

**How Life Coach Training Transforms My Practice:
Weaving Mindfulness, Body Awareness, and Neuroscience into Educational Therapy**

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Introducing Mindfulness to Children – Seven Components

1. Neuroscience lesson – Fight or Flight/Body Awareness

- Make a list: What are the things that happen to us in fight or flight? (rapid breathing, eyes dilate, muscles tense, all resources go to extremities – muscles, stress hormones activate, survival instinct activates, entire body goes to alert mode, not a time for logical step-by-step methodical thinking, butterflies in the tummy, dry mouth, sweaty hands/body.)
- Then ask: When your body is busy doing all this, are you thinking clearly? Can you learn something new in this state?
- What do you think your body and brain need to be doing when you learn something new or have to remember things? (Relaxed, open, able to think clearly, make connections, etc.)

2. Introduce concept of optimal learning based on arousal level: High, medium, low levels of arousal (high: fight or flight, or flooding. Medium: optimal. Low: sleepy, low energy, tired, bored. Not enough energy to learn) Have kids tell you if they are High, Medium, or Low. Then make decisions about this. Big Idea: How do I make sure I get to this state of optimal learning?

3. Breathing—double the out breath. In breath: 1-2-3 Out breath: 1-2-3-4-5-6. Parasympathetic Nervous System will signal to the body that “all is well” with a longer out breath (the brain gives the body the “stand down” order, no need to be on “high alert”).

4. Grounding activities – Focal Point (Learn to Return – Martha Beck) Teach kids how to ground, calm, soothe themselves. Remember that mindfulness means that we notice our present state without judgment. Find tasks with focus – repeating tasks (stones), slow movement with breath, tracing (Celtic Art plates), drawing, coloring mandalas....be creative. Engage the right brain.

5. Notice without Judgment: Accepting coach vs. Critical Coach – which one serves us better?

6. Clarity -- Glitter ball! When students begin noticing their body’s reactions without judgment, they begin to develop clarity. I explain clarity with the glitter ball. They notice when they are not clear (shake up the glitter ball), when they let themselves drop into stillness, the mind has a chance to clear (have them watch what happens to the glitter ball when it is still).

Big Idea: Learn to sit with feelings. Learn to be in the moment with whatever is in that moment. Most feelings work their way through us, even intense feelings, in about 90 seconds.

7. Make choices based on awareness -- Once a student is aware and in the present, choices can be made to address what comes up. If the student is in auto-pilot mode (not noticing at all, over stimulated, lost in worrying, anxiety, planning, or overwhelmed) then there is no chance to make a choice. If a student becomes more aware of the moment (I feel sad. I feel frustrated. I don't like math.) then it can be addressed and choices can be made. A language can be developed with the student to describe current brain states, feelings, and thoughts.

Next step: Dealing with thoughts that don't serve students....coaching through "thought work".