



The *Mindfulness* Toolkit

for Counselors, Teachers, Coaches
and Clinicians of Youth

by Jack Apsche and Jerry L. Jennings

Chapter 1

Welcome to *Mindfulness*

1-1. How *The Mindfulness Toolkit* is Organized

Chapters:	Content
1. Welcome to Mindfulness:	The opening chapter explains the purpose of the book, the benefits of mindfulness, and the range of facilitators who can use the book for teens dealing with a variety of different issues.
2. Getting Started with Mindfulness:	This chapter defines mindfulness and its key concepts and provides the framework and guidelines for using <i>The Mindfulness Toolkit</i> with groups or individuals. It answers common questions for facilitators and gives tips for making the most from the book.
3. Awareness is Natural – Anyone Can Do It:	This chapter introduces mindfulness through simple everyday acts like eating and walking, allowing youth to see that they already have the capacity to gain mindfulness skills.
4. Discovery:	This chapter starts training in basic mindfulness skills. It explains different mental and physical ways for youth to experience mindfulness, such as counting breaths (physical focus without exertion), visual concentration (mental), and deep muscle relaxation (physical focus with exertion).
5. Exploration:	This chapter strengthens skills through more advanced practice in mindfulness techniques.
6. Safe Places:	This chapter presents some examples of “safe places,” such as the beach and the forest, and helps each individual youth to find or create a personal safe place for self-soothing, relaxation, and comfort.
7. Adventure:	This chapter provides more complex mindfulness exercises that teach balance and flexibility. Each exercise begins with a pleasant experience of adventure, but then gradually increases in its level of tension and/or danger, thus enabling the youth to maintain a state of relaxed control, despite disruptions to that peaceful state.
8. Fun and Sports:	This last chapter offers guided imagery exercises that are designed to be fun. They may be especially helpful with oppositional or reticent youth who are unwilling to participate in the more introductory and structured mindfulness training exercises. This approach is more fun and provides a non-threatening way for young people to experience the positive feelings of mindfulness. Also, these guided imagery exercises can offer some variety, or advanced practice in mindfulness meditation.



1-2. About This Book

Lots of people are talking about mindfulness these days. It's no surprise that in this stressful, modern world, more and more people are finding that mindfulness is a straightforward, natural way to gain a more confident sense of calm and control. Through our work with troubled youth for over 35 years, the authors have learned that mindfulness can also help children, teens, and young adults develop the capacity to self-soothe and to control stress and volatile emotions.

Rooted in the wisdom of thousands of years of Buddhist spiritual practices, the techniques and philosophy of mindfulness were first introduced to the field of mental health in 1979. Given the appeal of its easy and natural expression in daily life, mindfulness has grown steadily in popularity and has become a widely accepted approach in the fields of psychotherapy and wellness. It is useful for the treatment of all sorts of mental disorders as well as for relief from normal life stressors. Yet, in spite of all its success, the application of mindfulness to youth is a relatively new development. Regardless, it has shown itself to have tremendous potential with that audience.

Youth, like adults, are susceptible to stresses in everyday life, yet they too, desire consistent good feelings and serenity. Young people's stress is often caused by such things as school grades, peer pressure, friendships, dating, self-esteem, family conflicts, drugs, alcohol, or a variety of other things. Using mindfulness with youth, however, requires some modifications to accommodate their differing developmental needs and interests.

The Mindfulness Toolkit for Counselors, Teachers, Coaches and Clinicians of Youth is designed specifically for use by, and with, older children, teens, and young adults. It is written for adults who work with youth in any setting who can benefit from mindfulness skills. It is not just for therapists working with kids with serious mental disorders or antisocial behavior, but for less troubled youth as well. We will use the term "facilitators" to cover the wide range of people that can use *The Mindfulness Toolkit*. It is designed to make mindfulness more fun and engaging by offering a variety of mindfulness exercises and activities that have an innate appeal to youth such as sports, nature, adventure, and discovery. At the same time, *The Mindfulness Toolkit* is designed to facilitate autonomy, a crucial developmental goal for all adolescents, by emphasizing each individual's preferences, choices, and learning pace when selecting and mastering mindfulness techniques that work best for each youth.

All kinds of facilitators can use the book. *The Mindfulness Toolkit for Counselors, Teachers, Coaches and Clinicians of Youth* can be used with any teenager, not just ones with "serious" problems, and can be used by professionals and laypersons alike.

Therapists and counselors can use the book to teach the skills of enhanced self-control and self-soothing to troubled youth with behavior problems and emotional dysregulation. *The Mindfulness Toolkit for Counselors, Teachers, Coaches and Clinicians of Youth* can be used with even the most oppositional and delinquent youth, and with equal utility in outpatient or residential mental health, addiction centers, or juvenile detention settings.

Teachers and school counselors can use the toolkit to show students ways to relax from the daily stresses of school, peer pressure, and other tensions through enhancing their mental concentration and attention and raising their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Coaches and youth group leaders can find fun and healthy group activities that promote fellowship, confidence, social ease, and self-efficacy. Leaders using these skills can represent such established groups as sports teams, Scouts, clubs, or church or synagogue youth groups.

1-3. The Benefits of Mindfulness

Extensive research and clinical experience have proven that mindfulness and meditative skills have two broad areas of benefit:

Stress reduction: Mindfulness practices can reduce stress, which is a normal part of daily life that causes emotional and physiological changes in one's body and mind. But, too much stress can cause more serious health problems. Depending on the person, stress can take the form of mental complaints like anxiety, worrying, irritability, moodiness, anger, and distractibility, as well as physical complaints like an upset stomach, headaches, insomnia, and eating problems.

Strengthening positive emotions: Mindfulness practice can enhance one's feelings of well-being and life satisfaction through increases in sensory awareness, self-control, and noncritical self-acceptance. Mindfulness is a way to gain and maintain a more full and lasting feeling of "happiness."

The Mindfulness Toolkit for Counselors, Teachers, Coaches and Clinicians of Youth is designed specifically for use with teens. The book features mindfulness exercises that we have used ourselves over many years of practice and that we have seen work well with troubled and distressed youth. Some of these techniques were first published over a dozen years ago (Apsche & Hasnas, 2000), but we have greatly expanded the array of mindfulness tools based on our on-going clinical work with children and teens. We have tried to keep the book as user-friendly as possible without sacrificing the integrity and depth of meaning inherent in contemplative practices.



Modifications to Make Mindfulness Easier for Youth

Use of guided imagery and protocols: Based on our experience, teaching mindfulness to youth requires more structure and prompting than traditional adult practice in order to accommodate teens' differing developmental needs and interests. In particular, when working with youth, we often use guided imagery techniques. This directive approach may surprise many readers whose experience with learning mindfulness has been explicitly non-directive. For example, traditional training might instruct a group to go for a walk in total silence and then discuss the individual members' experiences and perceptions in the classroom afterwards. In our approach with youth, the facilitator talks during the walk, suggesting that the teen direct attention toward what he or she may be hearing, seeing, and feeling in the moment. The important distinction is that we do not suggest what the teens should listen to, look at, or touch. We merely prompt the teen to attend to whatever he or she chooses.

Keep it simple: The optimal way to teach mindfulness to teens is by doing it with them. The tools and techniques should be easy for them to comprehend and practice. We have intentionally avoided any philosophical, spiritual, or even technical discussion of mindfulness and meditation in the information we present. Rather, we emphasize that mindfulness is quite ordinary and natural and that it is something people can do every day.

Keep it light and collaborative: Youth can be engaged in learning mindfulness when the training is presented in a light, non-threatening way and when the related activities excite their curiosity through the exploration of new sights and sensations. Keep it light. There is no "failing" at mindfulness; there is merely discovery. As you guide the process, show an attitude of collaboration by engaging in the activity along with the youth. Feel free to stumble or fumble or laugh at yourself. The teen will appreciate that you are learning, too.

Facilitate autonomy: Present the mindfulness activities like a buffet from which youth can choose those tools that are personally most appealing. Encourage teens to "taste" every dish on the buffet, but respect their own capacity to choose and to know which tools are best for themselves. Mindfulness serves the larger developmental goal of strengthening adolescents' sense of autonomy. A teenager will be more engaged and cooperative in mindfulness activities when he or she can say, "I picked the tool that works best for me. I used my own imagination and creativity to shape the tool. I am in control of my own being." This process can build competence and self-efficacy in combination with personal responsibility and independence. Be attuned to praising efforts and successes as they occur so that each teen consistently gets the message that he or she is gaining and learning self-mastery.

The *Mindfulness* Toolkit

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and Clinicians of Youth**

The Mindfulness Toolkit is filled with a rich variety of thirty exercises and activities that are designed to appeal to youth, such as sports, nature, adventure, and discovery. The workbook emphasizes individual autonomy and competency. The Toolkit offers multiple pathways for learning mindfulness, which can accommodate the differing learning styles of individual teens and, in particular, can be applied strategically to oppositional and treatment resistant youth. The core concept is to expose youth to a variety of mindfulness skills so that individuals can choose the coping “tools” that they find most practical and effective for their own personal “mindfulness toolkit.”



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