

Mindfulness

-WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?-

Mindfulness can help to switch off our body's stress reaction and activate the calming response. People who practice mindfulness still experience stress, and may actually feel emotions more strongly, but they are less likely to be overcome by it.



-ORIGINS-

- Mindfulness meditation has its origins in Buddhist practices that are over 2,500 years old, however it is only in the last 30 years or so that it has been used therapeutically and become more mainstream.
- Prince Siddhartha, who became the Buddha, dedicated his life to finding the cause of suffering and he recommended mindfulness as a way of overcoming grief, sorrow, pain and anxiety and of realizing happiness.
- In 1979 mindfulness began to be used therapeutically to reduce stress and help people learning to live with chronic medical conditions, as many were suffering from depression and anxiety as a result of their condition. The aim was to bring these techniques of meditation into their everyday lives. Evidence showed that often health improved slightly in those following the program, and allowed them to deal with their suffering in a different way. This technique has now been adapted to help people to cope with anxiety, depression, eating disorders and addictions.
- At the core of these techniques is an emphasis on the deliberate and non-judgemental present-moment awareness of one's own experience.

REMEMBER!

Mindfulness is about deliberately paying attention to your experiences, without judgement, as it unfolds – noticing what is happening physically in the body and where. It also involves being aware of what emotions are arising and the tone of these feelings, as well as noticing the stories we tell ourselves.

The emphasis is always on *what* is happening, not *why* it is happening.

We use our senses – sight, sound, taste, touch and smell – to explore our experience.

If at any time you get lost in a practice, just bring your attention back to the physical sensations of breathing.

Over the next few months we will share with you a few informal meditations for you to start practicing mindfulness if you wish. Please note, they are not a substitute for therapeutic care. A key component of mindfulness is the willingness to turn toward the difficult – uncomfortable sensations in the body, painful emotions, or unwanted thoughts. As our awareness increases we notice much that previously we have tuned out from because it was unpleasant or painful, either physically or psychologically. Paying attention to the body can also bring old emotions to the surface.

If at any time you feel overwhelmed, it is important that you stop immediately and speak to someone. You can speak to the Pastoral Team in person or email wellbeing@stmichaels.bucks.sch.uk if you wish.

There is never just one way to do something and the instructions are for guidance only. The more you do the practices the more you will make them your own, to give you the best outcome.

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK YOURSELF WHILE PRACTICING:

What am I feeling physically in my body? Notice what the sensation is, where is it and what it's like – is it constant or changing?

What am I feeling emotionally? How do I know? Where am I experiencing this emotion in my body? How would I describe how this emotion physically feels?

What thoughts are arising? What stories am I telling myself about my experience?

-TOP TIPS BEFORE YOU START-

You can do many of these practices while out and about in your daily life, but others require finding a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. Wherever you are, turn off your phone to allow yourself to enter fully into the practice. If you are on a time frame, set an alarm on your phone but then put it on airplane mode or out of reach so you won't be easily distracted.

Some people find keeping a meditation journal helpful so they can record their experiences, and there are apps that you can download to help you do this.

Keep it simple and perhaps focus on just one practice to start with. Don't take on too much and then get frustrated that you haven't kept it up. Try one style a couple of times a week, before experimenting with something new. Congratulate yourself on what you do manage, rather than berate yourself for what you don't accomplish.

-MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING-

Focusing on the breath is a great place to start if you are new to meditation. Pay attention to your breathing. Experiment with tuning in to the breath at odd times during the day when you remember. If you would like to start practicing more formally, set aside five minutes to sit quietly somewhere and pay attention to the breath. Gradually extend the length of time, but remember the quality of attention is more important than the length of time you sit.

TRY THIS:

It can be helpful to choose an area of the body in which you feel the breath most strongly, such as your belly, chest, nostrils or lips – and always take your attention to this place when doing a breathing practice. If you find it difficult to locate a place, perhaps place your hand on your belly or chest so that you can feel the act of breathing.

Then, just notice the sensations – this is different to thinking about the breath. Feel the movements of your body on the in-breath and the out-breath.

REMEMBER!

We are staying with the length of each in-breath, then the length of each out-breath. Whenever our mind wanders (which it will), gently escort it back to the breath and continue.

