



Module 5: Mindfulness

Goal

Students and service providers alike will benefit from an understanding of the practice of mindfulness. No matter the state of an individual's mental health and wellness, mindfulness offers a specific way to calm and focus one's mind in the moment. This is immediately helpful whether dealing with an intense traumatic experience or simply small daily stresses. The ability to teach students quick and relatively easy ways to counteract anxiety is a very important tool for each service provider.

This module focuses on mindfulness—the ability to intentionally focus on the present moment without judgment. The concept of mindfulness is about acting purposefully, rather than acting on auto-pilot. It may mean something as simple as taking joy in little things like a loved one's smile or the scent of a flower. It includes the practice of slowing one's breathing and becoming conscious of what is happening in the immediate surroundings.

Experts define mindfulness as the practice of self-regulating one's attention “with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance,” to calm and soothe by shifting focus away from the effects of a stressor to the present moment. Trauma can be present in anyone's life, but for most migratory students and indirectly, their service providers, that stress can be multiplied in a number of areas ranging from immigration issues, cultural or language barriers, poverty, and poor physical or mental health. Like any skill, mindfulness takes practice. It is important to encourage students with the reminder that often the only thing standing between us and our goals is a little bit of practice. Mindfulness also includes the effort of not taking things for granted and returning one's focus to the present moment again and again.

With a focus on mental health and wellness, service providers must realize they will not have the ability to “fix” every trauma and stress in the lives of students. But they can have simple tools available to encourage students to help themselves recognize and address the feelings of stress and anxiety. Mindfulness is a key step in this process.

Objectives

- Demonstrate an ability to practice mindfulness in your own life to develop the skills to communicate it to others.
- Increase your ability to regulate emotions, decrease stress, and anxiety.
- Teach a variety of strategies to achieve personal well-being.



What to Know Before Presenting the Mindfulness PowerPoint

1. Introduce the concept of mindfulness.

The brain networks that underlie habits reduce the millions of sensory inputs received by our brains each second into manageable shortcuts to enable functioning in an unpredictable world. These “fast brain” signals are so efficient that they often cause relapse into old behaviors before one remembers what one meant to do. Mindfulness, or “slow brain”, is the exact opposite of this process, triggering intentional actions, willpower, and good, deliberate decisions. The benefits of “slow brain” get stronger with practice.

2. Identify the benefits of mindfulness.

A few daily mindfulness exercises can cut the production of the stress hormone cortisol and reduce feelings of anxiety and fatigue. Clinical evidence supports the effectiveness of meditation and other practices in relieving stress, improving anxiety and depression, helping with weight loss, reducing pain, and lessening the risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and possibly even asthma and fibromyalgia. Meditation boosts brain power, relieves insomnia, and elevates our moods.

3. Discuss ways that everyone can incorporate mindfulness into their everyday schedules.

Mindfulness is more than meditation. Remind participants to breathe, pay attention, be mindful using all their senses, practice mindful walking, eating, and finding joy in simple pleasures. It is very important to treat oneself the way one would treat a good friend.

4. Stress that everyone can benefit from mindfulness and incorporate the power of appreciation.

Science recognizes that grateful people are more resilient in the face of stress and serious trauma. Gratitude allows one to celebrate the present, focus on positive emotions, feel more alert, and be aware of joy and pleasure. It boosts moods, improves sleep, and actually helps make new friends and create more personal relationships, all of which work to relieve stress.



The messages in the Mindfulness PowerPoint emphasize an individual's ability to:

- **Acknowledge the present.**
 - Focusing on what is happening in the present moment can help one deal with what has happened in the past.
- **Learn self-regulation.**
 - Learn new skills, gain new understandings, and apply them during times of stress.
- **Take charge of one's own personal wellness.**
 - Understand that there are skills and tools that will, with practice, positively impact mental health and personal wellness.
- **Cultivate the ability to meditate through specific practices and habits.**
 - People who meditate are happier, healthier, and more successful than those who do not. The benefits of practicing meditation and mindfulness are available to everyone who takes time to practice these skills.
- **Reframe the concept of stressful moments.**
 - Accept that daily stress, as well as long-term stress in reaction to past trauma, is not atypical, but can be managed successfully by using the practices of mindfulness.