

Trauma-Skilled
SCHOOLS™

Mindfulness

Supplemental Lesson
and Materials



NATIONAL
DROPOUT
PREVENTION
CENTER

How do students say they feel at school?

- Marc Brackett, PhD, Director of Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, surveyed 22,000 students.
- Their responses won't surprise anyone who works with students.

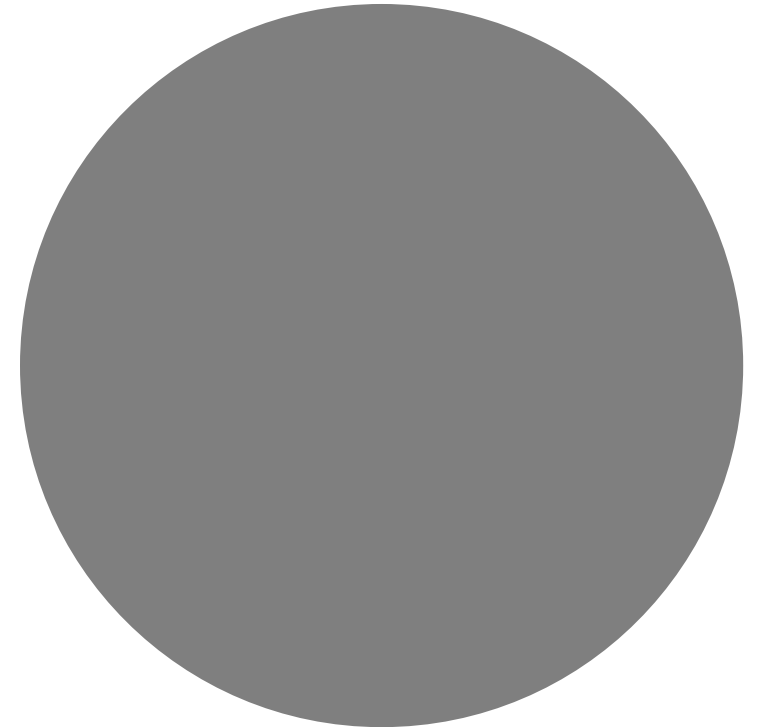


Why does this Yale study matter?

If emotions affect everything from

- attention,
- memory,
- learning,
- behavior,
- decision making,
- relationship quality
- physical and mental health, and
- everyday effectiveness,

Then it stands to reason that **self-regulating activities** can play an important part in a student's academic success and behaviors.



So, exactly how *did* those 22,000 students say they felt?

HOW DO STUDENTS FEEL AT SCHOOL?



Among the top 10 emotions named, **8** were negative and **2** were positive.

STUDENTS FEEL...



TIRED



BORED

70% of the time



STRESSED

80% of the time

How many students are *actually* stressed?

A recent [NYU study](#) reports

- nearly half (49%) of all students reported feeling a great deal of stress on a daily basis, and
- 31% reported feeling somewhat stressed.

That's a total of 80% of students who feel stressed!

Females reported significantly higher levels of stress than males (60% vs. 41%).

A substantial minority, 26 percent of participants, reported symptoms of depression at a clinically significant level.

When students are overwhelmed, they are more likely to act out and have difficulty adjusting at school.

The background features several concentric, curved lines in shades of gray, some solid and some dashed, creating a sense of motion and depth. A blue speech bubble is positioned on the left side of the slide.

What can we do?

Chronic stress and trauma can affect students' cognitive functioning (learning) and negatively impact their behavior in school.

Let's take a closer look at strategies for helping all students acquire the skills needed for success in school and in life.

How do chronic stress and trauma affect learning?

Stress and trauma cause the learning and memory centers of the brain to become less able to learn. When the primary function of a child's brain is to protect itself and process fear or deal with stressful situations, [normal brain development is affected](#).

Students may become

- forgetful,
- disengaged, or
- unable to concentrate.

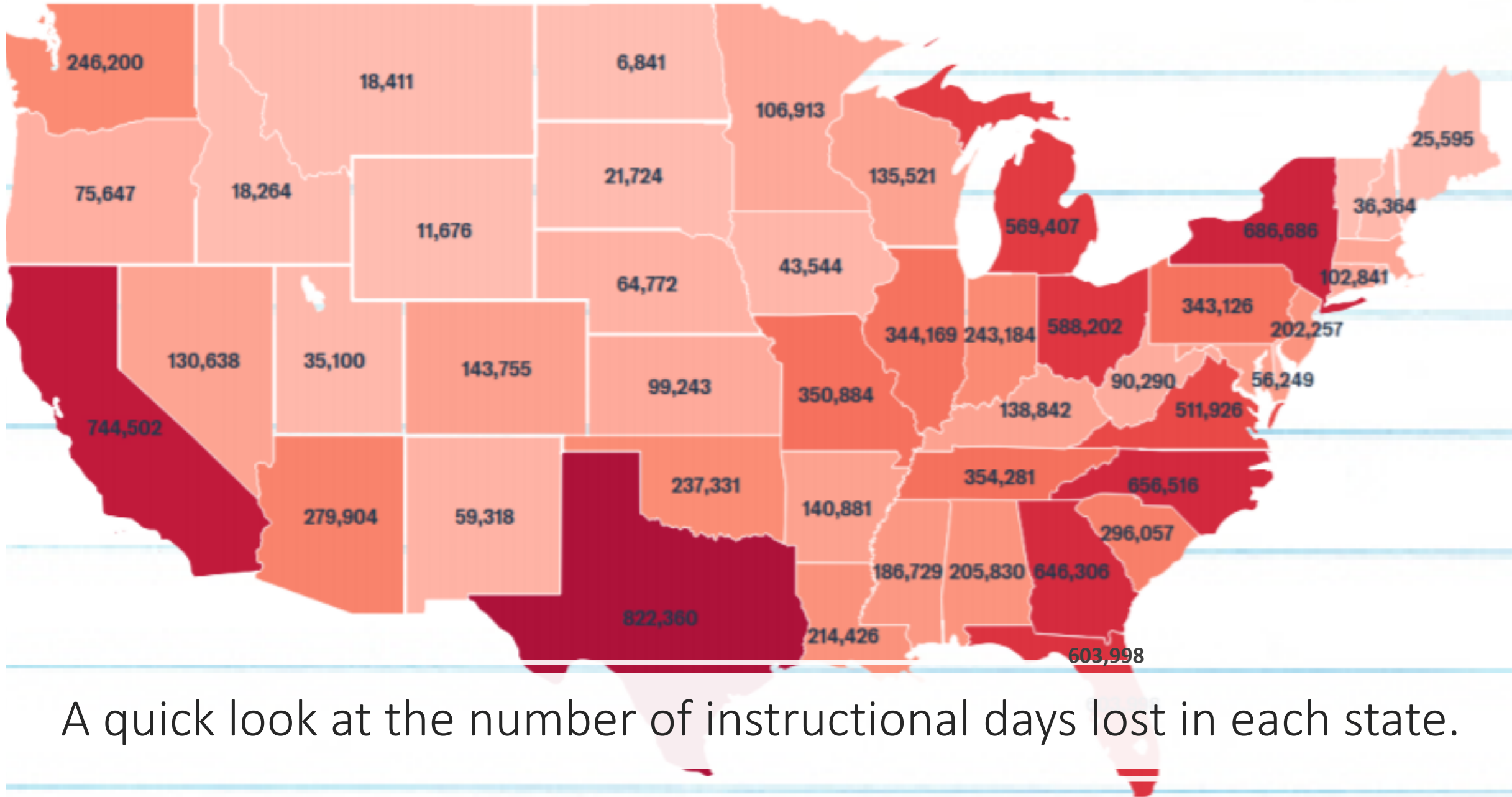
Over time, the effects can actually permanently alter the brain, making it increasingly difficult for a child to learn.

**Chronic stress and trauma affect learning
in a BIG way!!**

How big a problem is acting out?

According to a [Joint Report](#) by the Center for Civil Rights Remedies of UCLA's Civil Rights Project and The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, children in U.S. public schools lost more than [11 million instructional days](#) due to suspensions in a single school year.

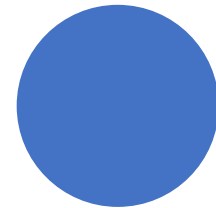
It's a BIG problem!



A quick look at the number of instructional days lost in each state.

A Useful Tool for Your Toolbox

The Society for Research in Child Development documents that [teaching students how to manage stress improves students' achievement](#), as well as their feelings of safety and belonging at school.



So how?

Executive functioning skills guide everything we do. From making decisions, to staying on track with an activity, to [planning and prioritizing a task](#).

The ability to make a decision, plan it out, and act on it **without being distracted** is what allows us to accomplish the most mundane of tasks to the more complicated and multi-step actions.

So, obviously, executive functioning and the ability to tap into its full potential is crucial for learning and behavior control.

How Big is My Problem?

5	Emergency You definitely need help from a grownup (fire, someone is hurt and needs to go to the hospital, a car accident, danger).	
4	Gigantic problem You can change with a lot of help (getting lost, hitting, kicking, or punching a friend, throwing or breaking things, bullying).	
3	Big problem You can change with some help (someone is mean to you or takes something that is yours, a minor accident, needing help calming down).	
2	Medium problem You can change with a little help (feeling sick, tired, or hungry, someone bothering you, being afraid, needing help).	
1	Little problem You can change with a little reminder (not being line leader, not winning a game, not taking turns, making a mess).	
0	Glitch You can fix yourself (changing clothes, cleaning up toys, forgetting favorite toy or blankie).	

Define the distraction.



Address the
distraction.

Some (Really) Good News About Mindfulness



Research reveals the amazing *neuroplasticity* of the human brain. Neuroscientists used to think that the brain stopped developing in a person's early twenties.

Now we know that our experiences can shape our neural development well into our sixties and beyond.

The more we exercise a particular neural pathway in the brain, the more we strengthen it.

Our experiences can actually transform our brains, the way exercise can transform our bodies.

Or as neuroscientists are fond of saying,

“Neurons that *fire* together, *wire* together.”

Teach Students Ways to Handle Life's Inevitable Stresses



[Executive Functioning Skills Course](#) Understanding the Part Executive Functioning Skills Play in Everyday Actions and Behavior (free 5-day email course)



[How to Teach Kids Impulse Control](#) (free toolbox)



[How to Teach Planning and Prioritization](#) (free toolbox)



Mindfulness Video [A Walk in the Forest](#) (with guided imagery script)



Many more [mindfulness videos for kids and teens](#)

It's been said that successful high school teachers have to be able to *motivate a sofa* (or, getting "buy-in" when teaching mindfulness to teens).

1. Model Mindfulness

Students won't be convinced of the benefits of a mindfulness practice without seeing teachers model it themselves. Demonstrating the ability to manage stress and *respond*, not *react*, to setbacks lets students see the value firsthand.

Students need to see mindfulness in action to take it seriously.



2. What's in it for Them?

Students may see mindfulness as completely unrelated to their busy and connected lives. But there are many ways that students can benefit from a mindfulness and meditation practice.

- Studies show that students who practice mindfulness before an exam perform better than students who do not.
- Mindfulness helps improve performance on standardized tests.
- Mindfulness can improve concentration.
- Mindfulness can help with anxiety, stress, and depression.



Physical Benefits

- Mindfulness has been demonstrated to increase immune function. In one study, people who meditated produced more antibodies to the flu vaccine than people who didn't meditate. Meditation is also linked to an increase in telomerase (at the end of our genes), which can possibly reduce cell damage in the body.
- Mindfulness, including eating mindfully, has been linked to weight loss.
- In one study, participants who practiced mindfulness **lowered their blood pressure** and cut their heart attack risk in half over five years.
- Meditation reduces levels of the hormone cortisol (which raises blood pressure and levels of stress).
- Taking a few deep breaths **engages our parasympathetic nervous system** (our “rest and digest” mode), and deactivates our sympathetic nervous system (our “fight, flight, or freeze” mode).



Mental Benefits

- Mindfulness increases neural connections in the brain and has been shown to **strengthen myelin** (the protective sheath on our neurons that facilitates signaling in the brain).
- Mindfulness is linked to having a longer attention span and **improves concentration**.
- Practicing mindfulness increases activity in the **prefrontal cortex** (associated with planning and judgment) and in the **anterior cingulate** (associated with emotional regulation, learning, and memory).
- In one study, participants who meditated for 30 minutes a day for 8 weeks had an increase in gray matter in the regions of the brain associated with memory, sense of self, and empathy.
- Students who practiced mindfulness prior to an exam performed better than students who did not. The researchers linked meditation to **improved cognitive functioning**.



Emotional Benefits

- Mindfulness and meditation practices have been extensively linked to **easing symptoms of depression and anxiety**, and these techniques are used in many therapy settings.
- A 2007 study of students who had been taught mindfulness techniques revealed a **decrease in test anxiety, nervousness, and self-doubt**, and an **increase in focus and concentration**. Further studies have shown reduced absenteeism and suspensions in schools where mindfulness programs have been implemented.
- Mindfulness and meditation help us learn to **turn off the negative self-talk or rumination** that our minds often resort to when left on their own.
- Meditation **reduces our emotional reactivity**. One study found that **mindful stress reduction practices actually decreased the size of people's amygdala** (responsible for our aggression, anxiety, and fear — an overactive amygdala is associated with depression).
- These practices can make us more **compassionate**. People who practice mindfulness show **more activation in the area of the brain associated with empathy** when they are exposed to someone who is suffering.

Students need
to know how
their brains
function.

3. Teach Students How Their Brains Works

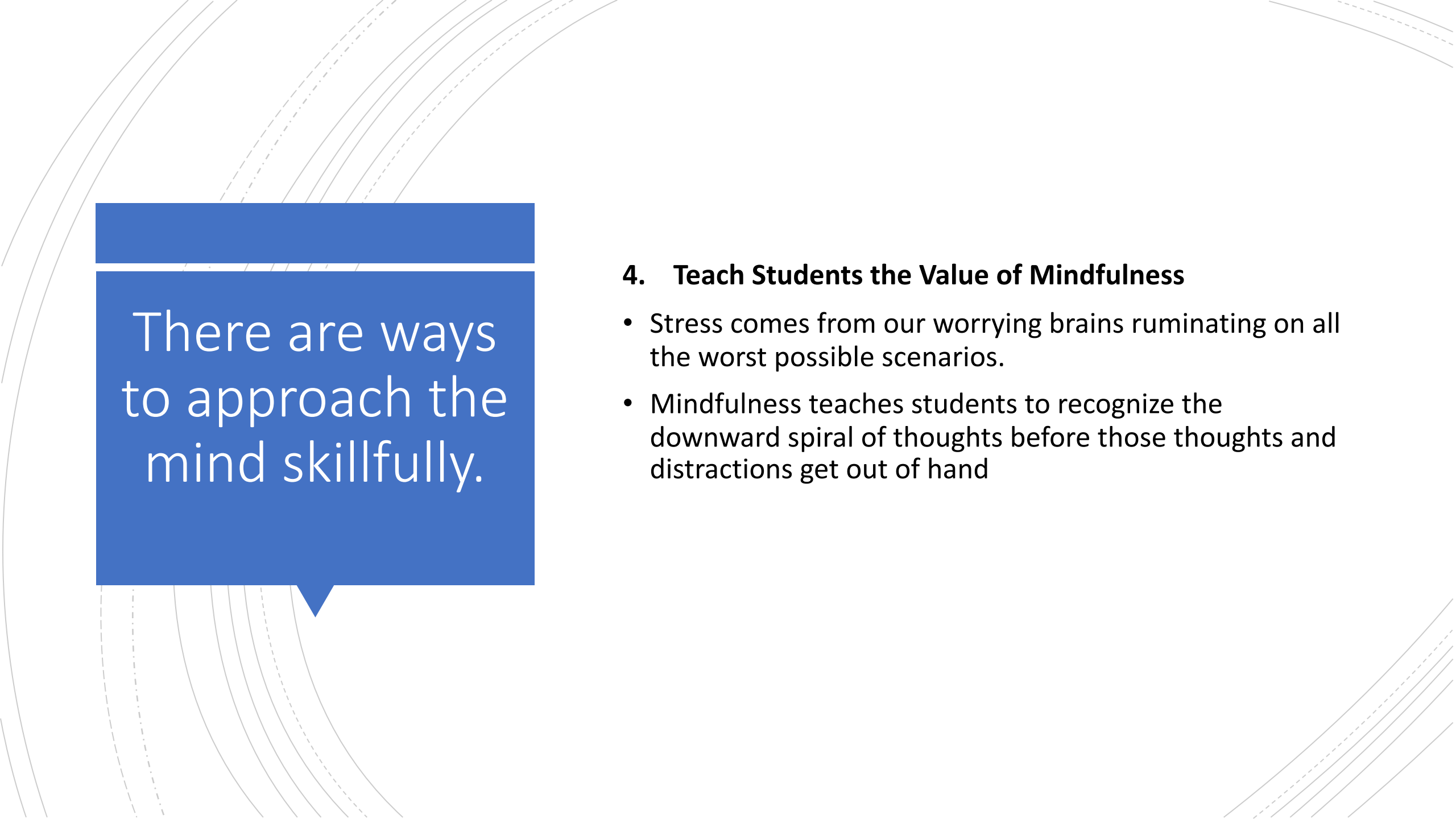
This [TEDx talk by Dan Siegel, MD](#), author of *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*, offers an easy to understand and interesting demonstration that shows the parts of the brain, using hands as a model.

Siegel focuses on three structures of the brain:

- the **brainstem** (our “reptilian” brain, responsible for breathing, heart rate, digestion, etc.)
- the **limbic system/amygdala** (our “mammalian” brain, involved in emotion and memory), and
- the **cortex** (our “human” brain, responsible for thinking and self-regulation).

Mindfulness can help the thinking part of the brain process the raw emotion of the limbic system, allowing a mindful pause and a skillful response instead of an unthinking reaction.

Bottom line: Mindfulness is a form of **training** for a brain.

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There are ways
to approach the
mind skillfully.

4. Teach Students the Value of Mindfulness

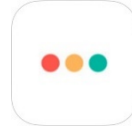
- Stress comes from our worrying brains ruminating on all the worst possible scenarios.
- Mindfulness teaches students to recognize the downward spiral of thoughts before those thoughts and distractions get out of hand

Resources

Mood Tracker Apps



MoodTrack is a mood track app that you simply put in your mood, any notes you want to add, and rate it 1-5. The app tracks your input and shows you a graph, which is to track mood swings and anxiety.



Moods is a mood tracking app. It is simple and easy to use because it takes just a few moments to track your mood each day.

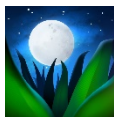


Hear and Now measures your body stress by taking the pulse in your finger through your phone's camera. You can set daily reminders for deep breathing exercises. Though other apps have guided breathing, Hear and Now's guided breathing can be set to the number of breaths you take, and suggestions are offered as well.

Relaxation and Mindfulness Apps



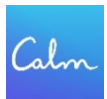
The **MindShift** app offers a welcome message about steps to take to stop anxiety from controlling your life. This app is good for helping work through anxiety rather than avoiding issues that are causing it.



Relax Melodies addresses anxiety can cause insomnia. Teens especially can have difficulties sleeping because they feel pressure to always be “on” (with their phones, computers). Combining over 100 relaxation sounds, melodies, binaural beats and white noise, Relax Melodies allows you to create your very own relaxing soundscapes. Can play for a specified period of time or all night.



Pacifica offers daily tools for stress and anxiety as well as a supportive community. This app is unique as their tools are based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy & Meditation



Calm is the #1 app for mindfulness and meditation for teens. Even if your teen has never done any meditation before, Calm's guided meditations will walk them through it. They also have breathing programs, relaxing music, and sleep stories. Recommended by top psychologists.



Aura walks you through 3-minute meditations to help you calm and destress. You let Aura know how you're feeling, and the app chooses the best meditation for you.

Aura also offers mood tracking and daily reminders for breathing exercises.

Resources

Meditation Apps

[Insight Meditation Timer](#)

[Stop, Breathe, and Think](#)

[Smiling Mind](#)

[Take a Break!](#)

Activity

31 Days of Self-Love

<https://www.blessingmanifesting.com/31-days-self-love/>

