

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

HIGH SCHOOL COURSE DESCRIPTION

Course Title: Introduction to Mindfulness (UC/CSU pending)
Grade Level: 10-12
Credit: 10 credits (Year)
Prerequisite: None
Textbook: *Growing Up Mindful*, Christopher Willard, PsyD, Publisher: Sounds True 2016 (ISBN 978-1-62203-590-8)
Learning To Breathe, A Mindfulness Curriculum for Adolescents to Cultivate Emotion Regulation, Attention and Performance, Patricia C. Broderick, Ph.D., Publisher: New Harbinger Publications, Inc., 2013 (ISBN 978-1-60882-783-1) (Instructor's Resource)

Supplemental Materials:

Other materials conducive to a stress-free classroom environment

Course Description:

Introduction to Mindfulness is a year-long course; the first class in a two course sequence. This experiential, year-long elective introduces mindfulness, the science surrounding it, and careers associated with it. Students will develop a personal mindfulness practice for stress resilience and learn to improve self and social awareness, relationships, and decision making. They will engage in evidence-based practices that are selected to cultivate well-being. Through work-based learning experiences, students will explore careers that utilize mindfulness in healthcare and personal well-being industries. Well-being is a skill that can be learned. Mindfulness is deliberately paying attention to what is happening around you and within you - in your body, heart, and mind. It is awareness without criticism or judgment.

Course Objectives:

Student will be able to:

- Develop a personal mindfulness practice that is age appropriate and fosters mental and physical health and wellness.
- Practice a healthy lifestyle that includes enhanced capacity for emotion regulation.
- Utilize reflection as a technique to integrate mindfulness on a daily basis, and

- Apply work-based learning opportunities to make connections between course content and post-secondary options.

First Semester Units

1. Science of Mindfulness

In this unit, students will be introduced to the basic structure and function of the brain, including neuroplasticity, the ability of the brain to change and adapt. This will help students understand how their thoughts can impact emotions, feelings, and ultimately actions. Special attention will be paid to the function of the pre-frontal cortex, brain stem, amygdala, and hippocampus.

Students will:

- Explore the impacts of cortisol and adrenaline on brain functions as it relates to the “fight or flight” response.
- Explore the how the brain is linked to our experiences of stress.
- Analyze recent research about potential neuroplastic changes in the structure and function of brain regions involved in regulation of attention, emotion and self-awareness.

The goal is for students to have a basic sense of how their brains function and can malfunction, and see the intrinsic connection between mindfulness and their well-being. By understanding the process from a scientific perspective, they will develop the skill set to more objectively experience stress rather than be drawn into negative, habitual practices without noticing.

2. Mindfulness of Breath

Mindfulness has been defined in a variety of ways, but most consistently it is considered deliberately paying attention to what is happening. Students will begin learning different ways of increasing awareness of stimuli within their body and the external environment. One of the most fundamental skills associated with mindfulness is awareness of the breath. The breath is something that is always with you and is able to serve as an “anchor” while practicing mindfulness. There isn’t a “right” or “wrong” way to breathe, but it is essential to be aware of the breath. We will discuss what mindfulness looks like in real practice, and what it doesn’t look like. Mindfulness will be approached as a trained attention, similar to developing a muscle at the gym. Students will begin developing a regular mindfulness practice inside and outside of the classroom.

3. Mindfulness of Body

Students will learn how the body is able to be used as a barometer of how they are feeling. They will learn to make connections between body sensations and corresponding emotions. For example, when you feel nervous does your heart beat faster, or if you are angry maybe the muscles in your neck and shoulders tense up? Students will practice using these body cues as a signal to pause, make a conscious effort to be mindful and then

proceed with a response rather than a reaction.

4. Mindfulness of Emotions

In this unit, students will practice developing the skill of recognizing emotions and dealing with them by paying attention and watching them come and go. Students will gain a better understanding of the role that “feelings” play in our sense of wellness, inner strength and balance. We will discuss the work of Daniel Siegel, who coined the phrase “name it to tame it.” Students will discuss the importance of non-judgemental awareness of emotions being experienced. The goal of mindfulness is not to change or inhibit feelings, it is to approach them with curiosity and kindness. The ability to identify specific emotions in the moment they are being experienced is a skill that can be learned. It is also an important step toward objectively understanding and responding to emotions, which is essential to a mindfulness practice.

5. Gratitude, Empathy, Joy

Students will explore the nature of gratitude, empathy, and compassionate joy and discuss how we feel when we experience these emotions. We will also look at the presence and function of the neurons that wire us for empathy. We will talk about how and when we cultivate these emotions, there is the potential to feel less isolated, have lower blood pressure and increased immune function. Students will compare these positive outcomes with the psychology of greed, and the neural patterns associated with negativity. Students will set goals to reduce life stressors in a health-enhancing way.

6. Interpersonal Mindfulness

Students will develop skills to be more mindful or present with others. We will examine ways or patterns that might inhibit our being “fully present” with others. For example, are we planning what to say to someone rather than mindfully listening to what they are saying, or are we focusing on how our life connects to what is being said rather than mindfully listening? As this awareness skill develops so does the potential for increased mindfulness.

Second Semester Units

1. Careers Incorporating Mindfulness

Students will investigate a wide variety of career paths that incorporate mindfulness. Examples include many careers in the health care field such as: doctors, nurses, psychiatrists and psychologists. Many businesses offer mindfulness programs to their employees through their Human Resources Department. Mindfulness training is also beneficial for careers in education – either as a mode of self-care or as a skill to be taught to students. By examining a wide variety of applications, students may connect mindfulness to a career they were previously interested in or increase their understanding of a career they previously didn’t know very much about.

2. Teaching Mindfulness to Others

As a class, students will select an audience (peer, parent or younger individuals) and conduct an outreach project. While doing this, they will develop and practice skills such as identifying the audience and planning a developmentally-appropriate presentation. They will practice using business appropriate communication skills that includes language and attire. They will also plan and develop the “lesson” to be taught. Through this process the students will learn strategies to help maintain a positive and respectful environment when individuals are different and/or from diverse backgrounds.

3. Developing a Daily Practice

Maintaining a regular “formal” mindfulness practice is the most effective way to integrate these skills into everyday activities. Students will practice leading class mindfulness sessions. They will maintain practice logs and reflections. Discussions will be had about challenges that may arise while trying to maintain a daily practice and strategies to deal with them. Students will explore different mindfulness practices, such as:

- mindful listening,
- mindful breathing,
- mindful movement, and
- mindful eating, while determining what is most effective for them in what situation.

4. Leading a Healthy Lifestyle

Students will learn about the connection between physical and mental health, including, the role of diet, exercise, and sleep in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Students will learn about changes that take place in development relating to growth, development and sexual health, as well as the role of a positive mental state/mindfulness in navigating these changes in healthy ways. They will also identify stressors and constructive ways to navigate the stress in addition to mindfulness. They will learn about problems that may arise when individuals rely on unhealthy practices as a coping mechanism.

5. Resilience

Students will learn about the importance of maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships with their peers, family members and trusted adults. This network forms additional support for dealing with setbacks and building resilience. Students will learn techniques to increase self-confidence and set personal goals, both of which contribute to developing increased resilience.

6. Review of Mindfulness Tools

Students will explore and critically evaluate the ever expanding tools designed to teach and/or encourage mindfulness. This may include books, research papers, software apps, websites, etc. They will evaluate what has been found to be personally useful to them as well as broaden their understanding of resources that are available and potentially useful to others.

2013 Career Technical Education (CTE) Standards: Pathway CTE.HSMT.F Mental and Behavioral Health Pathway

- 1.0 Recognize and interpret principles of community engagement.
- 2.0 Demonstrate the ability to build relationships by communicating empathy.
- 3.0 Develop and employ collaboration skills that engage others and build trust.
- 5.0 Communicate and practice leadership and accountability behaviors.
- 6.0 Analyze and interpret elements of positive psychology (e.g., hope, resilience, strengths, creativity, community building, and supportive spirituality).
- 9.0 Design a practice model of a personal support network by utilizing prior knowledge of recovery concepts and using natural supports within communities.
- 11.0 Recognize and respect the various cultures of a community and other factors that indicate its diversity in all aspects of communicating, designing, and implementing patient care.
- 13.0 Identify and apply leadership styles in personal growth and development.

CA Health Education Content Standards **Nutrition and Physical Activity**

- 1.1.N Distinguish between facts and myths regarding nutrition practices, products, and physical performance.
- 1.2.N Research and discuss the practical use of current research-based guidelines for a nutritionally balanced diet.
- 1.3.N Explain the importance of variety and moderation in food selection and consumption.
- 1.4.N Describe dietary guidelines, food groups, nutrients, and serving sizes for healthy eating habits.
- 1.5.N Describe the relationship between poor eating habits and chronic diseases such as heart disease, obesity, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and osteoporosis.
- 1.8.N Describe the prevalence, causes, and long-term consequences of unhealthy eating.
- 1.9.N Analyze the relationship between physical activity and overall health.
- 2.1.N Evaluate internal and external influences that affect food choices.
- 2.2.N Assess personal barriers to healthy eating and physical activity.
- 4.1.N Analyze positive strategies to communicate healthy eating and physical activity needs at home, at school, and in the community.
- 5.1.N Demonstrate how nutritional needs are affected by age, gender, activity level, pregnancy, and health status.
- 6.2.N Develop practical solutions for removing barriers to healthy eating and physical activity.
- 7.4.N Describe how to take more personal responsibility for eating healthy foods.

- 7.5.N Participate in school and community activities that promote fitness and health.

Growth, Development and Sexual Health

- 2.1.G Determine personal, family, school, and community factors that can help reduce the risk of engaging in sexual activity.
- 2.5.G Evaluate how culture, media, and other people influence perceptions about body image, gender roles, sexuality, attractiveness, relationships, and sexual orientation.
- 4.1.G Analyze how interpersonal communication affects relationships.
- 4.2.G Use effective verbal and nonverbal communication skills to prevent sexual involvement, HIV, other STDs, and pregnancy.
- 4.3.G Demonstrate effective communication skills within healthy dating relationships.
- 5.3.G Use a decision-making process to analyze when it is necessary to seek help with or leave an unhealthy situation.
- 5.5.G Use a decision-making process to analyze the benefits of respecting individual differences in growth and development, physical appearance, gender roles, and sexual orientation.
- 8.1.G Encourage and support safe, respectful, and responsible relationships.

Injury Prevention and Safety

- 1.2.S Recognize potentially harmful or abusive relationships, including dangerous dating situations.
- 2.1.S Analyze internal and external influences on personal, family, and community safety.
- 2.2.S Analyze the influence of alcohol and other drug use on personal, family, and community safety.
- 5.1.S Apply a decision-making process to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

Mental, Emotional and Social Health

- 1.1.M Describe the benefits of having positive relationships with trusted adults.
- 1.2.M Analyze the qualities of healthy peer and family relationships.
- 1.3.M Describe healthy ways to express caring, friendship, affection, and love.
- 1.4.M Describe qualities that contribute to a positive self-image.
- 2.1.M Analyze the internal and external issues related to seeking mental health assistance.
- 3.1.M Access school and community resources to help with mental, emotional, and social health concerns.
- 3.2.M Evaluate the benefits of professional services for people with mental, emotional, or social health conditions.
- 5.1.M Monitor personal stressors and assess techniques for managing them.
- 5.2.M Compare various coping mechanisms for managing stress.
- 5.3.M Analyze situations when it is important to seek help with stress, loss, an unrealistic body image, and depression.

- 6.1.M Evaluate how preventing and managing stress and getting help for mental and social problems can help a person achieve short- and long-term goals.
- 6.2.M Set a goal to reduce life stressors in a health-enhancing way.
- 7.1.M Assess personal patterns of response to stress and use of resources.
- 7.2.M Practice effective coping mechanisms and strategies for managing stress.
- 7.4.M Practice respect for individual differences and diverse backgrounds.
- 7.5.M Participate in clubs, organizations, and activities in the school and in the community that offer opportunities for student and family involvement.
- 8.1.M Support the needs and rights of others regarding mental and social health.
- 8.2.M Promote a positive and respectful environment at school and in the community.
- 8.3.M Object appropriately to teasing of peers and community members that is based on perceived personal characteristics and sexual orientation.

Personal and Community Health

- 1.1.P Discuss the value of actively managing personal health behaviors (e.g., getting adequate sleep, practicing ergonomics, and performing self-examinations).
- 2.7.P Evaluate the need for rest, sleep, and exercise.
- 8.1.P Support personal or consumer health issues that promote community wellness.
- 8.2.P Encourage societal and environmental conditions that benefit health.

Student Activities

- Journaling
- Goal setting
- Experiential interviews
- Setting a daily intention
- Participate and role play activities
- Listen to guest speakers
- Group discussion
- Community outreach
- Projects and presentations

Student Assessment:

- Personal journaling and reflection
- Participation in group discussion
- Classroom observation and feedback
- End of semester reflection
- Career research report
- Community outreach event planning
- Work-based learning reflection