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Mindful, Aware Parenting: The Pathway to Raising Emotionally Regulated Children

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May 2021

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Abstract

To address several key elements in raising emotionally regulated children, this paper reviews existing literature on social-emotional skills and traits essential for children's development, including emotional intelligence and self-regulatory skills as well as morality, compassion, and kindness. Parents play a crucial role in helping these skills to evolve, beginning with parental self-awareness and the ability to review how early experiences shape current practices. The research presented examines key parental competencies, styles, and practices influential in the process of raising emotionally regulated children. The practice of mindfulness by parents is considered, and evidence suggests, that it can be foundational in developing self-awareness and the ability to parent with a non-judgmental presence. Parents are a child's first teachers; as such, their influence on outcomes for children is critical. The parent education portion of this thesis aims to help parents develop the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the parenting journey with the confidence and direction needed to raise emotionally regulated children.

Keywords: mindful parenting, social-emotional skills, parenting competencies, parenting skills, parent education

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Mindful, Aware Parenting: The Pathway to Raising Emotionally Regulated Children

This paper examines the available research on the central role of social-emotional skills in child development and how parenting knowledge and practices affect this development. The paper presents an overview of research on the essential skills children need to acquire in their early years to develop their full potential. Parenting begins with parental knowledge of social-emotional skills' critical components and the important role parents play in nurturing them. Effective parenting involves awareness of self and others as well as a metacognitive ability to see and be present in each moment as it unfolds in real time. Evidence suggests that mindfulness has much to offer in developing both of these traits. Research findings, as well as my observations from years of working with families in school settings, indicate a need for greater parent education and support. Thus, the idea to develop a mindfulness-based parent education program was born.

Effective parenting begins with a self-aware, emotionally available parent. Parents are a child's first teachers. However, they are often unprepared for the task of parenting, and frequently model their practices on a combination of their own childhood experiences and what they learn from a diverse range of advice encountered in books, seen on the internet, or shared by friends and family. Studies show that teaching parenting skills to new parents enhances their children's outcomes and increases those parents' sense of self-efficacy (Liyana Amin et al., 2018; Miller & Harrison, 2015). Parenting competence is an essential factor that influences a child's ability to interact with peers, adjust to school environments, and create positive peer relationships. The family setting offers the first opportunity for a child to develop these skills, and parenting skills are predictive of positive outcomes in all of these areas (Russell et al., 2016).

Parent education is necessary for preparing parents to be effective role models and teachers during their children's critical early years. New parents could benefit from more research-based training programs that offer both theory and practical applications in an accessible format. I propose that a mindfulness-based parent education program could enhance the parenting experience and contribute to the development of robust social-emotional skills and other essential life skills in children. This paper considers critical skills including emotional intelligence; self-regulation; and character traits such as morality, compassion, and kindness. This paper will investigate several factors vital to the process of raising emotionally regulated children, and the parent education component that follows will incorporate mindfulness as a mechanism for parents to use in that process. The paper details the skills and attributes that foster healthy growth across many domains and prepare children to successfully navigate their environments. In addition to exploring mindfulness and its potential role in parent education, this thesis also presents information on parental factors such as emotional socialization, competencies, and styles, and describes how these factors affect outcomes for children. Furthermore, this work offers examples of mindful parenting programs and school-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs and assesses evidence of their efficacy.

Child Skills and Traits

Strong social-emotional skills are predictive of success in peer relationships, adult relationships, success in school, and professional success later in life, thus meriting inclusion in any discussion on raising healthy, competent children. Social-emotional skills, including emotional intelligence and self-regulatory skills, are exceedingly impactful on all other development and learning areas. Kindness, caring, and compassion are commonly touted as desirable human traits, but they are frequently overlooked by parents and educators, who often

place greater value on achievement-oriented goals and their child's overall happiness. Moreover, emotional intelligence and emotional regulation are critical elements in thinking and acting with moral judgment. Varghese and Raj (2014) stated that "Moral Competency involves expression of these appropriate behaviours and the ability of a person to channel emotional skills, either positively or negatively, and adhere to the moral codes and standards" (p. 17). It is impossible to separate emotional intelligence and emotional regulation skills from kindness and compassion. When all are fully developed, they form a solid foundation that enables children to navigate their world with greater success. The following section delves more deeply into the areas of emotional intelligence, self-regulatory skills, morality, compassion, and kindness.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is generally accepted as integral to success across a broad range of life skills. Mayer et al. (1999) defined emotional intelligence as ". . . an ability to recognize the meaning of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve based on them" (p. 267). According to Goleman (2006), the emotional brain can either move an individual forward or hold them in place, paralyzed by fear or some other strong emotion; he spoke to this phenomenon in his own academic experience, recalling an occasion when he could not access his problem-solving capability during a calculus exam for which he had not prepared. The inability to recognize and manage emotions in stressful situations overwhelms the ability to focus on the task at hand and interferes with problem-solving capabilities. Goleman went on to emphasize the importance of emotional intelligence and recounted stories of success and achievement experienced by people who had developed the ability to cope with their emotions in productive ways. Goleman (2006) described the vital role of emotional intelligence as "a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them" (p.

80). Understanding one's own emotions as well as those of others is critical to successfully managing internal states and interacting with both peers and authority figures in socially acceptable ways.

Self-Regulatory Skills

Self-regulatory skills are strong predictors of success across many development areas throughout life and a critical area of focus in the study of early childhood development. Such skills have a significant impact on social-emotional outcomes at later developmental stages and are also essential factors in preparing children for school (Russell et al., 2016). Social-emotional and self-regulatory skills involve children's ability to both control their attention and moderate their emotional responses to factors in their environment (Sawyer et al., 2015). Furthermore, research points to the vital role that parents play in helping children self-regulate during their formative years. Parents who offer clear limits to unacceptable behavior in addition to giving reasonable alternatives in a calm and kind manner foster a safe and dependable environment where children can learn to manage their emotions (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). Such competencies develop rapidly in the early years and depend on the child's early caregivers for advancement. Evidence suggests that lack of growth in self-regulation early on will likely hinder a child's transition to school and their ability to interact positively with peers at a later stage (Sawyer et al., 2015).

Morality, Compassion, & Kindness

Parents frequently acknowledge a desire to raise children who are compassionate, kind, and morally responsible. The Making Caring Common project, directed by Richard Weissbourd, a psychologist at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, conducted a 2014 national survey on a broad sample of adolescents. The project suggested that despite their intentions, parents are

not always successful in their efforts to encourage kindness, compassion, and moral responsibility. In fact, most adolescents reported valuing personal achievement and personal happiness above others' welfare (Making Caring Common, 2014). Findings from the survey suggest that the underlying issue “. . . may be a rhetoric/reality gap, a gap between what parents and other adults say are their top priorities and the real messages they convey in their behavior day to day” (Making Caring Common, 2014, p. 1). The report concluded that the skills necessary for raising morally responsible and caring children can be taught, and it recommended the following four strategies to achieve this outcome:

1. Children and youth need ongoing opportunities to practice being caring and helpful, sometimes with adult guidance.
2. Children and youth need to zoom in—listen closely and attentively to those in their immediate circle and zoom out—take in the big picture and consider multiple perspectives.
3. Children and youth need strong moral role models.
4. Children and youth need guidance in managing destructive feelings and in thinking through ethical questions and problems. (pp. 15–16)

Parents will benefit by recognizing the disconnect between what they espouse and what they show through their actions and attitudes. This thesis project's parent education component addresses these issues and incorporates elements for parents to develop awareness and practice the necessary skills.

Parenting

The early years of life form the foundation for a child's subsequent development, and parents and early caregivers play a significant role. Parenting is one of the most critical elements

influencing how children perceive themselves and the world. Daniel Goleman (2006) discussed the impact of parents' levels of emotional intelligence; he cautioned that children learn by observing their parents dealing with emotions and interacting with each other. He referred to this concept as "emotional schooling" (p. 190) and suggested that adults who recognize and manage their emotions serve as strong role models for their children. Compared to their peers raised by parents who do not exhibit such competencies, children with emotionally intelligent parents have better outcomes across a broad domain of competencies. They are better at handling their emotions and interactions with peers, have fewer behavior problems, demonstrate stronger attention skills, and attain higher academic achievement in reading and math by the third grade (Goleman, 2006). This section examines the roles of several key aspects of parenting related to raising emotionally regulated and morally competent children. The information focuses on parent competencies such as parent social-emotional skills, parent socialization of emotion, parenting styles, and parenting self-efficacy (PSE), offering definitions of each competency and attempting to define its relationship with desirable outcomes for children. Parent education, not only to teach parenting skills but also to focus on parental emotional intelligence and self-awareness, is vital to ensuring that children grow up healthy and well adjusted. Finally, I propose that mindfulness and meditation can help parents develop self-awareness and increase emotional intelligence.

Parent Competencies

As role models, parents help their children to develop self-awareness, make good decisions, deal with their emotions, and expand their conflict management skills. According to an article written for Edutopia (2001) parents are advised to "[r]emember that modeling 'emotionally intelligent' behavior at home is the first step in nurturing emotionally intelligent children" ("Social and Emotional Learning: Strategies for Parents," 2001, section 1, para. 1).

With this in mind, it is essential to examine the effects a parent's social and emotional skills have on their parenting. Research investigating parents' social competencies in empathy, conflict management, assertion, and emotional intelligence suggests that these qualities contribute to successful parenting (Egeli & Rinaldi, 2016). They are central elements that affect the quality of parent-child relationships. According to Ezra Dereli (2016), "Emotional understanding and emotion regulation behavior and capacities of children are formed within the parent-child relationship" (p. 43). Children learn by observing interactions and communication styles within their family setting and amongst their peers. These observations, along with the parent-child relationship, all serve to impact the child's perception of appropriate emotional understanding and subsequent behavior. Dereli (2016) proposed a training program for parents that teaches the following skills: communication and relationship building, conflict resolution, and positive inter-parent relationships.

Parent Socialization of Emotion

Parents' essential role in the socialization of emotion and resulting ramifications for children has been highlighted in many research studies. Eisenberg et al. (1998b) defined socialization broadly and inclusively as follows:

. . . behaviors enacted by socializers that (a) influence a child's learning (or lack thereof) regarding the experience, expression, and regulation of emotion and emotion-related behavior, and (b) are expected to affect the child's emotional, learning of content, and emotion-related behavior in a manner consistent with socializer's beliefs, values, and goals about emotion and its relation to individual functioning and adaptation in society.
(p. 317)

Parental socialization practices are understood to impact children's emotional and social skills, with potentially deleterious outcomes resulting from harsh responses to children's emotional expressions (Eisenberg et al., 1998a). Parenting education that focuses on self-awareness and understanding what underlies the child's outward expression of emotion promises to improve parent-child interactions. Momentary angry outbursts or instances of inappropriate behavior from a child are teachable moments that offer opportunities to connect and redirect rather than disconnect and reject.

Taking a more in-depth look at parents' experiences and emotional regulation strategies is necessary for evaluating how these factors influence parenting practices and impact child development (Hajal & Paley, 2020). Parenting is imbued with a wide range of emotions as parents engage in daily activities including caregiving, planning, talking, and even thinking about their children. Children observe and frequently mimic the way their parents respond to such emotions as they react to life's circumstances (Hajal & Paley, 2020). Several aspects of parenting and family dynamics affect the child's emotional capacities and responses. Parent modelling, the emotional climate within the family as it plays out in relationships, and parenting practices and styles all affect the child's emotional capabilities (Rutherford et al., 2015). Parents' emotional competencies and their ability to modulate their emotions are critical “. . . because they may lead to different types of parenting behaviors that further socialize emotions” (Hajal & Paley, 2020, p. 406). Mindfulness can help parents develop a level of self-awareness that allows them to be more attuned to their own emotions and subsequent reactions to their child's behavior.

Parenting Styles

Darling & Steinberg (1993) defined *parenting style* as “. . . a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional

climate in which the parent's behaviors are expressed” (p. 488). Many studies have examined connections between parenting styles and outcomes across several developmental domains for children. Studies suggest that parenting style plays a vital role in the emotional intelligence and peer communication ability of three- to six-year-olds (Wang et al., 2019). According to research, four parenting styles contribute to emotional intelligence in children: *authoritative*, *authoritarian*, *democratic*, and *tolerant* (Wang et al., 2019). The authoritative style is characterized as warm, loving, and balanced, with parents setting clear limits while encouraging independence. In contrast, the authoritarian style is dictatorial, with parents ignoring input from the child and expecting unquestioning obedience. Democratic parenting provides a warm and nurturing environment, encouraging children to grow while helping them understand others' perspectives. The tolerant style is warm and nurturing, but with a laissez-faire approach where children have few boundaries (Wang et al., 2019).

Parenting styles directly influence the prosocial behavior of children. Warm, nurturing, positive styles that encourage autonomy and offer supportive guidance are associated with the development of prosocial skills. Conversely, children parented with more negative parental affects and harsher discipline styles are less adept in this area (Knafo & Plomin, 2006). Healthy and positive parenting styles also impact children's academic performance and self-efficacy, contributing to better social skills and a more fruitful life. Children who have caring, supportive parents are more likely to succeed academically and socially than those who don't (Masud et al., 2016), and research suggests that democratic and authoritative parenting styles can contribute to emotional intelligence and improve communication with peers (Wang et al., 2019). The significance of strong peer communication skills has further been shown to increase a child's ability to interact in a socially adept manner and to increase the likelihood of their acceptance by

peers; consequently, children with these skills develop friendships more easily. Additionally, a child's capacity to understand others' emotions also makes it easier for them to interact with their peers and gain acceptance (Eisenberg et al., 2003). Other research also highlights a positive correlation between the democratic parenting style and several valuable skills: interpersonal communication, anger management, adaptability, verbal communication, listening, coping with peer pressure, and self-control (Kol, 2016).

Parenting Self-Efficacy (PSE)

Vance and Brandon (2017) offer the following definition of PSE: “. . . parental beliefs or confidence in their ability to successfully carry out parenting tasks” (p. 6). PSE is associated with positive parenting practices, healthy parent-child relationships, and better child development outcomes. Not least among these is the relevance of PSE for new mothers, who experience many physical and psychological changes both before and after giving birth. Research examining mothers' ability to adjust to this new reality while dealing with additional responsibilities finds a “significant positive relationship between functional status and self-efficacy” in the postpartum stage (Mirghafourvand & Bagherinia, 2018, p. 321). PSE contributes significantly to a sense of competency in parenting and an area that must be considered in parent training (Wittkowski et al., 2017). When parents believe in their own ability to parent effectively, “. . . the quality of parenting can be optimized and the role of being a parent can become as pleasurable as possible” (Wittkowski et al., 2017, p. 2975). Parents are influenced by their self-perceptions of their skills throughout the parenting experience, starting at childbirth. As such, parent education merits close study, and its implementation may increase the level of confidence parents have in their own ability to navigate the journey of parenting. Additionally, sharing experiences with other parents can help parents realize they are not alone in their fears and doubts about their parenting skills,

which may help reassure them of their competence and, at a minimum, afford them the opportunity to voice their concerns in a safe and accepting environment. Self-confidence and an opportunity to share and learn in a community can support parents in their efforts to raise emotionally regulated children by increasing their skills and sharing their experiences with others on a similar path.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice that has existed for more than 2600 years. It is not a uniform philosophy; rather, it represents many different practices and takes slightly different forms depending on the particular school of Buddhism involved. Mindfulness has varying definitions, but it is generally accepted as constituting embodied, non-judgmental awareness and acceptance of present-moment experience; accepting, acknowledging and tolerating current circumstances whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral in character. (Germer et al., 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness is woven into Buddhism's philosophical beliefs and practices. As a Buddhist construct, mindfulness is enmeshed in the Four Noble Truths that outline the nature of suffering, frequently described as an attachment to or rejection of the reality of life in any given moment (Davis et al., 2020). The Noble Eightfold Path is offered as a means to liberate oneself from attachment, thus leading to the end of suffering. The Eightfold Path, comprising certain underlying concepts, is categorized into three areas: "wisdom (right understanding and intention), morality (right speech, action, and livelihood), and concentration (right effort, mindfulness, concentration)" (Davis et al., 2020, p. 21). In Buddhist philosophy, by following this path and developing the requisite skills, one moves out of reactivity and habitual responses towards wisdom, ethical living, and freedom from suffering.

Mindfulness has become increasingly popular over the last twenty years, taking hold in many different environments in the West. Mindfulness is frequently used to enhance outcomes in many aspects of life and continues to gain traction as a secular practice in the West. Terry Hyland (2015) asserted this is the “. . . result of its application as a therapeutic strategy in mind-body medicine, psychotherapy, psychiatry, education, leadership and management” (p. 170). Many credit Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR), with popularizing mindfulness in the West. His eight-week MBSR program was one of the first mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) programs, and it was utilized initially to help alleviate physical pain in chronically ill patients before being expanded to address mental health issues as well (Davis et al., 2020). Mindfulness meditation impacts many aspects of personal well-being and mental health. It has demonstrated positive effects on the development of awareness, self-regulation, stress reduction, attention regulation, and a host of other beneficial outcomes. Evidence suggests that the practice of meditation causes neurological changes in the brain, which cause these changes (Hölzel et al., 2011).

Daniel Siegel (2010) presented a concise explanation of how cultivating attention can alter the landscape and operating system of the brain. In his book *Mindsight* (2010), he described this idea as follows:

Mindsight is a kind of focused attention that allows us to see the internal working of our own minds. It helps us to be aware of our mental processes without being swept away by them, enables us to get ourselves off the autopilot of ingrained behaviours and habitual responses, and moves us beyond the reactive emotional loops we have a tendency to get trapped in. It lets us “name and tame” the emotions we experience, rather than being overwhelmed by them. (pp. ix–x)

Siegel (2010) gave detailed descriptions of the three vital elements that underscore the cultivation of “mindsight” and, as a result, healthier mental and physical lives, better personal connections, and more fulfilling relationships. First, he proposed that mindsight can be learned and improved using a practice that encourages acceptance of reality as it is (openness), self-awareness (observation), and the knowledge that thoughts are not reality (objectivity). Secondly, he asserted that the cultivation of mindsight changes the very structure of the brain through the process of neuroplasticity. Finally, he described a third element, which he called “integration.” He proposed that integration is the ability to connect all aspects of how we interact with others and posited that it transforms the very structure of the brain. Siegel (2010) asserted that “With mindsight we are able to focus our mind in ways that literally integrate the brain and move it toward resilience and health” (p. xiii). Parents' ability to help their children develop the ability for mindsight and live a more integrated life will likely be improved by first cultivating these skills in themselves.

Richard Davidson, founder and director of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a founding member of the Mind and Life Institute, has spent much of his life researching the effects of meditation on the brain. He described meeting His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 1992 as an experience that changed the direction of his research. As a result of that meeting, he shifted his focus from the study of negative human conditions and emotions like stress, fear, anxiety, and depression toward the development of positive emotions like kindness and empathy (Davidson, 2019). He also speaks about neuroplasticity and advocates the use of mindfulness to train the brain. Human brains continually change and are shaped by life practices and influences of which we are mostly unaware. We can take greater control of our life direction, train our brains through mindfulness, and help reshape our minds. Davidson (2019) identified

four pillars that form the foundation of a healthy mind: awareness, including meta-awareness (awareness of awareness); connection; insight, or self-awareness; and a sense of purpose in life. He contended that all of these can be learned through regular mindfulness practice, which ultimately changes the brain's structure. By training these four foundational aspects of a healthy mind, parents also have an opportunity to parent with greater presence and be better role models for their children (Davidson, 2019).

Writing together, Richard Davidson and Daniel Goldman (2017) made still another compelling argument for the benefits of meditation on mental and physical health, as well as its potential for developing enduring traits. They contended that meditation lowers stress and anxiety levels, develops self-awareness, increases executive functioning skills, improves the capacity to cope with pain, and contributes to mental and physical well-being. In some cases, they were able to connect specific brain systems to some of the trait changes they observed in meditators. Goleman and Davidson (2017) were encouraged by their research on compassion meditation, which “. . . enhances empathic concern, activates circuits for good feelings, and love, as well as circuits that register the suffering of others, and prepares a person to act when suffering is encountered” (p. 121). Empathy and compassion are integral to developing strong connections with others and critical for dealing with difficult emotions.

Mindfulness and the Parenting Experience

During the parenting experience, parents often overlook opportunities to immerse themselves in the journey; they may not be fully present with whatever is happening in the moment or hold all of it with care and kindness. Siegel and Hartzell (2003) propose that being fully present is available to parents who adopt a conscious and “. . . “mindful approach toward parenting” (p. 256). Mindfulness presents opportunities to develop awareness and be better

prepared to act and react more kindly and thoughtfully to the demands of parenting. Parents are too often preoccupied by what they need to do: they worry about providing for their child and preparing them for the future rather than fully and consciously participating in the current moment. There is little doubt that parenting is fraught with challenges, and focusing on becoming perfect parents only adds to that pressure. Mothers are held to particularly high standards. Research suggests that the pressure to be a perfect mother leads to increasing levels of guilt and stress, contributes to burnout, and infringes on career enjoyment and success (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018). Parents need more support systems and more training in nurturing and self-care: such systems which would enable them to foster healthy development for their children.

Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell (2003) observed that the parenting journey begins when parents uncover and understand the ways their own childhood experiences influence their current parenting practices. Their research speaks to the importance of early relationships and their impact on many aspects of development, suggesting that “[e]motional intelligence, self-esteem, cognitive abilities, and social skills are built on this early attachment relationship. How parents reflect on their lives directly shapes the nature of that relationship” (p. xvii). Mindfulness is a useful tool for exploring and developing an awareness of emotional states and increasing one’s ability to be present for what happens in any moment. Mindfulness facilitates awareness and acceptance of whatever emotion or feeling is present, and it allows one to face the experience and choose an appropriate response rather than reacting impulsively (Burke, 2014). Research into mindfulness parenting training programs suggests that parent-child relationships are improved by parents’ increased capacity for attentiveness, self-awareness, self-regulation, and compassion in interactions with their children. Mindful parenting practices offer the possibility

for better parent-child relationships over the long term, increasing the opportunities for parents to step out of habitual responses in favor of more thoughtful, caring responses to their child's needs (Duncan et al., 2009).

Clinical psychologist Shefali Tsabary (2018) echoed the ideas of Siegel and Hartzell, and proffered that most parents enter the parenting journey unaware and unconscious of their “. . . own unresolved needs, unmet expectations, and frustrated dreams. Despite our best intentions, we enslave them to the emotional inheritance we received from our parents” (p. 5). Tsabary (2018) posited that children are here to teach parents to become more self-aware—not vice versa. She argues that a parent's role is not to create their ideal child, but rather to accept children as they are, help them uncover their authentic selves, and help them determine their futures. Parents show their children their self-worth by listening deeply to what they say and validating their perspectives as worthy. Far too often, parents focus on what they want for their children rather than trusting that they can navigate their own journeys with support. When parents try to save their children from suffering and strive to make them happy, these efforts prevent their children from discovering that they are capable of solving their own problems. As established previously, parents often err on the side of choosing happiness for their children over taking advantage of the learning opportunity it presents and the message it sends to their children (Making Caring Common, 2014). Tsabary (2018) asserted that parenting is a privilege and that learning to be present and conscious while parenting is the greatest gift parents can give to their children. Becoming conscious is a practice achievable by observing one's thoughts, feelings, and actions while interacting with one's children; moments when a parent is aware of being unconscious are moments where consciousness becomes possible. A parent's ability to understand and be with

their own inner landscape allows them to become conscious and helps their children to become emotionally regulated and well adjusted.

Shefali Tsabary (2018) proposes that engaging with reality is critical for developing self-awareness; she describes the practice of mindfulness, required for such engagement, thusly:

To be fully present to our reality, *as it is*, and not *as we wish it to be*, requires us to silence our mind and detach from our preoccupation with the past and the future. It requires us to center ourselves in the here and now. Instead of seeing everything through the veil of polarizing thought, we enter into *a state of pure presence*. (p. 258)

Parents' examination of their personal histories and deeply held views on parenting derived from childhood experiences and cultivation of the critical attributes of compassion, self-care, and attentional skills can contribute to a more successful parenting experience and healthier, more emotionally grounded children. Meditation may offer a roadmap for uncovering a parent's unconscious beliefs and help develop other critical skills in the process. In the upcoming section, I review some aspects of parenting skills that may be enhanced through the development of a personal mindfulness practice and thereby positively impact both parental effectiveness and child outcomes. These aspects include a parent's executive functioning, mentalization, self-care, and compassion.

Parent Executive Functioning

Parent executive functioning is understood to impact both the way a parent responds to their child and also their ability to impact those skills in their children (Deater-Deckard, et al. 2012). Emotion regulation is a key skill that children need in order to maintain successful relationships and succeed in school. Parents' emotion regulation has been shown to significantly contribute to promoting children's emotional development and emotional regulation capacities

(Hajal & Paley, 2020). Parents' ability to regulate their emotions is connected to executive function and the cognitive capacity to be aware of their own underlying emotions while also understanding their child's behaviors and emotional states (Rutherford et al., 2015). Parents who lack strong executive functioning skills tend to react negatively to their children, and their children tend to exhibit increased behavior problems (Deater-Deckard et al., 2012). Another study on the influence of executive function skills on child behavior issues concluded that “. . . maternal emotion and cognition control capacities affect how mothers interact with their children and ultimately child conduct problems” (Crandall et al., 2018, p. 339). Research suggests that the practice of mindfulness meditation can enhance executive functioning, due in large part to greater acceptance of emotional states, both positive and negative (Teper & Inzlicht, 2012).

Parent Mentalization

Kalland et al. (2016) described *mentalization* as “. . . a parent's capacity to think about and understand their child's feelings and experiences" (p. 5). This process may be affected by the parents' experiences growing up and how they themselves were parented. Mentalization also involves the ability to see one's child as a separate being with independent thoughts and emotions and to respond appropriately while regulating one's own internal emotions (Slade et al., 2005). A parent's ability to consistently react appropriately and responsively to their child creates a secure attachment, encouraging the child to venture out and explore, secure in the knowledge that there is a stable base to which they can return (Kalland et al., 2016). Research suggests that, given the strong connection between a child's self-regulatory skills and parent mentalization capabilities, parent training and education programs should focus on developing mentalization (Senehi et al., 2018). Mindfulness, both as a personal practice and when incorporated into parent education, promises to develop that skill. One model of mindful

parenting offered by Duncan et al. (2009) “. . . suggests that parents who can remain aware and accepting of their child's needs through using mindfulness practices can create a family context that allows for more enduring satisfaction and enjoyment in the parent-child relationship” (p. 256). Parent self-awareness and non-judgmental presence when interacting with their child offers the promise of a more effective, rewarding experience and greater understanding and connection between parent and child.

Self-Care, Compassion, and Empathy

Another important aspect of parenting is self-care, which is an essential component in fostering self-awareness and also the first step in caring for others. Research suggests that a balance between care for one's self and care for others develops over time during early childhood and adolescence. This care ethic is based on recognizing interdependence and the interconnection of one's own needs with others (Scoe, 2014). Self-compassion is an integral component of self-care. People high in self-compassion are better equipped to handle adversity and less likely to be defensive or feel bad about their efforts' poor performance or outcomes (Leary et al., 2007). They are also more accepting of failures, which they perceive as resulting from their actions rather than from factors beyond their control; they are, therefore, more realistic in their perceptions of events. Self-compassionate people experience fewer distressing emotions in the face of difficult situations (Leary et al., 2007). A self-compassionate approach to challenging and difficult situations in parenting may offer a more balanced way of viewing these events and a greater likelihood of recovering from them more quickly.

Parenting styles and practices have a significant impact on a child's emotional development. Parenting programs need to shift their focus from mitigating negative child behaviors toward cultivating prosocial parenting skills. James Kirby (2019) proposed “. . . a new

framework for understanding parenting and family interactions, referred to as compassion-focused parenting” (p. 2). He posited that parent compassion training involves two key components: being aware and responsive to signals indicating that the child is suffering or in pain, and responding to help relieve that pain and suffering. He asserted that compassion training involves being attentive to the child and acting with empathy rather than irritation and discouragement. Mindfulness training with an emphasis on self-awareness, self-compassion, and compassionate parenting practices is an important area of focus in the parent education program portion of this thesis project.

Compassion and empathy are often considered to be the same basic emotion. However, although they are related, there is a distinction between them. Tania Singer, a leading researcher in behavioral sciences, has studied these emotions and clarified how they differ. She described empathy as experiencing another's emotions as one's own (Hasenkamp & White, 2017). In contrast, compassion allows one to feel concern and care for a suffering person without taking on their suffering as one's own. In this state, a person can act out of care and kindness with the intent to relieve the suffering of the other, without being overwhelmed by it and therefore unable to act. Singer's research on empathy and compassion involving long-term mindfulness practitioners like Matthieu Ricard produced some interesting findings on the impact of meditation regarding these emotions. Singer showed disturbing pictures of others suffering to subjects who had completed compassion training. Their fMRI images revealed activation in brain regions associated with positive emotions and less negative affect. When people were exposed to similar images of suffering following empathy training exercises activation in brain regions associated with negative emotions and more negative affect were detected (Hasenkamp & White, 2017). Singer inferred that empathy alone may be problematic when dealing with

others' pain, and that compassion training may lend itself to “. . . strengthening positive affect while not ignoring the presence of suffering” (Hasenkamp & White, 2017, p. 243). Loving-kindness meditation, a mindfulness exercise that cultivates an attitude of kindness and compassion towards oneself and others, may offer an opportunity to develop these skills and strengthen the brain regions associated with them. Greater self-compassion and compassion for others will allow parents to access an empathic response to their child, rather than feel overwhelmed or retreat from stressful moments.

Mindful Parenting Programs

A great volume of research indicates the efficacy of mindful parenting practices and mindful parent training as tools to enhance effective parenting. The Mindfulness-Based Childbirth and Parenting program (MBCP), developed by Duncan and Bardacke (2009) and modeled on the MBSR program, is, according to the authors, “. . . achieving its intended effects” (p. 190). Introducing mindfulness training during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period has demonstrated positive well-being and health outcomes for women and their partners (Duncan & Bardacke, 2009). Mindfulness infused into parenting education programs is shown to increase parent and child welfare and relationships. A randomized study of a group of adolescents aged 10–14 in the Strengthening Families Program, modified to incorporate mindful parenting strategies, indicated that mindfulness enhanced parenting practice and improved parent-child relationships (Coatsworth et al., 2009). The infants of parents engaging in mindfulness and meditation practices during the prenatal period demonstrated positive outcomes in areas of temperament and health at five months of age (Chan, 2014). A large body of evidence also suggests the benefits of mindfulness in enhancing the parenting experience, promoting more positive parent-child relationships, and improving social-emotional proficiencies for children.

School-Based Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Programs

Much has been written about the importance of social-emotional skills for children and efforts to incorporate Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into school curricula. This section reviews some school-based SEL programs that are producing results in school settings, and it examines how they may provide useful strategies for parents to incorporate at home with their children. Emotional intelligence skills are taught at many schools using various SEL models. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), known for their expertise in school-based SEL programs, described SEL this way:

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.

(CASEL, 2020, para. 1)

This definition incorporates the key components necessary for children to develop social and emotional competency.

Emotional competency is taught at schools throughout the United States, and research indicates positive outcomes among student populations. A study by Bierman et al. (2010) on the Fast Track PATHS (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies) SEL school program concluded that “. . . well-implemented multiyear social-emotional learning programs can have significant and meaningful preventive effects on the population-level rates of aggression, social competence, and academic engagement in the elementary school years” (p. 156). Webster-Stratton and Herman (2009) researched the Incredible Years Project, which delivers a series of

socioemotional lessons to children between kindergarten and first grade. Results showed an increased ability to solve problems and handle conflict in the student group that received the training. This program was further enhanced by incorporating training for parents and teachers as well. The research from these studies and the positive outcomes associated with the training they implemented offer promising evidence for the possibility of teaching and improving socio-emotional skills for children.

Conscious Discipline (CD), an SEL program developed by Becky Bailey that focuses on teaching self-regulatory skills to children and self-awareness to teachers, has shown positive outcomes for both (Hoffman et al., 2009). Bailey (2015) defines CD as follows:

Conscious Discipline is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary self-regulation program that integrates social-emotional learning, school culture and discipline. It helps teachers and administrators build schools based on internal resources of safety, connection and problem solving instead of external rewards and punishments. (p. 12)

CD is built on neuroscientific research and incorporates a mindfulness-based model of education to deliver its lessons. Initial lessons focus on internal states of mind that impact behavior in both adults and children. Self-awareness and the development of self-regulation build strong executive function skills, which in turn lay the groundwork for sound decision making and learning. These practical steps are intended for both teachers and the students they supervise. CD starts with a conscious, self-aware, mindful adult because it is based on the premise that it is impossible to teach children these skills if the adult has not developed them first (Bailey, 2015). CD also offers online parent webinars and training to bridge the home-school gap and offers additional support for parents to implement the program at home. The webinars are informative

but are by nature unable to offer interactive components, such as opportunities for discussion or connection with other parents; therefore, they are less comprehensive than in-person training.

The Kindness Curriculum (KC) is a twelve-week mindfulness-based program that teaches social skills to preschool children, developed by Richard Davidson at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Flook et al. (2014) described the KC as follows: “The foundation of the kc [sic] is mindfulness practice, aimed at cultivating attention and emotion regulation, with a shared emphasis on kindness practices (e.g., empathy, gratitude, sharing)” (p. 45). Each lesson builds on the previous one and utilizes music, movement, and literature to teach “concepts related to kindness and compassion” (p. 45). Early research has shown that teachers report increased social-emotional skills in the group engaged with the KC. Additionally, this research supports findings compatible with increased learning and delayed gratification compared to the control group. Even after a short training period, the results make a compelling argument for introducing more mindfulness training into early learning environments.

Discussion

Two of the most critical elements in raising emotionally regulated children are (i) social-emotional development and its impact on overall child development and (ii) parents' critical role in nurturing growth. In reviewing the available research that supports this assertion, I identified gaps in the field of practice, such as conscious parenting and an easily accessible roadmap to lead the way towards that goal. Raising healthy, competent, and morally responsible children who are capable of living independent, productive lives and engaging with the world in a way that they define and design is the definition of success. Having seen CD in action at Pine Village Preschool over the past five years, as well as having heard families' repeated requests to learn more about this approach, I was inspired to develop a mindfulness-based parent education

program. The success of SEL programs in the school environment raises the question of what an SEL home-focused program might offer families seeking to develop practical parenting skills and promote emotional intelligence for children.

Mindfulness-based programs that focus on helping parents to develop a personal practice to foster greater self-awareness and self-management skills and take the first step in the parenting journey are largely absent from the field of parent education. Although the emphasis on social-emotional development in children and the role that teachers and parents play in developing these skills has increased, few programs bridge the gap between home and school. Several constructive SEL programs are being utilized in educational settings around the world, offering evidence of the efficacy of teaching social-emotional skills with mindfulness as the foundation. The current approach to parent education focuses more on preventing problem behaviors in children than proactively encouraging ways for parents to build prosocial skills and develop stronger parent-child relationships (Kirby, 2019). In my research, I have found few school programs offering SEL that collaborate with families to bridge the gap between home and school. The parent education program I developed will begin to bridge that gap and create an opportunity to look critically at the feasibility of such interventions for future learning.

Conclusion

This paper proposes that mindful, aware parenting is the pathway to raising emotionally regulated children. There are many interrelated components involved in the process of helping parents to achieve this ideal state. The research outlined in this paper explores many aspects of parenting practices and skills in nurturing emotional competence in children. Evidence suggests that robust social-emotional skills and personal traits such as morality, compassion, and kindness are critical elements in developing emotional regulation, and that parent knowledge, skills, and

self-awareness are instrumental in nurturing that development. Parent education, with a mindfulness approach that offers both information and support, can help parents develop both the knowledge base and personal qualities to aid in this endeavor.

The accompanying six-week education program, offered to parents with children as old as five, incorporates information on social-emotional skills; parenting skills, styles and practices; mindfulness; and mindful parenting, emphasizing the development of a personal mindfulness practice. The program will review work done by leading experts on parenting, mindfulness and brain science with frequent opportunities for discussion in a supportive learning environment that engenders a sense of community and shared experiences. With these as the fundamental concepts, parents will learn about the critical elements of social-emotional development necessary for children to fulfill their maximum potential. Parents will understand the role that they play in that process and the importance of developing self-awareness as the starting point for raising confident, independent, kind, and compassionate children ready to navigate the world on their own terms. Firmly grounded in mindfulness, the program offers a guide (or map) for examining the past and moving forward with purpose. Indeed, the acronym *MAP* encompasses many elements of the program, which guides parents as they navigate their journey towards mindful, aware parenting, while also suggesting that parents must examine their own maps—tracing their own journeys from childhood to gain greater perspective—as a critical first step in the process.

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Mindful Aware Parenting (MAP) Education Program

Bridget Martin

May 2021

Facilitators Guide

Course Description

The idea for developing this course came about due to my work in the field of Early Childhood Education over the past 30 plus years. One of the significant gaps I saw in the area was a lack of parent education on the critical role of emotional intelligence in children's lives and how the early years are crucial in developing these skills. Research indicates that emotional intelligence is the foundation for success in all areas of life with the capability to negatively or positively impact other life skills (Goleman, 2006). Over the past twenty years at Pine Village Preschool, I have witnessed the impact the lack of such skills has on children and their parents' desire to find better ways to interact with their children while helping them develop to their fullest potential. Parents at Pine Village Preschool repeatedly asked over the years for training in behavior management. In addition to witnessing the success of Conscious Discipline, a mindfulness behavior management program at Pine Village Preschool, I was inspired to help parents by offering information and practices in a supportive group setting.

The training consists of six two-hour workshop sessions with an initial roll out within the Pine Village community of families, directors, and teachers. This guide is designed to provide a clear path for delivering the training, understanding that it is flexible and likely will evolve based on the needs and interaction with participants. Each session is an independent module with participants learning something they can take from each while getting an opportunity to explore and experience various mindfulness practices. Participation in one or more sessions will provide helpful information and practices. The sessions also build on each other, increasing the learning and training as participants move through the sessions. One of the program's foundational aspects is developing a personal mindfulness practice that facilitates greater self-awareness and stability in parent-child interactions. Each session will focus on two main themes that enhance

parent understanding of key areas of emotional intelligence, increase parenting competencies and practices, provide self-reflection opportunities, and explore one or more mindfulness practices.

Participants are welcome to request to have content from previous sessions emailed to them if they were unable to attend in person. Each session will include optional extension activities to do at home.

Goals

- Provide information on emotional intelligence, its role in child development, and the connection with brain states and function.
- Review aspects of parenting approaches and styles and discuss how they affect parent-child interactions and possible children's outcomes.
- Develop awareness of the maps we carry with us and use to navigate our current parenting landscape.
- Recognize that brain plasticity allows for new skills and practices to evolve. We are not 'stuck' in the current mode without an off switch or new possibilities
- Introduce mindfulness as a valuable tool in developing self-awareness and an opportunity to move out of habitual responses to a more thoughtful proactive mindset.
- Create a consistent and common language in the Pine Village Preschool community where parents, directors, and teachers synchronize their energies to benefit the children and families.
- Improve parent-child relationships and promote well-being for families and the entire Pine Village community.

Format

The workshops will be offered at one of our school locations and restricted to twenty participants to allow for discussion, questions, sharing, and practice time. They will be provided on a bi-monthly schedule at the beginning of the school year and offered throughout the school year until all families have had an opportunity to participate. Each session presents a unique theme with a standard format, including discussion time, self-reflections, mindfulness practice, and an extension/homework offering. Resources, including books, articles, videos, and audio, are listed in the workshop outline for each session and emailed to participants ahead of the upcoming session.

MAP Workshop Themes

Session 1 - The Brain

Mindfulness

Session 2 - Emotional Intelligence

Attachment Theory

Session 3 - Emotional Styles

Seeing the Mind

Session 4 - Wellbeing

Wellbeing Practices

Session 5 - Parent Competencies

Parent Styles

Session 6 - Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness

Discipline and Love

Workshop Materials

Participants

- Journal or Notebook
- Comfortable clothing

Facilitator

- Computer
- Bluetooth Speaker
- Projector and Projector Screen
- Name Tags
- Large Post-It Note Paper
- Markers
- Meditation Bowl or Chime
- Printed Agenda for each session
- Session 6 requires some additional supplies for the Putting it all together activity:
 - Blank Puzzle pieces - 10 per attendee
 - Cardboard piece for each person
 - Glue
 - Program Evaluation Form (see also link to google docs)

Session 1

The Brain

Mindfulness

Introductions (15 Minutes)

- Facilitator(s) introduction and background. Brief overview of the program and how it came to be.
- Ask each participant to introduce themselves and offer a little background on why they are here and anything they wish to share about their family.

Meeting Norms (2 Minutes)

- Please write your name and your child(rens) name on the name tag provided.
- Workshops will begin and end on time
- Listen respectfully when someone is speaking
- Respect privacy – What is shared in this space stays in this space
- Practice being open minded, supportive and non-judgmental
- Allow space for everyone to share

Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)

Brief breathing exercise

Signal the beginning of the mindful moment by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

it in your chair with your feet on the floor and your eyes closed or gazing at the floor. Feel your body sitting and bring your awareness to the body breathing. Count to five on each inbreath and again on each outbreath. Allow whatever is present in awareness to be as it is and when your mind wanders gently return to the breath. Do this for two minutes.

Signal the end of the exercise by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Agenda for Session 1

- Introductions (10 Minutes)
- Meeting Norms (2 Minutes)
- Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)
- Overview of Concepts we will present and Goals for the trainings (5 Minutes)
- Getting to know you (10 minutes)
- My Story and how that impacts my parenting (10 Minutes - includes discussion time)
- The Brain (30 Minutes)
- Seven Powers for Conscious Adults (10 minutes)
- Mindfulness (30 Minutes)
- Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)

Overview of the Training and Program Goals (5 Minutes)

- Provide information on emotional intelligence, its role in child development, and the connection with brain states and function.
- Review aspects of parenting approaches and styles and discuss how they affect parent/child interactions and possible children's outcomes.

- Develop awareness of the maps we carry with us to navigate our current parenting landscape.
- Recognize that brain plasticity allows for new skills and practices to evolve. We are not ‘stuck’ in the current mode without an off switch or new possibilities
- Introduce mindfulness as a valuable tool in developing self-awareness and an opportunity to move out of habitual responses to a more thoughtful proactive mindset.
- Create a consistent and common language in the Pine Village Preschool Community where parents, directors, and teachers synchronize their energies to benefit the children and families.
- Improve parent/child relationships and promote well-being for families and the entire Pine Village Community.

Getting to Know You (10 Minutes)

- What do you hope to get from these training sessions?
- What do you know about Mindfulness?
- Parenting issues, you would like to learn more about

My Story (10 Minutes)

- Talk about the 4 basic emotions: Anger, Sadness, Fear & Joy - where they are experienced in the Brain and Body. How aware am I of these emotions as they arise and how do I respond?
- My story - How I was parented.
- My parenting map - Is it the same, opposite or a mix of the way I was raised?
- Importance of self-awareness as a starting place in parenting and all life pursuits.

Discussion Suggestion

Share something from your childhood that you believe impacts the way you parent today.

The Brain (30 Minutes)**Daniel Siegel's Hand Model of The Brain**

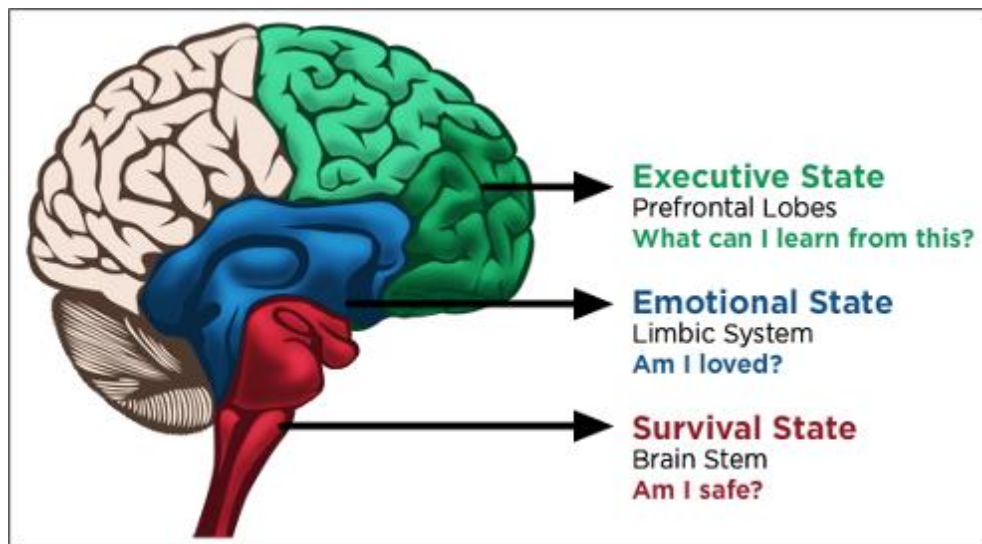
Link: [Dr Daniel Siegel presenting a Hand Model of the Brain](#) (Video 3 Minutes)

- Implications of Brain in emotional regulation and parenting

Dr, Becky Bailey: Conscious Discipline

Dr Bailey defines Conscious Discipline as:

Conscious Discipline is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary self-regulation program that integrates social-emotional learning, school culture and discipline. It helps teachers and administrators build schools based on internal resources of safety, connection and problem solving instead of external rewards and punishments. (2015, p. 12)

Brain State Model

(Bailey, B. 2021)

Bailey (2021) describes how the brain and body are interconnected and how Conscious Discipline trains us to use this connection to regulate emotions:

- Conscious Discipline empowers us to be conscious of brain-body states in ourselves and children. It then provides us with the practical skills we need to manage our thoughts, feelings and actions. With the ability to self-regulate, we are then able to teach children to do the same. By doing this, we help children who are physically aggressive (survival state) or verbally aggressive (emotional state) become more integrated so they can learn and use problem-solving skills (executive state). When we understand the brain state model, we can clearly see the importance of building our homes, schools and businesses on the core principles of safety, connection and problem-solving. (Bailey, 2021)
- The three states represent Safety (Brain Stem), Connection (Limbic System), and Problem Solving (Executive State).
- Conscious Discipline proposes a shift out of more traditional approaches to discipline involving fear, judgement and rejection and replacing these with discipline offered from a place of love, acceptance, and compassion.
- Discipline is not something we impose on children to gain obedience; it is something we teach children to become the best they can be.

Seven Powers for Conscious Adults (10 Minutes)

1. Power of Perception

- No one can make you angry without your permission.
- **Goal:** Take responsibility for our own upset and, in turn, teach children to

be responsible for their own behavior.

2. Power of Unity

- We are all in this together.
- **Goal:** To perceive compassionately and offer compassion to others and to ourselves.

3. Power of Attention

- What we focus on, we get more of. When we are upset, we are always focused on what we don't want.
- **Goal:** To create images of expected behavior in a child's brain.

4. Power of Free Will

- The only person you can make change is yourself.
- **Goal:** Learning to connect and guide instead of force and coerce.

5. Power of Acceptance

- The moment is as it is.
- **Goal:** To learn to respond to what life offers instead of attempting to make the world go our way.

6. Power of Love

- See the best in others. ("Seven Powers | Conscious Discipline", 2021)
- **Goal:** Seeing the best in others keeps us in the higher centers of our brain so we can consciously respond instead of unconsciously react to life events

Link: [Conscious Discipline Basics - Conscious Discipline Skills](#) (Video 5-6 minutes)

Mindfulness (30 Mins)

Definition

Jon Kabat-Zinn is recognized as one of the people who popularized mindfulness as a secular practice in the West. He is founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, currently used by many health and wellness coaches and medical personnel throughout the world. His definition of mindfulness is one of my personal favorites because it captures all the key components of mindfulness with just a hint of the promise it holds:

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally,” says Kabat-Zinn. “And then I sometimes add, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom” (Mindful, 2017)

Mindfulness Practice Benefits

- Mindfulness meditation helps individuals to develop awareness, learn to better self-regulate, reduce stress and increase the ability to attend to tasks. Evidence suggests that meditation practice may also alter neurological systems in the brain with lasting, positive changes (Hölzel et al., 2011).
- Daniel Siegel addresses the changes that happen in the brain as a result of practicing mindfulness and the way it affects our relationships with ourselves and the world (Siegel, D. 2010). We will explore this in more depth in Session 3.
- In an inspirational story by Katia Hetter (2012), a newly divorced mother with a four-year-old daughter who, by becoming more present, was better equipped to navigate the journey and enjoy the process. She recounts:

With practice, I can now feel the light switch quietly clicks off my brain. It's OK. I know other parents feel the same way. I can rest for a minute. Then I can go back into my brain and turn it back on, quite deliberately, and be present for the next mundane or sad or joyful moment (Hetter, K, 2012).

Her story captures the essence of what developing a mindfulness practice can contribute to the parenting journey.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

In Buddhist philosophy there are 4 foundations of mindfulness:

1. Mindfulness of Body

- The body consists of many parts (e.g head, hands, feet etc.) and the idea is to become mindful of each part, not the whole.
- Recognize that the body is not ‘me’, it is not my body or myself but many parts.

2. Mindfulness of Feelings

- Pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. When we are able to separate and identify them we see that they are impermanent.

3. Mindfulness of Mind

- External sources: mind states that result from our senses: sight, smell, taste, touch and sound
- Internal sources: mind states that result from: memories, imagination and daydreaming.

4. Mindfulness of Dhammas

- Not just the teachings of the Buddha but also serves to remind us that the truth is available to all, it is within each one of us.
- Nobody can solve your problems but you, solutions can only come from within (Gunaratana, 2018).

Homework/Extension Activities**Journal Prompt**

Personal Awareness: Observe the times you experience Anger, Joy, Sadness & Fear this week. Who/What triggers these

Relationship Awareness: Patterns of interactions with your child(ren). Do you recognize influences from your parents or extended family?

Home Mindful Practice: Mindful Breathing 5 minutes each day

Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)

Mindful Breathing with Jon Kabat-Zinn

Link: [Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD – Guided Mindfulness Meditation Series 1 \(Audio Excerpt\) \(10 Minutes\)](#)

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Session 2

Emotional Intelligence

Attachment Theory

Introductions (15 Minutes)

- Facilitator(s) introduction and background. Brief overview of the program and how it came to be.
- Ask new participants to introduce themselves and give a little background on why they are here and anything they wish to share about their family.

Meeting Norms (2 Minutes)

- Please write your name and your child(rens) on the name tag provided.
- Workshops will begin and end on time
- Listen respectfully when someone is speaking
- Respect privacy – What is shared in this space stays in this space
- Practice being open minded, supportive and non-judgmental
- Allow space for everyone to share

Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)

Brief breathing exercise

Signal the beginning of the mindful moment by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Script

Sit in your chair with your feet on the floor and your eyes closed or gazing at the floor. Feel your body sitting and bring your awareness to the body breathing. Count to five on each inbreath and again on each outbreath. Allow whatever is present in awareness to be as it is and when your mind wanders gently return to the breath. Do this for two minutes.

Signal the end of the exercise by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Agenda for Session 2

- Introductions (15 Minutes)
- Meeting Norms (2 Minutes)
- Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)
- Emotional Intelligence (30 Mins - includes discussion time)
- Mindful Practice (8 Minutes)
- Emotional Developmental Milestones (15 Mins)
- Attachment Theory (30 Mins - includes discussion time)
- Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)

Emotional Intelligence (30 Minutes)

Definition of Emotional Intelligence

"Emotional intelligence refers to an ability to recognize the meaning of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve based on them" (Mayer et al., 1999 p. 267).

5 Areas of Emotional Intelligence Daniel Goleman

1. Knowing One's Emotions - Self-Awareness

Knowing what we are feeling in the moment presents an opportunity to monitor the feelings and choose how to act in that moment. Helps one to be confident in making decisions because of a greater understanding of what one needs.

2. Managing Emotions - Self-Regulation.

An ability to manage emotions so that responses are in proportion to circumstances. This also allows for quicker recovery from distressing situations and allows one to move on more smoothly

3. Self-Motivation.

Handling emotions with an appropriate response and focus is crucial for attending to bigger goals in life. It underlies the ability to delay gratification, pay attention and be more efficient.

4. Recognizing Emotions in Others - Empathy.

The ability to understand other people's emotions is essential in all interactions with others. Goleman calls it the ultimate “people skill” (p. 43). People strong in this area of emotional intelligence are better at detecting the emotional states of others and reading the social cues.

5. Handling Relationships - Social skills.

This involves understanding and handling other people's emotions. This ability underlies “popularity, leadership, and interpersonal effectiveness” (2006, p. 43)

Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional intelligence*.

Discussion Suggestions

Choose one of these areas and reflect on why/how it resonates with you. Can you relate to ways it helped or hindered in your relationships and how it might impact on parenting?

Share if you wish.

Mindful Practice (8 Minutes)

Mindful Walking with Jack Kornfield

Link: [Walking Meditation - Jack Kornfield by Jack Kornfield](#) (Audio 7-8 Mins)

Emotional Developmental Milestones (15 Minutes)

At 2 Months

- Begins to smile at people
- Can briefly calm himself
- Tries to look at parent

At 6 Months

- Knows familiar faces and begins to know when someone is a stranger
- Likes to play with others, especially parents
- Responds to other people's emotions and often seems happy
- Likes to look at self in mirror

At 9 Months

- May be afraid of Strangers
- May be clingy with familiar adults
- Has favorite toys

At 12 Months

- Is shy or nervous with strangers
- Cries when parents/caregivers leave
- Has favorite things and people
- Shows fear in some situations
- Hands you a book when they want to hear a story
- Repeats sounds or actions to get attention
- Puts out arm or leg to help with dressing
- Plays games such as "peek-a-boo" and "pat-a-cake"

At 2 Years

- Copies others, especially adults and older children
- Gets excited when with other children
- Shows increasing independence
- Shows defiant behavior
- Plays mainly beside other children but beginning to include other children e.g game of chase

At 3 years

- Copies adults and friends
- Shows affection for friends without prompting
- Takes turns in games
- Shows concern for a crying friend
- Understands idea of “mine” and “theirs”
- Shows a wide range of emotions
- Separates easily from mom and dad
- May get upset with major changes in routine
- Dresses and undresses self

At 4 Years

- Enjoys doing new things
- Plays the role of pretend parent
- Is more and more creative with make-believe play
- Would rather play with other children than alone
- Cooperates with other children

- Often can't tell what's real and what's make-belief
- Talks about what they like and what they are interested in

At 5 Years

- Wants to please friends
- Wants to be like friends
- More likely to agree with rules
- Likes to sing, dance and act
- Is aware of gender
- Can tell difference between real and make-belief
- Is More independent
- Sometimes demanding and sometimes very cooperative ("CDC's Developmental Milestones", 2020)

Link: [CDC's Developmental Milestones](#)

Attachment Theory (30 Minutes)

A child's first attachment is formed during the bonding that happens between parents or other primary caregivers and a newborn. Daniel Siegel proposes that "Attachment lays the foundation for how a child comes to approach the world, and a healthy attachment in the early years provides a secure base from which children can learn about themselves and others" (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003, p. 106)

Siegel, D., & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out*

Siegel describes 4 types of Attachment

1. Secure

This develops in the presence of a caregiver who is aware of the child's needs and responsive to them in a consistent warm manner.

2. Avoidant - Insecure

The caregiver is unaware, insensitive and unresponsive to the child's needs

3. Ambivalent - Insecure

The caregiver is inconsistent in level of awareness of the child's needs and responsiveness. They may also behave intrusively, not recognizing that the child is not ready or does not want to interact.

4. Disorganized - Insecure

This attachment type usually results from a feeling of frustration and irritation at the behavior of the child by the caregiver. It may result in the child feeling frightened, alarmed and disoriented.

Facilitator shares own experience and also talks about the connection between family dynamics and the beliefs I have today.

Discussion Suggestions

How did my family and extended family manage emotions?

Fear

Anger

Sadness

Joy

Are we consciously or unconsciously following the same patterns? It is not good or bad but being aware allows us to have insight and make choices.

Homework/Extension Activities

Journal Prompt: Think about an important person in your life and why you felt attached to them. How did this shape your life?

Home Mindful Practice: Mindful Walking

Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)**Eating a Raisin (Choose an alternative food if you prefer)**

Below you will find a video version and a script version.

Link: [Raisin Exercise](#) (Video 10 Mins)

Link: [How to Eat Mindfully](#) (Script 10 Mins)

Sit comfortably in a chair.

1. Place a raisin in your hand.
2. Examine the raisin as if you had never seen it before.
3. Imagine it as its "plump self" growing on the vine surrounded by nature.
4. As you look at the raisin, become conscious of what you see: the shape, texture, color, size. Is it hard or soft?
5. Bring the raisin to your nose and smell it.
6. Are you anticipating eating the raisin? Is it difficult not to just pop it in your mouth?
7. How does the raisin feel? How small is it in your hand?
8. Place the raisin in your mouth. Become aware of what your tongue is doing.
9. Bite ever so lightly into the raisin. Feel its squishiness.
10. Chew three times and then stop.
11. Describe the flavor of the raisin. What is the texture?

12. As you complete chewing, swallow the raisin.

13. Sit quietly, breathing, aware of what you are sensing.

Kabat-Zinn discusses the experience thus:

The raisin exercise dispels all previous concepts we may be harboring about meditation. It immediately places it in the realm of the ordinary, the everyday, the world you already know but are now going to know differently. Eating one raisin very, very slowly allows you to drop right into the knowing in ways that are effortless, totally natural, and entirely beyond words and thinking. Such an exercise delivers wakefulness immediately. There is in this moment only tasting. ("How to Eat Mindfully | Taking Charge of Your Health & Wellbeing", 2016).

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<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/activities/how-eat-mindfully>.

Session 3

Emotional Styles

Seeing the Mind

Introductions (10 Minutes)

- Facilitator(s) introduction and background. Brief overview of the program and the reasons how it came to be.
- Ask new participants to introduce themselves and a little background on why they are here and anything they wish to share about their family.

Meeting Norms (Reference)

- Please write your name and your child(rens) name on the name tag provided.
- Workshops will begin and end on time
- Listen respectfully when someone is speaking
- Respect privacy – What is shared in this space stays in this space
- Practice being open minded, supportive and non-judgmental
- Allow space for everyone to share

Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)

Brief breathing exercise

Signal the beginning of the mindful moment by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Script

Sit in your chair with your feet on the floor and your eyes closed or gazing at the floor. Feel your body sitting and bring your awareness to the body breathing. Count to five on each inbreath and again on each outbreath. Allow whatever is present in awareness to be as it is and when your

mind wanders gently return to the breath. Do this for two minutes. Signal the end of the exercise by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Agenda for Session 3

- Introductions (10 Minutes)
- Meeting Norms (Posted on Board - Reference only)
- Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)
- The Emotional Life of your brain (15 Minutes - includes discussion time)
- Daniel Siegel - Mindsight (20 Mins)
- Triangle of well-being (20 Minutes)
- 9 Pre-Frontal Functions (20 Minutes)
- River of Integration (FACES) (20 Minutes - includes discussion time)
- Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)

The Emotional Life of Your Brain (15 Minutes)

Six dimensions of your emotional style

Davidson, R., & Begley, S. (2013). *The emotional life of your brain*

1. Resilience

How quickly or slowly you recover from adversity.

2. Outlook

How long you are able to sustain positive emotion.

3. Social Intuition

How adept you are at picking up social signals from the people around you.

4. Self - Awareness

How well you perceive bodily feelings that reflect emotions.

5. Sensitivity to Context

How good you are at regulating your emotional responses to take into account the context you find yourself in.

6. Attention

How sharp and clear your focus is. (p. xiv)

These are all teachable skills and learned with practice.

Discussion Suggestions

Think about a happy experience you had in your childhood. Why was it happy?

Role of Memory in our lives

Recordare in Latin means to pass again through the heart (Core = Heart)

- Impact of positive childhood experiences in our childhood
- The way our past stories impact our current realities

Daniel Siegel - Mindsight (20 Minutes)

I am including a link in the resources section at the end for anyone who is interested in learning more about Daniel Siegel and his extensive work in neuroscience, parenting, education and much more.

Mindsight Definition

Mindsight is a kind of focused attention that allows us to see the internal working of our own minds. It helps us to be aware of our mental processes without being swept away by them, enables us to get ourselves off the autopilot of ingrained behaviors and habitual responses, and moves us beyond the reactive emotional

loops we have a tendency to get trapped in. It lets us “name and tame” the emotions we experience, rather than being overwhelmed by them. (p. ix-x)

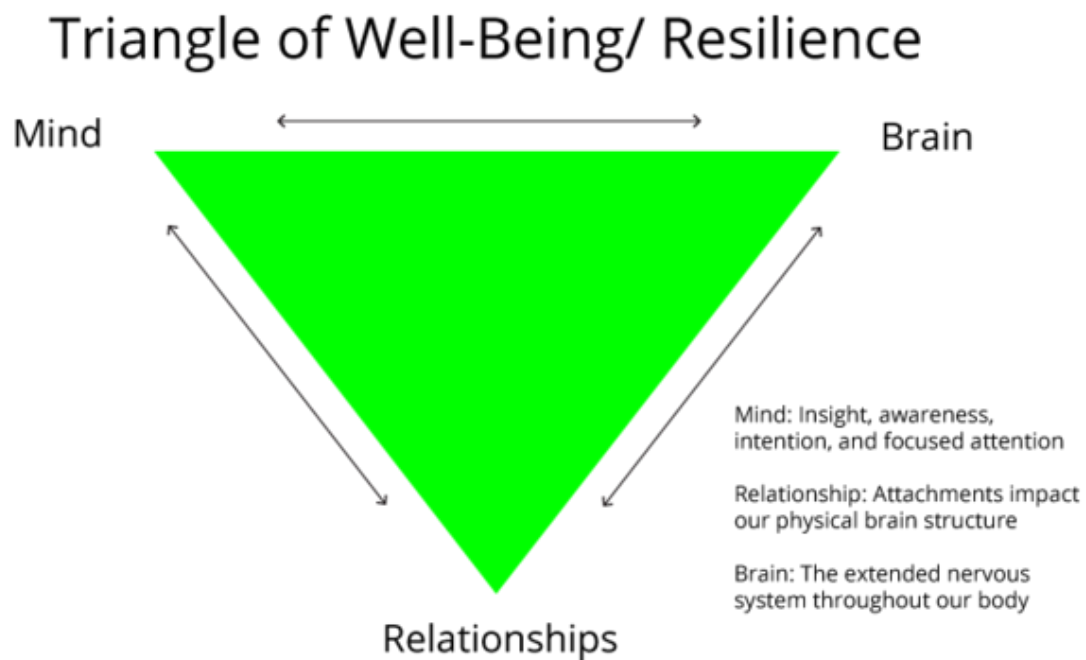
- Mindsight is the ability to “see the mind”
- Cultivating Mindsight can help transform the brain at the physical level of the brain - Neuroplasticity.
- Mindsight is a learnable skill - when we train the mind to ‘see’ itself we can choose where to put our focus and build stronger connections with the outcomes we wish to encourage
- Wellbeing emerges when we create connections in our lives, when we learn to use mindsight to help the brain achieve Integration.

Siegel, D. (2010). *Mindsight*

Triangle of Well-being (20 Minutes)

Link: [Triangle of Well-Being | Trauma Recovery](#)

The Triangle of Well-being and Resilience model, developed by Dr. Dan Siegel (2010), demonstrates how our thoughts and experiences literally shape the physical connections between the various parts of our brain. The arrows in Dr. Siegel’s model below point in every direction. Each point in the triangle interacts with the other two to create continuous feedback loops. The model demonstrates our mind, brain and relationships are parts of an open system that is continually responding to new experiences. This capacity for change (neuroplasticity) is a new idea. Not too long ago scientists were certain that once the basic structure of the brain was formed in childhood and physical reworking of the connections in the brain was impossible.



Dr. Siegel goes further to say that the “mind”, our thoughts and feelings, can and do interact with the physical nervous system to influence how we respond to experiences throughout our lives.

What we intend and pay attention to directs and regulates electrical and chemical signals so that physical changes can be detected with scans that measure activity (like blood flow) in the living brain.

Relationships are part of this model because we form our view of the world through interactions with our parents, caregivers, teachers, friends and the larger community. These relationships, especially with care givers in our earliest months, have a profound effect on how our brain develops and what our mind will be preoccupied with. Our internalized experience of these interactions with our care givers will be the template that informs, often unconsciously, our relationships throughout life.

In this model, mind, brain and relationships co-evolve to make up who we are. This is particularly true when we are babies. It is our earliest relationships that lay down the blueprint of our developing brain. The study of parental influence on young children's development has been explored through viewing the results of various forms of parent-infant bonding in Attachment Theory (Bowlby,1988). ("Triangle of Well-Being | Trauma Recovery", 2013).

9 Pre-Frontal Functions (20 Minutes)

Link: [Nine Critical Functions of Your Attuned Middle Prefrontal Cortex](#)

1. Body regulations
2. Attuned Communication
3. Emotional Balance
4. Response Flexibility
5. Fear Modulation
6. Empathy
7. Insight - Self Knowing
8. Moral Awareness
9. Intuition (Siegel, n.d.)

River of Integration (FACES) (20 Minutes)

Flexible

Adaptive

Coherent

Energized

Stable

When we lack these elements, we tend towards the banks of the river - Rigidity or Chaos

Siegel, D. (2010). *Mindsight*

Discussion Suggestions

This is a lot of information - how do you see these pieces impact parenting.

Thoughts on the value of knowing your mind and self-awareness.

We can have the mind we want if we train it - who believes this and how do we train it?

Homework/ Extension Activities

Home Mindfulness Practice: Body Scan

Assessing your Emotional Style: Read Chapter 3 of *The emotional life of your brain* and answer the questions to get your own emotional style profile

Journal Prompt:

- Think about a difficult experience in your childhood. How did you deal with it?
- What was your physical response? (hit, hide, steam)
- What was your emotional response? (anger, sadness, fear)
- Write two words that reflect what you discovered about your style
- How can you apply that learning to your parenting and relationships now?

Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)

Body Scan

Link: [A 10-Minute Full Body Scan Meditation by mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org/10-minute-full-body-scan-meditation/) (10 Mins)

Resources:

A 10-Minute Full Body Scan Meditation. soundcloud. (2020).

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Session 4

Wellbeing

Wellbeing Practices

Introductions (10 Minutes)

- Facilitator(s) introduction and background. Brief overview of the program and the reasons how it came to be.
- Ask new participants to introduce themselves and a little background on why they are here and anything they wish to share about their family.

Meeting Norms (Reference)

- Please write your name and your child(rens) name on the name tag provided.
- Workshops will begin and end on time
- Listen respectfully when someone is speaking
- Respect privacy – What is shared in this space stays in this space
- Practice being open minded, supportive and non-judgmental
- Allow space for everyone to share

Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)

Brief breathing exercise

Signal the beginning of the mindful moment by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Script

Sit in your chair with your feet on the floor and your eyes closed or gazing at the floor. Feel your body sitting and bring your awareness to the body breathing. Count to five on each inbreath and again on each outbreath. Allow whatever is present in awareness to be as it is and when your mind wanders gently return to the breath. Do this for two minutes.

Full Disclosure

The content, format and practices in this session are taken from an online workshop I attended through the Center for Healthy Minds and based on the information shared by Richard Davidson. The layout and information presented offered a perfect balance between delivering pertinent content and an opportunity for practice. This training was developed based on research conducted by the University of Wisconsin- Madison. Findings indicated that emotional well-being can be taught and learned by practices infused into daily life.

Link: [A look into the science of well-being and the Healthy Minds Framework from the Center for Healthy Minds at UW–Madison.](#)

Agenda for Session 4

- Introductions (10 Minutes)
- Meeting Norms (Posted on Board - Reference only)
- Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)
- Four Pillars of wellbeing (5 Minutes)
- Awareness and Practice (20 Minutes)
- Connection and Practice (20 Minutes)
- Insight and Practice (20 Minutes)
- Purpose in Life and Practice (20 Minutes)
- Discussion (15 Minutes)

Four Pillars of Wellbeing (5 Minutes)

Richard Davidson outlines 4 areas of life that can be trained through meditation and increase wellbeing.

1. Awareness (20 Minutes)

What it is

A heightened, flexible attentiveness to your environment and internal cues such as bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings. Training in awareness during meditation practices can increase what's called "meta-awareness" or being aware of what is happening in your mind.

What it looks like

- Noticing thoughts, feelings, sensations as they arise - commonly called mindfulness
- Catching yourself from being distracted or in auto-pilot mode while doing daily tasks like cleaning or driving

The Science

- People with higher levels of awareness have higher levels of well-being and positive emotions.
- Distraction, the main detractor from awareness, can impair executive function as well as increase stress and anxiety, ADHD symptoms, and depression.
- Some studies show that distraction and the effects of perceived stress can harm our health and produce stress responses in the body related to inflammation and aging.
- Bringing awareness to one's thoughts recruits lateral regions of the prefrontal cortex that form part of the brain's central-executive network.

The Practice (10 Minutes)

Script

Close your eyes and take 10 intentional breaths, counting each silently and noticing how each inhale and exhale feels in your body. What do you notice? Whatever arises is fine. It's the noticing that matters (Minds, 2021).

Audio

Link: [A Tour of the Senses: 10-minute Sitting Practice \(10 mins\)](#)

2. Connection (20 Minutes)

What it is

A feeling of care and kinship toward other people, promoting supportive relationships and supportive interactions.

What it Looks like

- Acknowledging people's differences (like politics or points of view), and trying to understand that person's unique perspective and acknowledge that just like you, they are worthy of dignity and respect as a fellow human being.
- Showing appreciation to people in your life by acknowledging them and sharing why you're grateful for them.
- Focusing on a shared characteristic when you meet someone for the first time.

The Science

- Forming negative first impressions (or even neutral ones in some cases), can potentially lead to apathy, intergroup bias, and perceived social isolation.
- Social relationships are better predictors of health than some biological and economic factors.

- Making inferences about someone we perceive to be similar to ourselves activates the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is central to the perception of social safety and feelings of social connection.
- One Center study has reported that just 30 minutes of compassion meditation training per day over the course of two weeks resulted in changes in people's caring behaviors as well as resulted in measurable changes in the brain

The Practice (10 Minutes)

Script

Make a habit of noticing the positive in other people. You do this as a sitting meditation practice by bringing a close friend or family member to mind and noticing things you admire or appreciate about them. Recall situations where they expressed these qualities and then imagine expressing your appreciation. You can then extend this to people you don't know very well and eventually even to people you find challenging. Then apply this skill in daily life by noticing the positive in the people you see and interact with and expressing your appreciation (Minds, 2021).

Audio

Link: [Appreciation: Sitting Practice by Healthy Minds Innovations](#) (10 Mins)

3. Insight (20 Minutes)

What it is

Self-knowledge concerning how our emotions, thoughts and beliefs shape our experiences and sense of self.

What it Looks like

- Recognizing an anxious thought and being curious whether it's coming from a fearful expectation or self-criticism

- Clarify and challenge “unchangeable” beliefs about yourself and people around you

The Science

- Rigid and negative self-beliefs can result in an increase in mental health disorders, while accepting and growth-oriented beliefs about the self are linked to lower levels of depression and anxiety and even things like improved academic performance.
- Scientific studies of the self suggest that there does not appear to be a single, unitary network associated with insight in the brain.
- Meditators with significant experience who have done insight-related deconstructive meditation appear to show enduring changes in self-related processing in the brain.

The Practice (10 Minutes)

Script

If you've ever found yourself already in a bad mood before even joining a meeting, that's a moment for insight. You can question your assumptions, and notice them (Minds, 2021).

Audio

Link: [Deconstructing Inner Experience \(10 Min - Seated\) by Healthy Minds Innovations](#)

(10 mins)

4. Purpose in Life (20 Minutes)

What it is

Being clear about your core values and deeper motivation and being able to apply them in your daily life.

What it looks like

- Being able to link mundane activities with a meaningful value or motivation, such as doing the dishes as an act of generosity for the people you live with

- Viewing challenges and setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow, including strengthening your connection to meaningful values and goals

The Science

- A strong sense of purpose is associated with improved health outcomes and behaviors, including increased physical activity, decreased incidence of stroke, fewer cardiovascular events, reduced risk of death, lower health care utilization, and even better financial health.
- In a sample of African Americans at high-risk for psychiatric disorders, purpose in life emerged as a key factor predicting resilience and recovery from traumatic events.
- A pioneering study found people who prioritized more transcendent values (those that extend beyond themselves) had different activity in the left and right amygdala and left anterior insula, suggesting more transcendent values may reduce defensiveness and promote openness.

The Practice (5 Minutes)

Script

In moments of hardship (like many people around the world are experiencing this year with the pandemic), identify what is most meaningful to you. For some whose aspirations might be to create a kinder world, how can you find actionable ways to be kind in this moment?

Audio

Link: [Purpose Practice: Core Values by Healthy Minds Innovations](#) (5 mins)

Discussion Suggestion (15 Minutes)

How do you think these pillars can help you in your relationships with your child(ren), Family members?

Homework/ Extension Activities

- Write in your journal daily. Reflect and write about your emotional states throughout the day. Develop this as a mindful habit because it is an opportunity to increase self-awareness, notice our mind states and start to ‘name and tame’ strong emotions.
- Write also about 3 things you are grateful for at the end of each day
- Repeat some of the practices we did during this workshop session.

Resources

Dahl, C., Wilson-Mendenhall, C., & Davidson, R. (2020). The plasticity of well-being: A training-based framework for the cultivation of human flourishing. *Proceedings Of The National Academy Of Sciences*, 117(51), 32197-32206.

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2014859117>

Minds, C. (2021). *A look into the science of well-being and the Healthy Minds Framework from the Center for Healthy Minds at UW–Madison - Center for Healthy Minds*.

Centerhealthyminds.org. <https://centerhealthyminds.org/about/why-well-being>.

Session 5

Parent Competencies

Parent Styles

Introductions (10 Minutes)

- Facilitator(s) introduction and background. Brief overview of the program and the reasons how it came to be.
- Ask new participants to introduce themselves and a little background on why they are here and anything they wish to share about their family.

Meeting Norms (Reference)

- Please write your name and your child(rens) name on the name tag provided.
- Workshops will begin and end on time
- Listen respectfully when someone is speaking
- Respect privacy – What is shared in this space stays in this space
- Practice being open minded, supportive and non-judgmental
- Allow space for everyone to share

Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)

Brief breathing exercise

Signal the beginning of the mindful moment by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Script

Sit in your chair with your feet on the floor and your eyes closed or gazing at the floor. Feel your body sitting and bring your awareness to the body breathing. Count to five on each inbreath and again on each outbreath. Allow whatever is present in awareness to be as it is and when your mind wanders gently return to the breath. Do this for two minutes.

Agenda for Session 5

- Introductions (10 Minutes)
- Meeting Norms (Reference)
- Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)
- Parent Competencies (40 Minutes)
- Parenting Styles (20 Minutes)
- Parenting From The Inside Out (30 Minutes - includes discussion time)
- Mindful Practice (6 Minutes)

Discussion Suggestion

Think about one person in your life who had a profound impact and why they were influential.

Share if you wish.

Parent Competencies (40 Minutes)**Children Learn by Observing**

“Remember that modeling "emotionally intelligent" behavior at home is the first step in nurturing emotionally intelligent children” (“Social and Emotional Learning: Strategies for Parents”, 2001 section 1, para.1).

Important Skills for Parents to Embody and Model

1. Empathy
2. Conflict Management
3. Assertion
4. Emotional Intelligence

Children learn through Parent-Child Relationship and Observing Adult Relationships in Their Family. Children learn about their intrinsic value as well as the way they view the world from the way they were parented. This first experience with relationships both parental and family is an important one, it is where they first learn about relationships and develop the ability to trust or mistrust.

Teachable Skills for Parents: (Dereli, 2016)

1. Communication
2. Relationship Building
3. Conflict Resolution
4. Positive Parent Relationships

Activity

Watch 3 short Videos from Don Miguel Ruiz on The Four Agreements

Link: [The Four Agreements — don Miguel Ruiz](#)

Link: <https://youtu.be/SBielOoXDUE> (3:30 mins)

Link: <https://youtu.be/b1ZN02AFg6w> (4:00 mins)

Link: <https://youtu.be/D9o8ZGTlt28> (4:00 mins)

Discussion Suggestion

Share two nuggets you take away from these videos and how you think they might contribute to relationships and parenting.

Parenting Styles (20 Minutes)

Described by Darling and Steinberg (1993) as "...a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviors are expressed" (p. 488).

Research suggests that Parent style affects a broad spectrum of areas in child development, including emotional intelligence and peer relationships.

Four Styles

1. Authoritative

- Warm, Loving, balanced with clear limits but encouraging independence.

2. Authoritarian

- Dictatorial - Do as I say approach. No room for child input

3. Democratic

- Warm and Nurturing with encouragement to see other's perspective

4. Tolerant

- Warm and Nurturing but without many if any limits.

Warm nurturing supportive styles such as Authoritative and democratic styles help develop emotional intelligence, peer relationships, academic success. The opposite is true of both permissive styles with Harsh styles even more damaging for children. (Wang, Li & Zhu, 2019)

Parenting from the Inside Out (30 Minutes)

Key Concepts:

- Need to understand how our past and present experiences affect our current lives and parenting practices and styles.
- Two Types of Memory:
 - Implicit - unconscious, unaware & automatic - abstract- develops in-vitro
 - Explicit - conscious, memories, concrete - starts to develop 18/24 months
- We are mostly unaware of how both of these affect our current parenting
- Integration is key:

- Right/left brain
- Upstairs/downstairs
- Temporal - connecting past. Present and future
- How? Connect the dots using stories to help make sense of our story. When we are unconscious, we react in autopilot mode and are not in control.
 - Journaling - recounting memories. Explore How you felt about these events? How old were you?
- Secure Attachment
 - Created when a parent is aware of their past
 - Able to resolve unresolved trauma
 - The past does not define the present and the cycle is broken
- Suggestions on Ways to develop awareness:
 - Understanding oneself involves reflection. Journaling, mindfulness meditation, speak to a counselor are all good options
 - Reflect on arguments you had with your child - ask why, explore the outcome and think about alternative approaches you could have taken
 - Repair is possible - Speak with your child about interaction, acknowledge your reaction was not appropriate and that you are not perfect
 - Conflict is uncomfortable - accept that reality
 - Develop self-compassion first - enables compassion for others.

Discussion Suggestions

Think about a time you were 'triggered' by your child's behavior and reflect on your past think about why that may have caused you to react that way?

What might you have done differently if you were aware of this connection at the time?

Homework/ Extension Activities

Journal Prompts

- Think about the behaviors that are most difficult for you with your child(ren) and record those.
- Write about some of the memories that stand out in your mind when you were the same age as one of your children is now.
- Reflect on the way I was parented and how that affects the way I approach parenting.
- Identify the people in my life and particularly my family who were the main actors and role models for me.
- Do I embrace or reject the ways I was and be curious about where your current map comes from?

Mindful Practice (6 Minutes)

Compassion Meditation

Link: <https://youtu.be/Y-z4HqdTQFw> (6 Minutes)

Resources

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Psychological Bulletin, 113(3), 487–496. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.113.3.487>

Dereli, E. (2016). Prediction of emotional understanding and emotion regulation skills of 4-5

age group children with parent-child relations. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(21), 42-54.

Edutopia. (2001). *Social and Emotional Learning: Strategies for Parents*.

<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-parent-resources>.

Memorial, H. (2020, February 21). *Guided Meditation Loving Compassion for Self*

Compassion. [Video] Youtube.com. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-z4HqdTQFw)

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<https://www.miguelruiz.com/the-four-agreements>.

Siegel, D., & Hartzell, M. (2003). *Parenting from the inside out: How a deeper*

self-understanding can help you raise children who thrive (10th ed.). Penguin Random

House.

Wang, Y., Li, Z., & Zhu, L. (2019). Emotional intelligence of 3- to 6-year-olds and parenting

style: Peer communication ability as a mediator. *Social Behavior and Personality: An*

International Journal, 47(12), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.8636>

Session 6

Buddhist Foundations of Mindfulness

Discipline and Love

Introductions (10 Minutes)

- Facilitator(s) introduction and background. Brief overview of the program and the reasons how it came to be.
- Ask new participants to introduce themselves and a little background on why they are here and anything they wish to share about their family.

Meeting Norms (Reference)

- Please write your name and your child(rens) name on the name tag provided.
- Workshops will begin and end on time
- Listen respectfully when someone is speaking
- Respect privacy – What is shared in this space stays in this space
- Practice being open minded, supportive and non-judgmental
- Allow space for everyone to share

Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)

Brief breathing exercise

Signal the beginning of the mindful moment by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Script

Sit in your chair with your feet on the floor and your eyes closed or gazing at the floor. Feel your body sitting and bring your awareness to the body breathing. Count to five on each inbreath and again on each outbreath. Allow whatever is present in awareness to be as it is and when your mind wanders gently return to the breath. Do this for two minutes.

Signal the end of the exercise by sounding the mindful bowl or chime.

Agenda for Session 6

- Introductions (10 Minutes)
- Meeting Norms (Reference)
- Mindful Moment (2 Minutes)
- Mindfulness (5 Minutes)
- Buddhist Origins and Foundations of Mindfulness (25 Minutes)
- Conscious Parenting (15 Minutes)
- Discipline (15 Minutes)
- Love (10 Minutes)
- Putting it all together (10 Minutes)
- Discussion (10 Minutes)
- Mindful Practice or continue discussion if participants wish to (15 Minutes)

Mindfulness (5 Minutes)

Definition (Also in Session 1)

Jon Kabat-Zinn is recognized as one of the people who popularized mindfulness as a secular practice in the West. He is founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, currently used by many health and wellness coaches and medical personnel throughout the world. His definition of mindfulness is one of my personal favorites because it captures all the key components of mindfulness with just a hint of the promise it holds:

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally,” says Kabat-Zinn. “And then I sometimes add, in the service of self-understanding and wisdom” (Mindful, 2017)

Buddhist Origins and Foundations of Mindfulness (25 Minutes)

Mindfulness is rooted in Buddhist philosophy, dating back over two thousand years. It is therefore important to touch on a couple of the Buddhist beliefs which underlie its origins.

Mindfulness is not a religious practice and is mostly practiced in the West in secular settings but having a snapshot into some Buddhist concepts is helpful to better understand the practice.

The Four Noble Truths

Buddhism proposes that there are four truths that are foundational for understanding the true nature of life. These are referred to as the Four Noble Truths, and a guide to living in ‘reality’ with an understanding that everything in life is impermanent.

1. Suffering is inevitable because everything is impermanent.
2. Suffering is caused by the inability to accept impermanence, rejecting the unpleasant and clinging to the pleasant.
3. It is possible to alleviate or end suffering by accepting the impermanent nature of everything, including life itself.
4. There is a path that leads to the end of suffering bringing peace and happiness.

This sounds like the perfect prescription for a wonderful life but, while it sounds easy, it takes discipline and practice.

The Eightfold Path

This is the path or prescription for living a life of wisdom and awakening to the reality that life is impermanent. Everything arises and passes away and seeing this reality allows one to be free

and live life authentically with peace and joy. There are eight steps on this path combined in three groups: Wisdom, Conduct and Meditation.

Wisdom

1. Right View

- Understand the Four Noble Truths
- See reality as it is

2. Right Intention

- Desirelessness
- Friendliness/Lovingkindness
- Compassion

3. Right Speech

- Truthfulness
- Refraining from divisive speech - slander and gossip
- Refraining from hurtful speech - harsh, angry and abusive
- Refraining from idle chatter - frivolous

Conduct

1. Right Action

- Refraining from harming living beings
- Refraining from taking what is not given
- Refraining from sexual misconduct

2. Right Livelihood

- Work or business that does no harm.

Meditation

1. Right effort

- Prevent unarisen unwholesome states
- Abandon unarisen unwholesome states
- Arouse unrisen wholesome states
- Develop arisen wholesome states

2. Right mindfulness

- Mindfulness of Body
- Mindfulness of feeling
- Mindfulness of mind
- Mindfulness of dharmal

3. Right Concentration

- Practice of the 4 Jhanas - "...a set of states of deep and subtle concentration focused on a single object" (Talbot, 2004).

Conscious Parenting (15 Minutes)

This Quote from Shefali Tsabary (2018) perfectly summarizes what it means to be both mindful and a Conscious Parent:

“To be fully present to our reality, *as it is*, and not *as we wish it to be*, requires us to silence our mind and detach from our preoccupation with the past and the future. It requires us to center ourselves in the here and now. Instead of seeing everything through the veil of polarizing thought, we enter into *a state of pure presence*. (p. 258)

Conscious parenting requires parents to be present when they are in the presence of their children. They are also modeling this behavior for their child(ren) who can become self-aware, capable of being peaceful, and able to access “their inner joy” (p. 258).

Some Key points from Tsabary's book

- The problem is our unconsciousness not our children
- Conscious beings are naturally loving and authentic.
- We teach by example.
- Do not take children's actions or behaviors personally - they are simply communicating and asking for help.
- Correction should always happen in the moment.
- Teenagers do not ask for permission
- We need to respect who children are and where they are at any given moment. Otherwise, we invalidate their being and are asking them to 'please us'
- Emotional Reactivity is resistance to the way it is.
- All conflict is an opportunity to learn. Positive reinforcement works better than punitive consequences
- A conscious parent trusts that their child is the author of his/her own destiny

Discussion Suggestions

What are the common themes you see throughout our work together so far?

What are you applying to your parenting experience?

Discipline - Dr. M. Scott Peck (15 Minutes)**Teachings**

- Life is difficult (First Noble Truth)
 - When we understand and accept this reality then life is less difficult
- Life is a series of problems and we want to give our children the tools to solve them
- Discipline is the basic tool to solve problems

- Without discipline we cannot solve any problems
 - With some discipline we solve some problems
 - With complete discipline we can solve most problems.
- Life is difficult because problems evoke strong emotions depending on their nature, we may frustration, anger, fear, sadness and other uncomfortable feelings
 - Avoiding pain and ‘problems’ is the source of all mental illness. “Neurosis is always a substitute for legitimate suffering” (Carl Jung 1938) *Psychology and Religion*.
 - Discipline allows us to learn how to live with suffering and when we teach our children this, we also teach them how to grow.

Four Tools of Discipline

1. Delaying Gratification

- Scheduling the pain and pleasure of life to meet the pain first and work through it.
- Parents lead the way by example
- A quick fix approach derails this approach

2. Responsibility

- We cannot solve a problem if we do not take responsibility and decide to ‘see’ and face it.
- Problems are not solved:
 - By saying, “this is not my problem”
 - By hoping someone else will solve it for me
 - By blaming others for my problem

- The middle ground of responsibility depends on taking the right amount of responsibility. The extremes lead are characterized as neurotic at one extreme or a character disorder at the other.

3. Dedication to Reality or the Truth

- When we have clarity, we are better able to live in reality and deal with the pain and pleasures of life.
- When we lack clarity, it is very challenging to make wise decisions and decide on a logical course of action.
- Our reality is our map for navigating life
- Our maps come from our parents, our experience, and our environment (family, friends, country)
- Reality requires us to review our maps
 - Are we clinging to outdated maps?
 - Are we facing our pain and problems or avoiding them?
 - Review requires both an openness and willingness to look at ourselves in the mirror and be open to critique.

4. Balancing

- Exercising discipline requires both judgement and flexibility
- Balance is the key: some examples
 - Know when to take responsibility and when to know it is not ours to take
 - Know when to delay gratification but also to enjoy the moment and be spontaneous.

- Anger moves us to act but angry outbursts are not helpful. With balance we are able to act from the higher centers of the brain and choose.
- Balance can be taught and learned (Peck, 2012).

Love - Thich Nhất Hạnh (10 Minutes)

Thich Nhất Hạnh (2006) offers a very simple prescription for awakening the heart to true love. He is a much-celebrated Zen Buddhist Monk and author of several books on mindfulness and meditation. In this book (2006) he offers a clear, simple way to understand and practice real love.

4 Aspects of Love - Based on Buddhist Concepts

1. Loving-Kindness or Benevolence
2. Compassion
3. Joy
4. Equanimity or Freedom

This Translates to Behavior - How We Show Real Love

1. Love is being there (Presence)
2. Love is recognizing the presence of the other (be Attentive to the other)
3. Love is overcoming pride (Do not make assumption, ask for help and clarification if a loved one hurts you)
4. Love is deep listening (To see the other person and know their pain)
5. Love is exercising loving speech (Truthful, timely, helpful, kind and necessary)
6. Love is the energy of mindfulness (Practice, facing reality, developing joy and compassion)

Putting it all together (10 Minutes)

Each participant receives 10 blank puzzle pieces. On 5 of these pieces they write 5 concepts that resonated with them over these sessions. On the other 5 pieces they write 5 goals they are setting for the next 3 months.

Put all the puzzle pieces together and glue them on a piece of cardboard.

Mindful Practice Background (5 Minutes)

RAIN Meditation

Link: [Feeling Overwhelmed? Remember RAIN](#)

Speak about this concept and what the acronym means as described by Tara Brach (2019):

In order to flower, self compassion depends on honest, direct contact with our own vulnerability. Compassion fully blossoms when we actively offer care to ourselves. To help people address feelings of insecurity and unworthiness, I often introduce mindfulness and compassion through a meditation I call the *RAIN of Self-Compassion*.

The acronym *RAIN*, first coined about 20 years ago by Michele McDonald, is an easy-to-remember tool for practicing mindfulness. It has four steps:

1. Recognize what is going on
2. Allow the experience to be there, just as it is
3. Investigate with kindness
4. Natural awareness, which comes from not identifying with the experience.

Mindful Practice (10 Minutes)

Link: [Uprooting Limiting Beliefs with RAIN: a Meditation with Tara Brach](#) (10 Mins)

Google Doc Link to Evaluation Form

Link: [Parent Education Program Evaluation form.docx](#)

Resources

Brach, T. (2019, February 7). *Feeling Overwhelmed? Remember RAIN - Mindful*. Mindful.

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Review. <https://tricycle.org/magazine/jhanas-perfect-states-concentration/>.

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Namaste.