

**BRAIN HEALTH BOOST**



**Classroom Mindfulness Provides Better Atmosphere for Learning**

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond.* ***Today, we explore mindfulness in the classroom and what it can do to help teachers foster a calm, enriching, and educational environment.***

We hope our schools’ valued educators are enjoying a restful summer, shaking off the stress of the school year and getting reinvigorated for the year ahead. There were likely hectic moments during the past school year during which they wished for a moment of meditation to reset their mindset.

The related practice of mindfulness – using breathing exercises, guided imagery, movement and sensory experience to calm the mind and body – is becoming a popular tool in the classroom to keep students and their teachers in a more relaxed, ready-to-learn state. Research has shown students who practice mindfulness improve their attention span, empathy, emotional regulation, and cognitive control.

There is brain science behind the concept. The amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex areas of the brain communicate with each other to respond to external events. A student’s emotions, for instance fear or anger, stimulates the amygdala. The amygdala can mistake stress for danger and call for a fight, freeze or flight reaction. When that happens, the hippocampus shuts off access to learning and memories. The prefrontal cortex can delay the amygdala’s response, permitting rational thought and behavior control, but only when it receives the input it needs.

The calm that comes from mindfulness exercises offers the prefrontal cortex a chance to assess the situation before triggering an action. Typical mindfulness exercises include having students breathe deeply enough to inflate their bellies, playing soothing music or sounds, having students close their eyes and leading them on a pretend journey, and moving through yoga or simple dance.

It has been proven that children who are comfortable, safe, and relaxed learn best. Advocates of mindfulness in the classroom say the practice offers students a lifelong lesson about how they can use their breath and brain to lead a healthy, happy life. Educators, too, will experience the benefits of a more advantageous learning atmosphere.

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|  **WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH***The Brain Health Initiative offers these tips for bringing mindfulness into the classroom:** **BE A BRAIN HEALTHY EXAMPLE.** Make mindfulness a regular part of your life. Take a few moments daily to sit quietly and focus on your breathing. Try some of these [guided meditations](http://billpmeyer.com/guided-meditations-1).
* **DECLARE YOUR INTENTIONS.** Widen the focus from curriculum and lesson plans to how you want to teach. Consider goals for the experience and how to best help students master the necessary skills.
* **SURVEY THE ENVIRONMENT.** Begin each session with a brief quiet time, then offer students a chance to share how they’re feeling. You may choose the next activity based on the overall mood of the room.
* **SET UP A MINDFULNESS OBJECT.** Use a signal to bring everyone together. A bell works well, or you can create a brain health jar, which is a mason jar filled with water or dish soap and glitter or glitter glue.
* **SOUND THEN SILENCE.**To bring the brain and body into harmony, use a reverberating sound, like a bell or rainstick. Ask students to sit quietly and raise a hand when they can no longer hear the sound. Then find out how they are feeling.
* **PRACTICE GRATITUDE.**We tend to remember the bad stuff and forget all of the things for which we should be thankful. End the day by asking students to express gratitude.

***BE BRAIN HEALTHY* and adopt a lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:* Stress resilience
* Nutrition
* Physical activity
* Sleep
* Social connection
* Emotional well-being
* Meaning and Purpose
* Cognitive stimulation and creativity
* Engaging with nature
* General health
* Positive impacts
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**Brain Health Initiative (**[**www.brainhealthinitiative.org**](http://www.brainhealthinitiative.org)**)**

The Brain Health Initiative, Inc. (BHI), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that promote brain healthy lifestyles, foster protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes at the individual and community level for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. ***Brain Health Matters and Lifestyle Makes a Difference.***