

## **The Dorset Mindfulness schools project**

### **What is mindfulness?**

Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment.

Mindfulness also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there’s a “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a given moment. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we’re sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.

### **Why study mindfulness?**

Studies have shown that practicing mindfulness, even for just a few weeks, can bring a variety of physical, psychological, and social benefits. Here are some of these benefits, which extend across many different settings.

- Mindfulness is good for our minds: Several studies have found that mindfulness increases positive emotions while reducing negative emotions, anxiety and stress. Indeed, at least one study suggests it may be as good as antidepressants in fighting depression and preventing relapse.
- Mindfulness changes our brains: Research has found that it increases density of grey matter in brain regions linked to learning, memory, emotion regulation, and empathy.
- Mindfulness helps us focus: Studies suggest that mindfulness helps us tune out distractions and improves our memory and attention skills.
- Mindfulness is good for us socially as it increases patience, empathy and compassion. Thereby improving our sense of wellbeing and connectedness to others.
- Mindfulness has even been shown to fight obesity: Practicing “mindful eating” encourages healthier eating habits, helps people lose weight, and helps them savour the food they do eat.

### **The Dorset Mindful Schools project:**

Last year Stoborough Primary School was successful in gaining lottery funding for a project that aimed to offer access to mindfulness learning opportunities to students, teachers and parents from the school as well as The Purbeck School. This project has run from January – December 2015 and by its conclusion will have:

- Supported the teachers from both schools to gain benefits from learning mindfulness.
- Supported one teacher from each school to become a mindful champion and to train with ‘The Mindfulness in Schools Project’ in order to deliver mindfulness lessons within the curriculum.

- To teach mindfulness to the students and work with them to create a peer to peer learning resource.
- To open up the opportunity to learn mindfulness to all parents for their own wellbeing and to support their children.
- Attract and develop a network of Dorset mindful schools

### **Mindfulness lessons for each Stoborough year group**

Every year group has had a short mindfulness lesson on Monday mornings for the since April 2015

Sessions aim to help the children learn how to focus their attention into the present and concentrate on using their senses to do so. Each time we discuss how tricky it can be to focus when our mind behaves like a curious puppy – always wandering off to something more interesting! We discuss how in mindfulness our aim is to notice where it has wandered off to so that we might choose to bring it back to the present.

The following are some of the activities we have done together:

Reading of the book 'The mindful monkey, happy panda' discussing the difference between monkeys busy jumpy mind and pandas mind who is able to fully focus on each task he is doing.

Feeling our breath in our body – putting our hand on our tummy to feel it rise and fall with each in and out breath.

Listening exercise – Putting all our attention into listening, what can we hear?

Eating exercise – Eating a raisin or similar, really slowly and careful – what can we taste/what sensations do we feel.

We also talked a lot about choice – how we have a choice as to what we think and we played a number of focus and concentration games to help us to focus.

### **Mindfulness sessions for teachers**

Teachers from Stoborough School have been invited to attend regular mindfulness session on a Tuesday morning before school since April 2015.

Mindfulness sessions have been delivered in order to help the teachers develop a solid practise in mindfulness themselves in order to help them manage a busy and demanding job. Also in addition the sessions have allowed the teachers to understand the practises that have been taught to the children each week.

## **8 week parent mindfulness course.**

Over an 8 week period parents have been invited to join a traditional 8 week mindfulness course where all of the theory of how and why mindfulness helps us is learnt. Parents practise learning mindfulness through a number of led meditation sessions in order to support them to build confidence with the practise and fully experience mindfulness so that it becomes a useful skill at our disposal throughout our busy day to day life. This course has an additional focus on mindful parenting and talks about how we can learn to skilfully respond rather than react to our children, through:

- Aiming to focus our attention in the present
- Developing compassion and empathy
- Developing acceptance
- Challenging our ideals/expectations as we notice them
- Letting our children make their own choices and be themselves, where appropriate