



# THE MINDFUL EDUCATION WORKBOOK

Lessons for  
Teaching Mindfulness  
to Students

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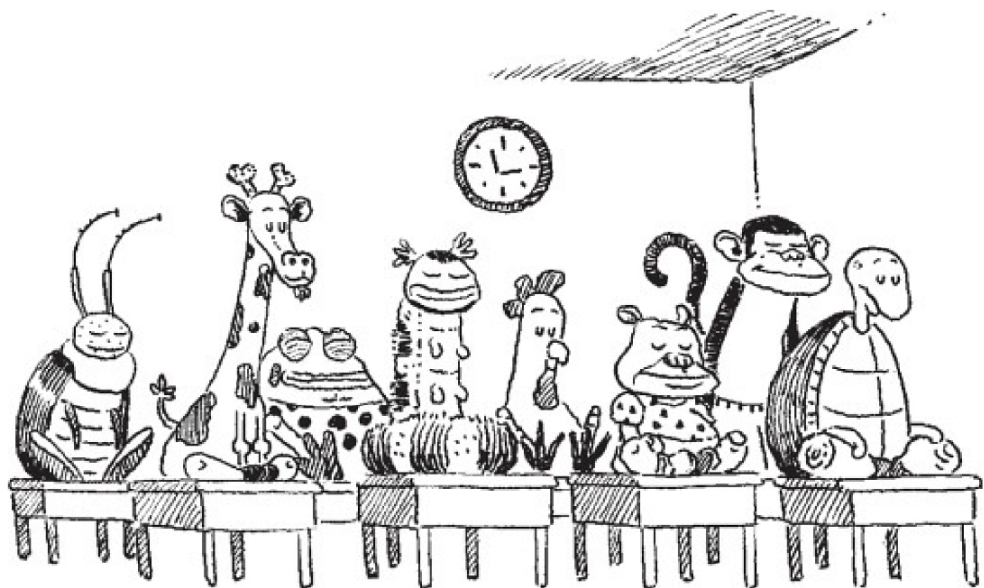
*This e-book contains some places that ask the reader to fill in questions or comments. Please keep pen and paper handy as you read this e-book so that you can complete the exercises within.*

# The Mindful Education WORKBOOK





# GETTING STARTED







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*“Mindfulness is like taking a tour inside your body to help calm yourself down.”*  
*“Mindfulness is being really aware. You can even hear ants moving and you can feel blood moving in your body!”*  
*“Mindfulness is a tool to use when you’re fighting with someone and you can just take some vacuum cleaner breaths and then get on with what you were doing.”*

—ELEMENTARY STUDENTS, SAN FRANCISCO

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## **The Mindfulness in Education Movement**

Schools across the world are turning to mindfulness in the hopes that it will be an antidote for rising stress, emotional dysregulation, and attention deficit. In researching the school systems that have adopted mindfulness, we are learning that students and teachers are happier, more focused, emotionally regulated, and less affected by stress (Zenner et al., 2014). What school would pass up a chance to raise test scores, have fewer playground fights, and cultivate a more peaceful environment?

In South Burlington, Vermont, students begin and end each day with a few mindful minutes, focusing on their breath and building their attention muscles. In Baltimore, Maryland, high schoolers walk into the chill room when they need to cool down from stressful situations, working with impulse control and learning to communicate when there is conflict. In Sun Valley, Idaho students practice compassion in school and then make it real by choosing community service projects in their town, even traveling around the world bringing their empathic commitment. Students from Mexico to Israel to Rwanda are learning mindfulness in creative and inspiring ways.

Apps and online programs have been developed to teach these concepts in a way many find fun and accessible. There are now mindfulness in education programs with videos and recordings where all the teachers need to lead a lesson is press play. Hip-hop artists are putting out albums for kids to teach them to breathe and relax over a funky beat. Artist and mindfulness teacher JustMe has a song called Mindful Life in which the chorus repeats, “I’m showing up every school day, being present without judgment is the new thing.”

Mindfulness is not just for kids, of course. Sometimes after our students have learned mindfulness, we may have the beautiful and humbling experience of having them look at us and say, “You look stressed. Do you

need to take a mindful moment to relax?” There are now many programs and school initiatives that promote personal development as part of professional development. We the adults can begin with our own self-care, mastering the art of attention, and finding a sense of contentment. Some mindfulness in education programs exclusively teach mindfulness to teachers, assuming that once we can work with our own burnout, compassion fatigue, and attention deficit, then our students will naturally benefit from the mindful role models we become (Jennings, 2015; Jennings et al., 2016).

### **HOW DOES MINDFULNESS WORK?**

The field of mindfulness in education is young, but the research is already confirming what thousand of teachers and students are learning firsthand. For teachers mindfulness reduces stress, helps them focus, and makes them more happy (Roeser et al, 2013). Students are more emotionally regulated and attentive, and their learning improves. The classrooms are more peaceful, there are fewer school conflicts, and kids like each other more (Zoogman et al., 2014). These are preliminary results from teaching mindfulness to youth, and research from teaching mindfulness to adults is well established. For adults practicing mindfulness has been shown to positively transform everything from brain architecture to immune function, positive affect, and even gene expression (Tang et al., 2015).

A potent description of mindfulness is from the movie *Kung Fu Panda*, in which the wise old turtle Oogway says, “Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the present.” Being mindful is something we have all done a million times, and some people who have never heard of mindfulness are already really good at it. Being mindful means that we are showing up fully for each moment, paying attention with an open heart. We all have mindful moments when we are engaged with our students, and we can really feel the impact we are making. Being mindful is not something we create, it’s a natural state of mind we return to when we are settled in our bodies and attuned to the world around us. Often kids are a lot more mindful than we are, absorbed in the wonder of the moment, though they may not be particularly attentive to the specific things we want them to be mindful of.

There is being mindful, and then there are mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness exercises are what we use to strengthen our attention and compassion. We use our breath as a home base of attention that we return to again and again, limiting our distractibility. We call to mind someone who annoys us so that we can work on forgiveness and compassion. The qualities that everyone wants to see their children develop, such as kindness, attention,

and emotional balance, can be exercised like muscles. We can isolate a particular quality, such as attention, and use a focusing practice repeatedly so that mindful attention becomes a habitual attitude. The practice of mindfulness helps us build up the percentage of moments in which we are present rather than lost in thought.

We become scientists with our students, studying our own minds. As teachers we can track our stress levels throughout the day, learning when we may need a break or to open our hearts more with certain kids. Students are empowered to examine their behaviors, thought patterns, and relationships. Instead of acting out, they learn to track the subtle emotional triggers in their bodies so that right before they were going to react they are able to pause and take a breath or ask for help.

Doesn't mindfulness sound like a magic pill? The only problem is that it cannot simply be swallowed with a glass of water. The many benefits of mindfulness develop through consistent practice and introspective explorations into our minds, hearts, and bodies. To relax, we need to become aware of our stress and tension. To find peace of mind, we face the chaotic swirl in our brains. To feel happier and content, we may need to feel the anxiousness and sadness in our hearts.

If we simply think of mindfulness as a calming agent for dysregulated and hyperactive students, then we run the risk of using it like a drug or a behavioral modification technique. Mindfulness is not like that "game" where we tell our kids to see who can be quiet the longest. We are not just trying to shut them up so they won't be so difficult to deal with. Mindfulness cannot be the next school curriculum brought in one year and tossed the next. This is not a subject to be forced on students and teachers or to be tested against standards.

Across the world, mindfulness is supporting focus and regulation so that students can ace their math tests and use impulse control. Before we try to push mindfulness on our students, we can join the thousands of teachers who are on their own introspective journeys, becoming leading lights of presence and compassion. Often after taking a mindfulness training, teachers will say that they find an amazing transformation in their classrooms, not from teaching their kids anything but from showing up as a mindful teacher. It's like dropping an ice cube in a cup of hot water and feeling it cool down. Then other teachers and principals get interested. "What are you doing in there? Your class seems so chill." This is the quiet revolution under way. Not a top-down curriculum based educational reform, but an organic, committed group of conscious individuals cultivating our own compassion and presence, slowly and unstoppably rippling into the world.

# The Five Realms of Mindful Literacy

Mindfulness is a way of being. It is an open-minded and open-hearted view we can take while chatting with friends, walking to class, or grading papers. Here we explore how to take a mindful view in all of the realms of our lives. We explore how to be mindful of our bodies, minds, hearts, relationships, and with the world all around us. We first gain this wisdom for ourselves and then we will learn to teach youth these five mindful literacies.

## PHYSICAL LITERACY

Champion sports teams and Olympic athletes practice mindfulness because they say it helps them relax their stress and slow down their thoughts to enter into a flow state, an experience where they are more present in their bodies and attuned to the world around them. When learning mindfulness, we begin by relaxing and slowing down our busy minds. For our students' minds to be sharp and creative, we need to make sure they are getting their basic physical needs met and feel safe and secure in the classroom. Our first job as teachers is to welcome students into the room and help them feel regulated in the space. Adults begin mindfulness practice the same way. We slow down our usual pace of life and find a state of rest, relaxation, and introspection. Physical literacy lessons help us wake up our senses to gain a feeling of wonder and connection to our bodies and the physical world.

## MENTAL LITERACY

Once we are physically regulated and present, we can cultivate our attention. We build our attention muscles by choosing a focus point, such as our breath or the taste of an orange. Then we get to watch the unruliness of our minds, distracted here and there. The practice of mindfulness is to kindly bring attention back again and again to the point of focus. In this way we learn about the mechanics of our minds and master our mental capacity. Young children can learn to watch their thoughts passing like clouds, which is particularly helpful when the thought is one that would get them in trouble if they followed it. As adults, this practice lets us watch our own thoughts with the ability to be not so impulsive and not get caught in the tumble of rumination.

## EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Once we have learned the language of sensations and the mechanics of the mind, we can bring them together, learning the language of the heart. We can witness unhealthy thought patterns and learn to uncover the feelings that underlie them. By tracking our stress levels and emotional states, we can

build impulse control and emotional regulation. We can also cultivate healthy emotions like empathy, gratitude, and love. We are not suppressing anger or anxiety; rather, we are opening our compassionate awareness to the full spectrum of emotions. An amazing outcome of mindfulness is that when we are fully present with our emotions, happiness, compassion, and gratitude get stronger while feelings such as anger, anxiety, and depression lose their strength. Some of our emotions are very painful, but as we are present to them, our hearts open wider, and we become more compassionate to ourselves and the world around us.

### **SOCIAL LITERACY**

Having found compassion and regulation, we can become mindfulness ambassadors, bringing these skills into the world. We can develop empathy for our friends, family, and eventually even those people who annoy us. We can use mindfulness to look at our assumptions and start understanding other perspectives. We can learn to see the world with fresh, empathic, and understanding eyes. Whether it's in our faculty room, our romantic relationships, or the social dynamics on the playground, we all have a lot to learn about empathic communication and social literacy. We are not just learning to be mindful so that we can find inner peace amidst a warring world. We are building inner peace to be a model of what is possible and to work for equality and inclusion for all of our students and community.

### **GLOBAL LITERACY**

We don't need to stop expanding our circle of compassion with our community. We can gain understanding and care for everyone on the planet—even the birds, deer, and oceans. By opening our mindful eyes, we can gain an understanding of the interconnectedness of all things and the ways our actions affect the world. We can also become mindful enough to learn how our environments affect our moods and mind states. Often we don't even realize how the bright fluorescent lights in our classrooms negatively affect our students and ourselves. With a wider view of how we impact and are affected by the world, we can take greater responsibility for our lives. When we open to a global perspective, we expand our compassion and understanding from our friends and families to all those billions of beings out there who are striving for safety, health, and happiness, just like we are.

## **How to Use This Book**

This workbook is aimed at empowering educators to bring mindfulness and emotional intelligence into their work with youth to positively transform

communities and lives. Learning to teach mindfulness in an authentic and effective way has some important steps that we walk through here.

The first section, *Beginning with Ourselves*, is a mini-mindfulness training. This is an opportunity for adults to cultivate their own self-awareness and inner resources. Before we can be guides for our students, we need to know the terrain ourselves. With personal mindfulness practices, we explore the terrain of our bodies, minds, hearts, society, and ecology. With exercises and recommendations, we have a chance to build a foundational mindfulness practice from which all the rest of our teaching can be built. In this section we learn to use mindfulness when it counts: in the midst of classroom chaos, burnout, and compassion fatigue. We also take time to explore our emotional maturity. Before we teach mindfulness to others, it is indispensable to learn the art of introspection and emotional intelligence so we can be models for our students and not project our own issues onto them.

In the second section, *Introducing Mindfulness to Students: Resources and Recommendations*, we take the practices we have developed and learn how to embody them with our students. We explore tools for teaching in a mindful way and presenting mindfulness themes to students. We also consider how to structure an environment in which students will feel most relaxed, happy, and able to focus. Then we consider how to apply our mindful presence when teaching students of different age groups, diverse backgrounds, and with trauma and special needs. We can learn how to engage all students and offer mindfulness teachings in a way that students will find fun and engaging.

Our section on *Mindfulness Lessons for Students: Classroom Activities, Practices, and Techniques* is a full mindfulness-based lesson collection. Before we jump into the curriculum we examine 10 research-based mindfulness objectives. We also look at ways to present mindfulness to students to make it accessible and interesting. We look at the lesson template, which will be used in 25 of the lessons throughout the curriculum. Each lesson contains learning objectives, considerations for teaching to different ages, and other implementation recommendations. The lessons are laid out in a clear progression of five realms of learning literacy. We move from physical literacy to mental literacy, emotional literacy, social literacy, and finally global literacy. It will become clear why it is ordered in this way, since certain practices need to be built on previous capacities. Finally there are five integration lessons that will be helpful in weaving the practices into the school day.

The final section, *Integrating Mindfulness: Recommendations, Insights, and Tools*, supports us in integrating these teachings into our lives and work.

With worksheets and recommendations, we can use this chapter to feel confident bringing this work to our community. There are recommendations for implementation from teachers and mindfulness in education leaders. There are worksheets to create your own mindfulness-based lessons as well as an opportunity to explore presenting mindfulness to our larger communities. In the final section we explore how to integrate mindfulness into our schools fluidly and effectively.

## **Finding Time for Mindfulness**

Often teachers worry that they don't have enough time amidst their lessons to weave in a mindfulness practice in which the kids are just sitting there doing nothing. But once teachers carve out the space—maybe just a few minutes in the beginning of each class—they realize that they get much more done and the students can receive information much better. It's as if we said we didn't want to chew our food before we ate it because it took too much time. We may be able to get the food into our stomachs quicker, but it wouldn't be as healthy or enjoyable. When we take the time to be mindful, we live with greater ease of being, rather than stressfully jumping from one thing to the next.

When scientists scan the brains of people who have been practicing mindfulness intensively for many years, they see a profound integration of brain regions (Vestergaard-Poulsen et al., 2009). Now there is growing research showing that in only eight weeks, beginning mindfulness practitioners had positive transformations in the brain regions correlated with learning, emotion regulation, and self-awareness (Hölzel et al., 2011). Rather than sitting for hours we can begin by taking short pauses often. Mindfulness is not another excuse to beat ourselves up because we aren't exercising enough or eating right. This is not an internal prison sentence. Eventually we may build to mindfully sitting and breathing for 40 minutes, but at first we can start with digestible and enjoyable lengths of time. Mindfulness can be fun!

I try to find ways to make mindfulness into an engaging game in schools. In one class I came up with a new mindfulness “game” where we were seeing how many sounds we could hear. One third-grade student said abruptly, “That's not a game.” We don't want to just call some boring practice a game, we want the students to genuinely find it enthralling. We have to find the way to make mindfulness into a wondrous experience of learning.

Mindfulness needs to be fun and engaging, but we also do need some

determination to be able to develop mindful awareness. To cultivate attention and compassion in our fast-paced culture, we need to swim against the stream. There are a million digital distractions, and the news is full of tragedies. Without determined mindfulness practice, it's easy to close down our hearts and lose the rudder of our goals and vision.

We must find the balance in which our practice can be both enjoyable and simultaneously transformative. Maybe we begin by sitting silently every morning for five minutes, holding this as a special time, just for us. If we want we can lie down, sit in the morning sun, or find an ideal cushion to sit on. We make a commitment to ourselves to be still at this time, and slowly we can build moments of mindfulness throughout the day—a moment before lunch to rest and reflect, a moment in the car before we turn the engine on, a moment before we eat, a moment with a loved one. If we don't carve out these times and stick to them, then the old dictum of “nature abhors a vacuum” happens. Those special moments have a way of getting filled with responding to a few messages or rehashing a recent conversation with a colleague. We need to commit to giving ourselves the gift of presence, of spacious moments to return to our breath and our hearts.

We want to weave as many mindful reminders as we can into our days. This means that we regularly pause and recognize the weather patterns in our minds, hearts, and bodies. We can set up reminders, such as every time we get in the shower we remember to feel the water, every time we walk up the stairs of the school we feel the steps, or every time a student enters the room we make eye contact and see them clearly. We want to find mindfulness practices that work for us, ways that we can pause the spinning mind and land in the present moment. Maybe our mindfulness practice is walking by the lake, mindfully staring at lady bugs, or mindfully knitting. The first thing is to find a present-moment endeavor that we enjoy.

Once we find the merit of mindfulness practice in our own direct experience, we can start extending that practice. Throughout this book we explore many mindfulness practices pertaining to the body, mind, heart, relationships, and world. Once we have found a taste for these practices, we can dedicate ourselves to cultivating mindfulness, pushing our own edges to sit longer and look more deeply. In the Beginning with Ourselves section, we have the opportunity to commit to an ongoing mindfulness practice in an accessible and enjoyable way.

## Setting Intentions

Our intention is vitally important to set and hold steady when practicing



mindfulness and teaching our students. We choose a direction when we set sail and then we hold our compass steady. Even if we are blown off course, which happens regularly, we always remember our destination. Our intention with mindfulness is learning to be ever present and compassionate to what is true in ourselves and supporting our students to cultivate their own presence and compassion. We all want to be more relaxed, focused, and happy in our own lives. We also want our students to gain these indispensable life skills. We can extend our scope of care to hoping that teachers and students around the world can learn to be more mindful, envisioning what it would be like if the next generation of the whole world were raised more mindfully. So let's set our intention as we set sail.

First, how do we hope to be personally transformed by learning the art of mindfulness? Maybe we want to be less reactive, happier, or possibly just able to sleep better. We can write down how we hope that mindfulness will help us in our lives.

Second, what are our hopes and intentions in bringing mindfulness to our students? Maybe we want them to find inner calm, sustain attention, or develop kindness toward ourselves and others. We can write here what effects we hope to see from teaching mindfulness to our students.

Finally, we focus our intention on the larger world. With all the social, environmental, and political turmoil, how do we hope to help the planet by bringing mindfulness to our students? We could say we hope kids finding inner peace could inspire world peace. Let's write down how we hope reading this book and being part of this movement will affect the world.



# Beginning with Ourselves



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*“People who haven’t seen me in years say I exude calm.  
Go figure! Mindfulness practice has become routine, like flossing,  
but with much more visible benefits. I love the practices,  
I love the benefits in how it makes me feel.”*

—GREGORY DAVID, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER, NEW YORK  
CITY

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# WALKING THE MINDFUL TALK

After 15 years in the classroom, Teresa found herself dreading coming to school. She had never had a class with so many dysregulated, stressed-out students. At moments in the day, as she was pulled in every direction by the needs and demands of 25 second-graders, she could feel her heart racing, her emotions swirling, and her mind at the edge of panic. The mindfulness-based stress reduction class she attended taught her to slow down, get some space from her anxious thoughts, and befriend the agitated feelings that were arising in her body. She started feeling as if there was a dysregulated second-grader inside her own heart, and as the panic came, she learned to scoop up that scared inner kid and hold her close.

Amazingly, once she started this practice, not only did she feel a whole lot calmer and more peaceful, but her students seemed to relax with her. The same old chaos would be unraveling after the students returned from PE, and as the Teresa's anxiousness rose, she would stop, drop in, and roll with the feeling. Somehow the students responded by relaxing with her. It was like she had dropped an ice cube into a hot glass of water. Everything chilled out.

As Teresa kept practicing her own mindfulness, not only did it affect her students, the classrooms next door began to take notice. Her colleagues said things like, "Did you give them all happy drugs? Can you teach me how to do that with my kids?" The magic that Teresa learned was that when we take responsibility for our inner transformation, we can have a great effect on the world around us. When we become the peace we want to see in our classroom, the students feel peaceful when they are around us.

I hear Teresa's story over and over again from educators working on their own personal transformation and becoming beacons for others. I also hear another repeating statement from educators. They say, "I keep trying to get my students and colleagues to learn about mindfulness so they will be more calm and happy, but they won't listen." Sometimes it can be isolating for a teacher who has fallen in love with mindfulness and wants to spread the benefits to all the struggling students and staff. However, mindfulness cannot

be forced on anyone. Mindfulness is not the next cookie-cutter curriculum fad that we will be forcing on schools. This must be an organic process that begins with our personal development and spreads through genuine interest and openness.

The superintendent may walk into our room and be so blown away that she asks us to teach mindfulness to every educator in the district. Or we may spend our entire teaching career with one classroom that all the kids love coming to as a safe harbor of calm and creative learning although none of the other teachers or administrators take any notice. We can't force it. Taking responsibility for our own lives is incredibly empowering and transformative.

Later in this book we arrive at the curriculum section, in which we will learn the art of teaching mindfulness to youth. Here we begin with personal development before we get into professional development. We can start by realizing that everything we may want to attain with mindfulness is already here. No need to go anywhere or buy something—mindfulness is an inside job. Calmness, happiness, balance, and presence are states of being that we foster within ourselves by simply pausing and tending to our inner worlds. Even without any mindfulness training, we can start now by simply allowing our everyday thoughts, feelings, and sensations to float forward as we take a moment's pause to rest our awareness just enough to witness reality happening in front of us. For a few minutes we can take it all in, noticing the weather patterns of this particular moment. Try it for a few minutes.

In the following lessons we attune to the realms of body, mind, heart, society, and ecology. In any moment of pause and reflection, all five dimensions are happening and affecting us, but without cultivating mindful presence we often miss much of what is happening in our world. We break these five dimensions apart to focus on them separately, and the end goal is to bring them together into an integrated whole.



# THE MINDFULNESS LITERACIES

## Physical Literacy

Many of us have so many tasks and responsibilities that we rev our brain engines perpetually in fifth gear. When we come to one of those rare pauses in our lives, sitting at a red light or lying in the bath, we forget how to come back to neutral. We end up grinding the gears, our brains spinning even though we finally have found a space of peace to enjoy some precious moments.

By living in third, fourth, or fifth gear, we end up forgetting what neutral even feels like. When we lie down to sleep, our minds are still racing. To come back to neutral, we can begin by finding out what stress gears we are in. To do this, we explore the main stress zones in the body, such as the shoulders, jaws, stomach, and chest. We don't have to try and get rid of the feelings, we just notice how much tightness is there and then bring a sense of kindness and relaxation to them. *Trying* to relax doesn't help—relaxation happens when we stop trying.

### **PRACTICE: RELAXATION 101**

Lying down in a comfortable position, we take a moment to close our eyes and get a general sense of what is happening in our bodies, as if we're checking the inner weather patterns. Notice if there is agitation, calmness, happiness, sadness, pain; whatever is noticed, we can be aware of without needing to change anything.

Now we sweep our awareness through our bodies, noticing any tension on the in breath and relaxing on the out breath. Starting with our heads and our faces, we can notice if there is any tension in the muscles. If we notice tension, we can tighten the muscles a little more while breathing in and then letting go of the tension with a big sigh on the exhale.

Then we check our neck and shoulder muscles. See if there is any tension in this area on the in-breath, noticing tension, tightening a little more, and then releasing and melting the muscles into the ground on the out breath.

Try these same mindful inhales and relaxed exhales throughout the body, spending a minute or so in each zone. Move to the arms and hands, then the heart, belly, down through the back, hips, bottom, and all the way down the legs and feet. Moving through our bodies, we identify any tension and accentuate the tension on the inhales, relaxing and releasing with long exhales.

Once we have moved from our heads to our feet, we can continue for a few minutes, breathing into our whole bodies like big balloons, noticing any tension on the inhales and releasing any stress down into the ground on the exhales.

### **BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME**

When we are ready to get up, we can commit to staying aware of the tension and relaxation in our bodies. As we turn on our cell phones or hop in the car, we can see how our bodies respond. Do the shoulders and chest tighten up? We can remember that our breath is with us wherever we go and as we learn to track our stress levels we can regulate with our relaxing body breaths.

## **Mental Literacy**

While I was leading a mindfulness training for teachers on the Pacific cliffs of California, an elementary school principal asked me a prescient question. “Just feeling my breath is really boring, why shouldn’t I imagine myself down by the ocean watching the dolphins and whales splashing in the waves?” I also loved watching the whales and dolphins playing all week, so I appreciated the question. I replied, “It sounds like you are really loving being down by the ocean.” She looked at me like I had caught her with her hand in the cookie jar. “Actually it’s been really frustrating. Everybody is spotting the whales but I’m so caught up worrying about my family back home I keep missing them!”

When we are easily distracted, we have trouble staying present, even to the most precious things in our lives, such as our families, a beautiful sunset, or a delicious meal. Our capacity to focus is like a muscle we can exercise. A great place to exercise focus muscles is with our breath as a central hub, sitting quietly with as few external distractions as possible. As we build our focus, we learn to love the seemingly boring experience of breath coursing in and out of our bodies. As we build this capacity we become more present for the whales and dolphins splashing, for the smiles of our children, and for all the seemingly mundane mysteries of our lives. This principal wrote me after the training saying, “Once I learned how to appreciate the stillness of sitting





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