic content and routines in early childhood and elementary classrooms.
- Learn how to use mindfulness-based activities to support children to make smooth transitions to move easily from one activity to the next.



# Sarathy's Publications: Books and Quick Reference Guides

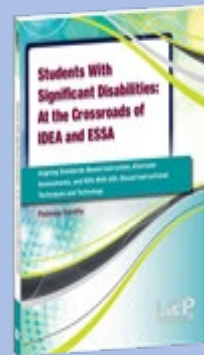


A music CD  
Law & Sarathy



## Focus Areas

- Autism: Behavior Interventions, Support Strategies, Music CD - Transitions
- Early Childhood: Transition, Parent Guide and STEM Teaching Strategies
- Executive Function
- Paraeducator Training Guide and DVD
- Severe and Multiple Disabilities
- Significant Disabilities and ESSA



A Behavior Guide coming soon!

A New Edition coming soon

## What is Mindfulness Practice? How Does it Help?

- 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).
- Mindfulness-based activities trains your mind – strengthening **Executive Function**
  - To be reflective instead of reacting to a situation automatically, thereby exercising impulse control.
  - 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).
- Mindfulness is best known as a practice for emotional self-regulation, stress reduction (Kabat- Zinn, 2003); recent research is showing usefulness in cognitive self-regulation as well (Razza, et al. 2015).

# Why Mindfulness?

Researchers Zelazo and Lyons (2012) tell us:

“... using age-appropriate activities to exercise children’s reflection on their moment-to-moment experiences—may support the development of self-regulation by targeting top-down processes while lessening bottom-up influences (such as anxiety, stress, curiosity) to create conditions conducive to reflection, both during problem solving and in more playful, exploratory ways”.

1. Learning is based on the ability to control attention (focused attention, sustained attention and selective attention (as cited in Lederer, 2017)
2. Metacognitive mindfulness practices can help train attention regulation.
3. Mindfulness practices can easily be integrated within and across the curricular content.

# Mindful Attention Practices

- “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-Ziinn, 2013).
- **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 with Autism, ADHD and others experiencing behavioral difficulties.
- Offers young students simple, positive, and fun tools that they can use throughout their lives.



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

# Research Tells us - Lowers Anxiety & Stress

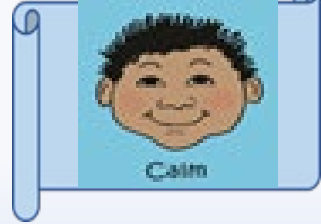
- A research study by [Tulane University study](#) found that school-based yoga programs helped to lower anxiety and stress levels among third-grade students at a local public school.
  - The students were screened for symptoms of anxiety at the beginning of the school year and assigned randomly to two groups.
  - A control group of 32 students received counseling and other activities.
  - A second group of 20 students participated in yoga/mindfulness activities for 8 weeks – breathing exercises, guided relaxation and traditional yoga poses appropriate for children.
- Students who participated in yoga at school "demonstrated significantly greater improvement in psychosocial and emotional quality of life compared to their peers who received standard care," says the researcher.

## What Research Tells us - Positive Benefits

- Another study evaluated the impact of a mindfulness-based yoga intervention program on preschool children. They received daily training for 25 weeks and demonstrated improved self-regulation (Razza, et al. 2013, 2015).
  - The study also found that the children who were most at risk of self-regulation dysfunction benefited the most from the intervention.
- There are also encouraging reports on the positive benefits from yoga for students with autism spectrum disorders in helping them to calm down (Koenig, Buckley-Reen and Garg, 2012).
- Research has also looked into the qualitative aspects of Yoga to ‘visualize children’s voice’ involving observations of yoga classes and group interviews with 34 preschool children. The findings indicated that children’s perceptions of yoga were overwhelmingly positive and that they would continue yoga if given the opportunity.



# Mindfulness Aligned with Cognitive-behavioral Interventions



- Mindfulness is tied to cognitive-behavioral interventions that seem to work well with people with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The mindfulness practice will potentially address the deficits of autism in the emotional, social, and neurological connections, encouraging new connections to be made (Kruer, 2009)
- Teaching students with ASD mindfulness meditation technique to self-regulate their behavior is therapeutic.
- When students learn to control their impulses and improve their focus through self-monitoring of behavior, it can result in overall positive learning consequences for them.
- Meditation technique, has the potential to be part of a comprehensive behavior intervention plan when it gains wider acceptance as a therapeutic practice.

# Mindfulness-based Activities

- In early childhood and elementary contexts, mindfulness-based calming strategies could include a range of activities for a few minutes a day:
  - **Mindful Breathing - Calming reflective breathing exercises**
  - **Teacher-guided meditation practices**
  - **Visualization (visual imagery) techniques**
  - **Yoga poses**
- The practices do not require any special equipment or resources but teacher awareness and understanding of the techniques will help.
- Take into consideration the age, developmental needs, and learning differences of the children. Ensure that any special accommodations and supports in place for all children to have access.

# Participant Poll

- Which of the following do you incorporate within your daily schedule of activities for your students ...
- Breathing exercise?
- Yoga Poses?
- Mindfulness practice?
- Positive Self-Affirmations?
- None of the above

# Participant Poll

- Which one do you incorporate in your daily schedule?
- Breathing exercise?
- Yoga Poses?
- Mindfulness practice?
- Positive Self-Affirmations?
- None of the above, yet

# 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.

*Do not learn how to react. Learn how to respond.*

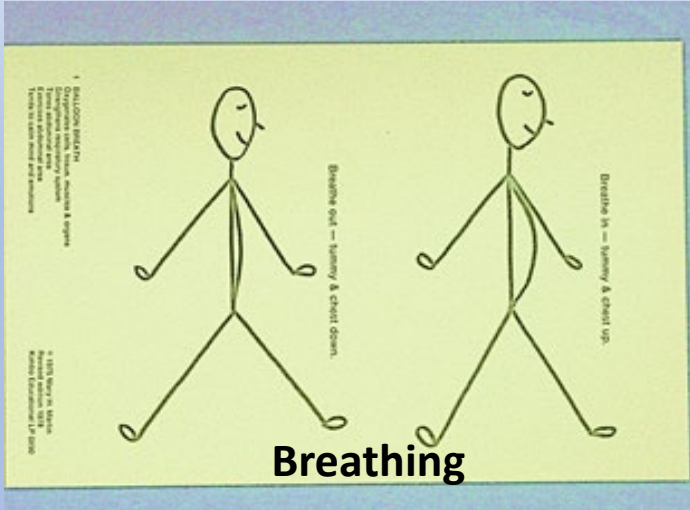
*—Buddha*

# Mindful Breathing

- Get children ready for listening and looking prior to building attention for the group learning activity.
- Begin with mindfulness attention – **listening with ears & looking with eyes** – followed by breathing exercise.
  - Use a bell or a musical instrument to assist with listening.
- Get children to begin focused breathing.
- Show the Hoberman's sphere to illustrate deep breathing **expanding** and **contracting** the sphere:



- Another option: Have children lay down on the floor and practice breathing.
- Provide positive feedback.



Inhale (breathing in through the nose) 1-2-3-4-5.

Exhale (breathing out through the nose) 5-4-3-2-1.

# Mindful Breathing

Breathe in, deeply and slowly  
expanding your tummy and chest



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



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

## **A Few Minutes During Transitions Between Activities**

Infuse mindfulness throughout the day with multiple opportunities to practice paying attention – breathing, looking and listening – as children shift focus during transitions between activities.

Taking a moment to focus on your breathing can help to manage stress, listen more deeply, and defuse tense classroom situations.

## Breathing Exercise: A Stress Reliever

- Breathing through alternate nostrils is done to reduce stress and anxiety.
- Step 1: With your left hand, touch index finger to thumb, other fingers stretched out with hand resting on lap.
- Step 2: With the right hand, place middle and index fingers gently between the eyebrows, while thumb presses right nostril closed.
- Step 3: Breathe in a long, deep breath with left nostril.
- Step 4: Cover left nostril with ring and pinky fingers of right hand, breathe out through right nostril.
- Repeat: Alternate breaths with right and left nostrils.
- Continue: For 2 to 5 minutes. End by breathing out through right nostril.

**Practice it yourself. Get comfortable with it before teaching older students. When giggles and laughter are generated as kids try it, it will further help to relieve stress.**



# Add Movement to Mindfulness with Yoga Poses

- Yoga is a series of physical poses, involves breathing, deep concentration that promotes awareness of the present moment. Yoga integrates both emotional and physical aspects of the experience (Erwin et al. 2015).
- Think of Yoga exercise as a movement-based activity.
  - Children need to move their small and large body parts for flow of endorphins – helps to process information. Memory is stored throughout the body through peptides. Moving discharges energy more effectively stimulating brain function.
- Make yoga (postures – asanas) a lot of fun and engaging for children.
  - Get them to perform yoga poses associated with animal, nature, ocean themes, etc. (e.g., bird, fish, flower, tree, etc.) to connect with what they may be familiar with and with picture books for younger children.
- Yoga helps the student to calm down, to focus better leading to improved behaviors.

# Embedding Mindful Yoga Movement into Your Daily Routine

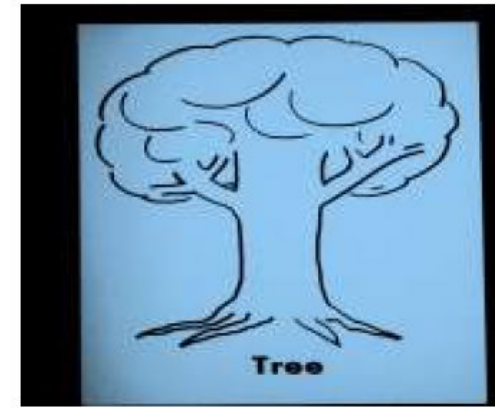
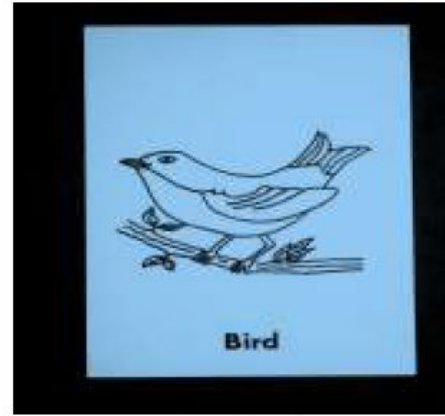
- Share information about yoga and mindfulness practices with the children, their families and other adults in the school on how the practices help children to calm down when they feel upset, worried, or overexcited (Erwin et al., 2015).
- Allocate a space that you can regularly use for yoga and mindfulness practice.
- Use small mats or carpet remnants for both yoga and meditation practices to help children to stay in their own space and not bump into each other.
  - Helps to create a personal space with visual and physical boundary.
- Build it into the routine: 1. Before Morning Meeting/Circle Time 2. After Recess  
3. Before Going Home 4. Before Group Instruction 5. Prior to Taking Tests
- Call it **Silent Time** (younger)/as **Contemplative Reflection Time** with older students.
- Children's yoga can incorporate singing, dancing and playing games. Benefits are:
  - Kids gain an understanding of the mind-body connection and why it's essential to care for both their physical and emotional health.

# Connect Movement-Yoga Poses with Stories and Concept-Building

## Using Picture Books

### Examples:

- 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

# Connecting Movement-Yoga 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-playing the character of mother and baby bird at specific points in the story.
- **Tree Posture** – Connect with the story of ‘Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom’ or ‘The Giving Tree’. Role-Play and Drama: Act out the stories.  
Art: Draw, paint and build a tree. At the Science Center, set up a mini tree to teach concept/vocabulary associated with tree: parts, the growth, the role of tree in the environment, pollination
- **Flower Posture** – Connect with science concepts of a flower, seed to plant, etc.  
Make flowers as an art/craft activity

# Super Brain Yoga: A Movement-based Physical Exercise

- SuperBrain Yoga is a simple exercise based on principles of acupressure, reflexology and the human energy system.
- Involves **cross-lateral movement** (crossing the midline). A **fun** movement activity leading to stress relief.
- A physical exercise that **includes breathing in and breathing out**. Takes just a few minutes to learn.
- With regular and daily practice, research shows that children are calmer and more focused.
- 'Super Brain Yoga' exercises helped children with disabilities including autism spectrum disorders. The authors were encouraged by the results, the students were more focused, calmer and displaying less negative behaviors (Kok Sui, 2005).
- A number of YouTube videos are available to learn the steps of this exercise.

# Physical Exercise for Children with ASD: Movement-based Yoga

- Yoga relieves tension in the muscles and aids in relaxing them.
- Physical Exercise involving movement is a relaxing tool to help reduce the stress levels and build calmness in children with ASD.
- Regular moderate physical exercise helps reduce stereotypy (Lytle and Todd, 2009).
- Helps to pay more attention to the task at hand, sit calmly at the desk and finish the work (Lytle and Todd, 2009).
- Provide physical activity breaks for 5-10 minutes after each period of 20-30 minutes of instructional activity.
- Teachers and parents report positive results in calming children with autism when they have outbursts of frustration if intervention is timely:
  - Helping them to remember exercises for breathing and toning -- humming in a monotone voice helps to calm them down.

# Benefits of Mindfulness In Reducing Aggressive Behaviors

- Mindfulness training may be a better alternative, or a useful addition, to traditional forms of controlling aggressive behavior.
- Mindful parenting has also been found to lead to a reduction of aggression, non-compliance and self-injury in children with autism and to lead to increases in mother's satisfaction with their own parenting skills (Singh et al., cited in Webber, 2007).
- Training staff in mindfulness can lead to increases in levels of happiness and quality of life of clients with profound multiple disabilities (Webber, 2007).

# Self-Management is the Goal

- Both behavioral and psychopharmacological treatments have been the mainstay of treatments for aggression in children and adolescents with autism.
  - They rely on external agents to administer them –parents, caregivers, teachers, etc. (Singh, et al., 2011).
- We want individuals with disabilities to learn self-management skills that will enable them to regulate their own behaviors and to achieve self-selected goals (Singh, et al., 2011).
- Self-management procedures avoid problems of generalization and maintenance.
  - Individual can use them in multiple settings and gain immediate self-reinforcement. It is portable.



# Mindfulness and Yoga Resources

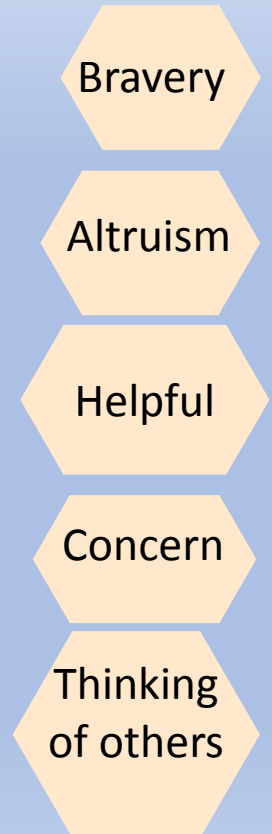
- **Kid's Yoga Deck: 50 Poses and Games** By Annie Buckley includes simple pictures and explanations on 50 kid-friendly yoga poses.
- **Mindful Schools** offers online courses for educators, mental health professionals, and parents to use mindfulness with youth. <http://www.mindfulschools.org/>
- **MindUP™** provides training programs for educators and children that teach social and emotional learning skills by linking cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology, and mindfulness in an effort to maximize children's health, happiness, and academic success.  
<http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/mindup-curriculum/>
- **The YogaKids Tools for Schools** - Program designs yoga curriculum for educators of all grade levels intended to integrate yoga and mindfulness into the classroom and physical education curriculum on a daily basis. <http://yogakids.com/tools-for-schools/>

# Mindful Positive Thoughts and Self-Affirmations

Cultivate in your students positivity and affirmative thinking. Get them to think of self-affirmations.



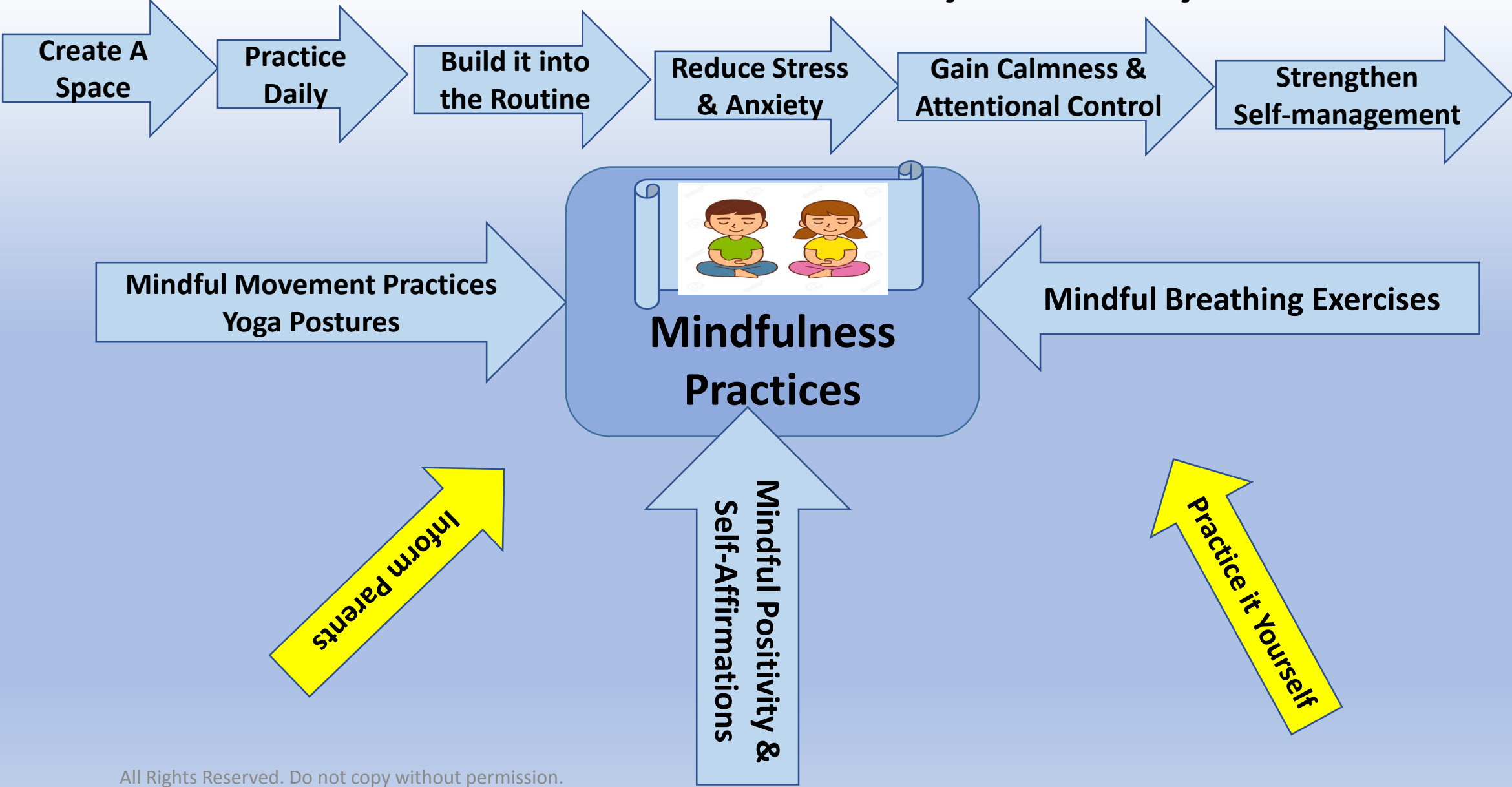
Qualities to Build in Your students



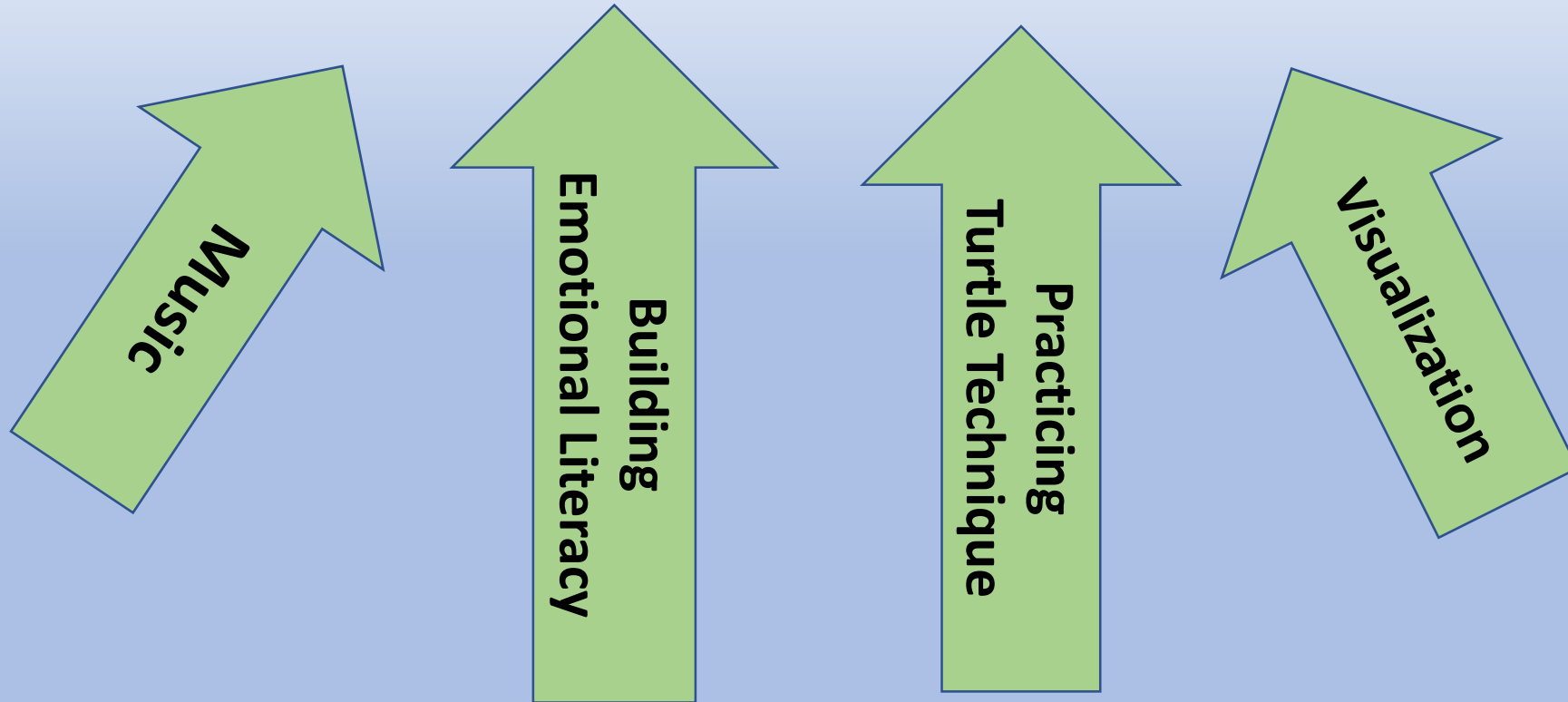
# Personal Weather Report Activity (Snel, 2013)

- Get in touch with your feelings **“Your Personal Weather Report” Activity** (Snel,2013)
  - **“Weathering the storm inside”** – Take time to determine the feeling right now inside you: “Sunny and Relaxed or Rainy and Overcast or a Storm brewing,...?”
  - **“Accepting the Weather”**- just let it be... Stops from reacting immediately.
    - Like the weather, this is how you feel right now. But, weather changes, and so does your mood. It will be different later in the day. Accept the feeling. Stay with it for a while.
    - Incorporate how to handle difficult feelings of anger, frustration and sadness.
- This weather exercise helps children, says Snel (2013). They allows themselves to feel the way they feel.. Helps children to recognize that they can “survive” these intense feelings and not be crushed by them.
- Teach them that doing mindfulness work before a test or when they feel anxious will help them reset the part of their brain that is upset by what feels hard.

# Mindfulness Practices – Key Takeaways



# Additional Calming Techniques



## Benefits – Practicing Yoga and Mindfulness and Breathing

Harvard's Medical Newsletter says:

- “Research shows 90% of all doctor visits are linked to stress-related problems.
- Movement-based Yoga can be a perfect remedy. It's one form of exercise that helps relieve stress while improving strength, balance, flexibility, and overall health.
- Yoga works across multiple systems in your body at one time to help:  
**Release tension with Abdominal Breathing.** Abdominal breathing is a basic yoga breath that all beginners should start with. This technique gets you to breathe deeply to create abdominal movement.”
- Incorporate yoga exercises and mindfulness-based practices as part of your own daily routine.
- Use Self-Soothing techniques to nurture yourself!
- Fill your mind with positive emotions.

# References and Resources

- Erwin, E. J., Robinson, K. A. McGrath, G. S. & Harney, C. J. (2015). It's Like Breathing In Blue Skies and Breathing Out Stormy Clouds: Mindfulness Practices in Early Childhood. *YOUNG EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN*. Vol. 20(10), pp. 1-17.
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## Books and Apps

- Sarathy, P. (2014). Positive Behavior Intervention for Students with Autism: A Practical Guide to Avoiding the Legal Risks of Seclusion and Restraint. Horsham, PA: LRP Publications.
- Snel, E. (2013). Sit Still Like A Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents) Penguin Random House Publisher Services
- Srinivasan, M. Teach, Breathe, Learn .The book highlights how mindfulness can be an effective tool in the classroom. *Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and their Parents) by Eline Snel*
- Altman, D. 101 Mindful Ways to Build Resilience: Cultivate Calm, Clarity, Optimism & Happiness Each Day

### Apps:

- **Calm** is a mindfulness app. Timed guided meditation sessions. [calm.com/schools](https://calm.com/schools) Peaceful backgrounds & music w/ guided meditations (free for educators)
- **Inner Explorer**--Mindfulness exercises for classroom (PK-12/English & Spanish) It offers a series of daily 5-10-minute audio-guided mindfulness practices

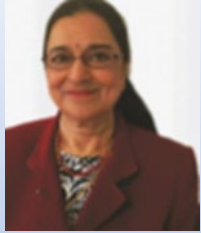
### Website:

- [mindfulschools.org](https://mindfulschools.org)--Resources & teacher courses
- <http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/>



# THANKS

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**Padmaja Sarathy**  
**Author and Consultant**

**psarathy@earthlink.net**

**[www.infinitepossibilities-sped.com](http://www.infinitepossibilities-sped.com)**



## **Future Webinars:**

**Invigorative Instruction to engage and advance young learners  
with severe and multiple disabilities**

**Webinar 1: (2/28/2019): Focus – academic, cognitive, communication, etc.**

**Webinar 2 (3/28/2019) Focus - music, art and movement activities**