Integrating Trauma Sensitive Mindfulness Interventions into Urban High Schools for the Benefit of both Teachers and Students

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Dedication

To my Mother for always believing in me

To my Father for teaching me the value of constant learning

To my Wife for being both my foundation and my guiding light

To my Children may I somehow offer you these same gifts

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Abstract

Integrating Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness Interventions into Urban Public High Schools for the Benefit of both Teachers and Students

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The purpose of this dissertation is to create a trauma-sensitive mindfulness curriculum that can be easily implemented in urban secondary schools. Emotional, academic, and behavioral difficulties are common among urban youth as they struggle to cope with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma. School-based mindfulness instruction has become a popular means of addressing the development of emotional regulation, attention, and performance of students across the country. Growing positive evidence supports the use of mindfulness-based approaches to help adolescents cope with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma. This dissertation will examine the impact that toxic stress and complex trauma have on both students and teachers at urban secondary schools, discuss the use of mindfulness-based strategies to cope with these issues and ultimately create a mindfulness-based curriculum that can be easily implemented by teachers.

Keywords: Mindfulness; Toxic Stress; Complex Trauma; Urban Secondary Education

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Chapter 1

Big Bad Ballou

During the 2017-2018 school year, Frank W. Ballou High School in Washington, D.C., lost five students to community gun violence. The final shooting involved a 9th grader who killed a 10th grader when a lunchroom confrontation spilled into the streets after dismissal and permanently ended the life of one teenage boy and severely altering the life of another (Hermann, 2017). This singular incident would be a lot of loss and trauma for any school community, but at Ballou High School, unfortunately, it represents the tip of the iceberg. Ballou High School is located in the Congress Heights neighborhood of southeast Washington, D.C., and serves a population of students that are 99% African American. The Congress Heights neighborhood was the epicenter of the crack epidemic during the 1980s and 1990s that saw Washington, D.C. become the murder capital of the United States (Jaffe, 1994). This neighborhood has been dramatically impacted by crime, violence, drugs, and poverty since the civil rights riots of the 1960s. As the public high school that serves this immediate community, Ballou is tasked with educating students while managing the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma have on families, students, teachers, and staff. On a national scale, there are public high schools, like Ballou, dealing with similar community-based issues in every major urban area in the United States.

Social problems are often clustered at community levels such that they can influence academic outcomes. For example, communities like Congress Heights, with high crime rates, drug-related issues, and abandoned buildings, have shown a higher correlation with lower academic grades and increased dropout rates (Patton, Woolley & Hong, 2012). Adolescents exposed to violence are at risk for a non-normative developmental process, which can impact an

adolescent's ability to self-regulate emotions (Patton et al., 2012). Combined with multigenerational poverty, high levels of drug use, and limited economic and educational opportunities, urban youth such as Ballou High School students, are struggling to cope with various stressors and traumas. Keenan, Walsh, Delliquadri, and Giovannelli (1997) noted that as many as one-quarter of impoverished youth have social and emotional difficulties relative to their more economically advantaged peers. Under such conditions, these issues persist, leading to higher rates of poor academic performance and school dropout.

Cognitive and emotional regulation are increasingly associated with overall adjustment and social, emotional development (Greenberg & Wessley, 2004). How an individual regulates emotional responses and copes with environmental stress can influence developmental trajectories (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen, & Wadsworth, 2001a). Chronic stress, ruminations, and intrusive thoughts are common correlates of both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. In addition, they are often predictors for depression and issues with emotional regulation (Wadsworth, Raviv, Compas, & Conner-Smith, 2005). Intervening in emotional regulation may assist in modifying normal stress responses altering the problematic trajectories faced by urban youth (Mendelson, Greenberg, Dartiotis, Gould, Rhoades, & Leaf, 2010A).

Many positive efforts to combat the above-stated issues have been attempted in public school districts across the country. Despite these efforts, it is fair to say that urban public-school systems in the United States are struggling to educate urban youth and racial and ethnic minorities properly. The 2018 senior class at Ballou consisted of 133 graduates. This number represented 51% of the students who were listed as members of the senior class at the beginning of the year (Mcgee, 2017). The 2017 senior class had very similar results as 164 students

graduated, representing 57% of students who were enrolled as seniors (McGee, 2017). According to a survey in 2001, by the Urban Institute, the national graduation rate for public high schools was 68%, with nearly one-third of all students failing to graduate (Swanson, 2004). This same study indicated that graduation rates for students who attend school in high poverty, racially segregated, and urban school districts lag from 15 to 18 percent behind their peers. Students from historically disadvantaged minority groups (American Indian, Hispanic, and African American) have little more than a fifty-fifty chance of finishing high school with a diploma (Swanson, 2001).

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is the standardized assessment tool that the District of Columbia Public School system uses to evaluate how students are performing. In 2018, 9% of Ballou students scored proficient in English, and 1% were deemed proficient in math on the PARCC assessment. The results for 2017 were similarly disappointing as 3% of students proved to be proficient in English, and 0% of students proved to be proficient in math (Ballngly & Ba Tran, 2018). A study by The Center for Reinventing Public Education paints a stark picture of schooling in 50 of the nation's largest cities. This study indicated that less than one in three cities that participated showed proficiency gains in math and reading scores relative to their states' average Common Core assessment. This study particularly highlighted the growing performance disparities for low-income students and students of color. A 14 percentage-point achievement gap existed between students who were eligible for free and reduced-price meals compared to those who were not (DeArmond, Denice, Gross, Hernandez, & Jochim, 2015).

Similar to other large urban school districts, academic performance at Ballou is impacted by poor student attendance. During the 2016-2017 school year, 90% of students missed 18 or

more days of school (Ballngly & Ba Tran, 2018). While this number is astonishing, urban districts across the country suffer from similar attendance issues. According to a study by Attendance Works, Everyone Graduates Center, the Philadelphia school district reported 37 percent of the systems 144,000 were chronically absent, which is defined as missing 15 or more days. Among high-school students, this figure shot up to 51 percent for the 2015-2016 school year. The Cleveland and Detroit public school systems reported chronic absenteeism rates around 50 percent during the same school year, with greater than 60 percent of Cleveland's high schoolers missing more than three weeks of the school a year (2016).

This struggle to improve school attendance is often discussed as it relates to the outside issues students are forced to cope with, e.g., lack of free transportation, coming from families that do not value education, having to assist working single parents with the responsibility of raising children, or concerns about safety. While district administrators and policymakers have focused attendance improvement efforts on external school factors that impact students' ability to get to school, there needs to be explicit efforts to improve attendance by making the school community a place where students feel loved, valued, supported, and safe. The push to improve attendance at Ballou and other urban high schools would benefit from focusing on the internal atmosphere of the schools' environment and the reoccurring trauma that students must learn to cope with while inside the building. The failure to create nonviolent school communities or safe therapeutic holding spaces perpetuates attendance problems by creating school environments that feel unsafe to students, teachers, and staff.

Urban public-school environments are often plagued by a surplus of behavioral issues that come to define school culture. For the past seven years, Ballou has led all of the District of Columbia Public School system in the number of suspensions for behavioral concerns per year.

During the 2017 - 2018 school year Ballou recorded 450 suspensions for behavioral concerns, which represented the lowest total in that seven-year span (Matos, 2017). For comparison, the national average for suspensions is 6.7 per 1000 students (Matos, 2017), and enrollment at Ballou High School for the 2018 school year was 997. This disparity helps illustrate the findings of The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights which in 2014 noted that African American students are suspended and expelled at three times the rate of white students (Keatney & Graczyk, 2013).

Reducing suspensions has been a school-wide campaign at Ballou for several years. As part of this initiative, a restorative justice approach has been implemented in which every effort is made to resolve behavioral conflicts through the use of interpersonal interaction more than punitive behavioral consequences. At Ballou, this campaign is directed by the Dean of Students and is implemented by behavioral technicians and school social workers. Each infraction requires the aggressor and the victim to sit down, discuss the incident, and agree on a suitable outcome that restores the community's balance. The outcomes are intended to be activities that provide a positive growth experience for the aggressor and are often used in an attempt to develop a positive holding school environment and the creation of healthy relationships between all parties involved. While this effort has had some success, it has not had total buy-in from teachers and staff as often students act out aggressively and are returned to class in a short period of time with what is deemed to be the limited consequence for severe misbehavior.

The problem with the restorative justice campaign at Ballou is representative of the more significant problems that impact this specific school system. There are too many infractions that occur at Ballou for the behavioral staff to manage, and the frustration created by working in an environment consumed by stress, trauma, and grief leads to constant interpersonal conflicts.

What started as a genuine campaign to use each of these behavioral issues as teaching moments has fostered mistrust between the behavioral staff, teachers, and students. Ballou has a long-standing reputation in Washington, D.C., as being a rough school and has earned a city-wide nickname of "Big Bad Ballou." This issue is best illustrated by the amount of teacher turnover that routinely occurs at Ballou.

Nationwide 40 % of teachers leave the profession in five years or less, with 14% of teachers in the United States leaving within their first year (Emerson, Leyland, Hudson, Rowse, Hanley & Hugh-Jones, 2017). In 2017 at Ballou, 21 teachers or 28% left the school between August and February - roughly the first half of the year. Of these 21 teachers, 13 were part of the math department, which offers some insight into how zero percent of students were proficient on the PARCC assessment. By the end of the year, a total of 33 teachers had decided to move on from an environment that can be a difficult place to work. A Washington Post article discussing this issue noted,

> Several former Ballou teachers told The Post they did not want to leave mid-year and felt terrible about the consequences for students. However, they said several problems drove them to leave, from student behavior and attendance issues to their perception of a lack of support from the administration (Matos, 2017).

This issue at Ballou seems to be consistent with what research indicates as to why teachers leave urban, high-poverty public schools. Ingersol (2001) noted that the top reasons for teacher turnover in these environments are low salaries, a lack of support from the school administration, student behavioral problems, poor student motivation, and lack of influence over decision-making processes.

The sad reality of teacher turnover at Ballou and other urban high schools is that it represents another lost relationship for a population of students who come from broken families coping with loss created by community violence, multigenerational poverty, and substance abuse. At Ballou, the effort to deal with what often feels like insurmountable loss and trauma is a recurrent school-wide theme that never gets resolved. While this trauma originates in the community, the effects of these systemic issues inevitably impact school culture. The failure to create a nonviolent and safe school environment to combat the effects of this trauma perpetuates the toxic stress and complex trauma that students must cope with and reinforces the bystander effect (Bloom et al., 2003) for teachers and staff.

Dr. Sandra Bloom's (1994), The Sanctuary Model is a trauma-focused inpatient psychiatric system designed especially for adult survivors of trauma. It has been adapted for use in several other environments, including schools. Central to the design of The Sanctuary Model is the need to identify safety as the primary stage of treatment in the development of the therapeutic milieu, "the essence of trauma is that a person's sense of safety in the world is seriously compromised (Bloom, 1994, p. 479)". Safety, according to The Sanctuary Model, must encompass physical, emotional, social, and moral levels of care. While school districts across the country are attempting to be trauma-sensitive organizations, urban school environments violate just about every aspect of creating a safe environment, according to Bloom's model.

Each day at Ballou and many other schools across the country begins with students arriving at school and being greeted by metal detectors and a physical search. As students are aware of this practice, those who feel their safety threatened in the community routinely hide contraband such as knives, pepper spray devices, or drugs in the bushes surrounding the school so that these items will be available for the trip home. While the metal detectors are designed to

create a safe environment, they often have the reverse effect as students feel emboldened to act out physically, knowing no one is carrying a weapon and violated by beginning their day with the assumption that they cannot be trusted members of the school community. The climate and culture team at Ballou are responsible for enforcing rules and are the only staff members other than administrators with the power to impose suspensions. While these individuals are often the most interpersonally connected to the entire student body of anyone in the building, their power to suspend creates a top-down threatening stance to try and impose behavioral compliance. These attempts to convey that violent or aggressive acts are unacceptable and often delivered in threatening or aggressive manners effectively negating the desired result.

Because Ballou and other urban high schools pull from a large neighborhood school boundary, students are also very aware of the various mobs and gangs that make up the school's violent cultural fabric. A large portion of the violence that occurs in the school can be traced back to these roots, as the students who claim membership to these organizations feel more loyalty to their gang than to their school community. Students are not alone in feeling threatened by this culture of physical stress. At Ballou, teachers and staff members have been assaulted by students physically. They are routinely attacked verbally as students use the classroom environment as a stage to reenact their personal traumatic narratives (Bloom, 1994). Often the ability to screen out violent offenders at large urban public high schools is challenging as these environments are required by law to accept all eligible students who live in the designated school boundary.

The classroom environments that successfully function at Ballou usually contain a dynamic teacher that students feel connected to for their ability to share academic material in engaging ways and for their ability to create protective boundaries around classroom norms.

These classrooms often include student leadership opportunities and teachers who manage to cultivate a sense of love and safety, effectively creating a positive therapeutic milieu (Bloom et al., 2003). In these environments, students who have been or are currently being traumatized feel connected, safe, and eager to engage, as forged relationships at Ballou are powerful because students are desperate for positive social connections.

Students display lower levels of on-task behaviors and performance when teachers lack the skill set to manage social and emotional challenges (Marzano, Marzano, &Pickering, 2003). This is evident at Ballou, as classrooms with deteriorating environments often lead to an increase in challenging student behaviors and contribute to teachers becoming emotionally exhausted as they struggle to minimize classroom disruptions. Under these conditions, teachers are prone to excessively punitive responses that fail to promote healthy self-regulation skills in students and may contribute to the sustainment of a negative behavioral cycle within the class (Osher et al. 2007). At Ballou, this dynamic is best understood by the large number of math teachers, thirteen, who departed mid-year and consistent performance evaluations that indicate that zero percent of students are proficient in the math portions of the PARCC standardized assessment tool.

Emotionally exhausted teachers are also at risk of becoming cynical and callous. Teaching is generally regarded to be among the most stressful professions for reasons that include managing the needs of a large group of students, the need to pay attention to numerous personal and academic interactions that demand creative and flexible responses and the need to manage both the socio-emotional needs of students as well as the teachers' own personal stress (Roeser et al., 2013). For this reason, teachers often feel they have little to offer or gain from remaining in the practice or continue to teach in unhappy manners that can lead to a rigid

classroom environment and suboptimal performance levels (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In either case, burned-out teachers can have a dramatic impact on students, particularly those who are at risk for mental health issues and require the positive relationships that may not be available to them in other aspects of their life (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Students who are at the highest risk of developing behavioral disorders and struggle with emotional regulation represent the very students who are most in need of supportive relationships. Often the challenging classroom events that teachers must cope with involve students who are not emotionally well-regulated or are suffering from anxiety, trauma, and mood-related concerns (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Student misbehaviors are often identified in teacher reports as a significant source of stress and emotional negativity (Yoon, 2002). This reported stress is magnified when teachers are forced to manage multiple students in a classroom exhibiting disruptive behaviors. This stress is also responsible for the negative behavioral cycle that occurs when teachers who are overwhelmed with negative emotions express a lack of enthusiasm for cultivating positive relationships with their most needy students. In turn, a teacher's negative affect toward a student may have long term effects on a student's social and academic outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Like most high schools in America, social and emotional safety at Ballou is jeopardized by typical teenage social awkwardness and insecurity. Unlike most high schools, these normal developmental stages are enhanced by the emotional and behavioral dysregulation of children struggling to cope with toxic stress and complex trauma. The effects of positive relationships between student's teachers and staff members help create a sense of psychological safety similar to that developed in a therapeutic milieu. Many of the students at Ballou consistently engage in

social systems that are so developmentally dysfunctional that even the most basic attempt to achieve social safety can offer a powerful corrective emotional experience (Bloom, 1994).

The possibility of a powerful corrective emotional experience offers the opportunity for growth for many students at Ballou. However, negative social interactions, particularly with teachers and staff, lead to the continued expression of personal trauma narratives. Inadequate relationships with teachers and school staff create in students' feelings of alienation, dislike, and ultimately disengagement from school. According to the U.S. Department of Education (1998), students who are disengaged from school are at a higher risk of developing antisocial behaviors, delinquency, and academic failure. In contrast, supportive relationships with teachers and school staff promote feelings of safety and the development of appropriate social, emotional, and academic skills.

Educational agendas across the country are moving in the direction of enhancing students' academic performance and social and emotional competence (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This is particularly necessary for environments like urban high schools where students are combating not just academic rigors but also attempting to cope with community violence, multigenerational poverty, failing educational systems, trauma, substance abuse, and racism (Sibinga, Perry-Parrish, Thorpe, Mika & Ellen, 2014). In these environments, it is increasingly essential for socially and emotionally competent teachers and school staff to set the tone for the classroom environment by encouraging positive relationships with students, establishing appropriate behavioral guidelines, coaching students in conflict or crisis and acting as a role model for appropriate communication and behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Students at schools like Ballou are who have had their ability to create healthy relationships fractured by complex trauma and chronic stress. This limitation impacts human

development across several fronts and is particularly evident as these individuals attempt to mature into productive young adults. This issue is problematic in communities where positive family role models are lacking due to a variety of social factors. In order for urban school districts to address the social development of their student body, effective programming needs to be developed that targets the specific needs of the urban school environment.

One approach should be the development of appropriate programming to help teachers in traumatic school environments manage stress better and improve their self-regulation. This effort will help create educators who can act as authentic social and emotional role models to students who have the dual task of improving themselves academically while attempting to cope with the chronic toxicity of urban school environments. Creating safe spaces necessary to cope with the impact of trauma can be difficult in certain school settings. Programming that helps develop self-regulated and trauma-informed teachers can cultivate therapeutic classroom environments that can act as safe spaces in school communities that have failed to develop a nonviolent culture.

There is an evident need for innovative and cost-effective services in school systems that support the resilience of both teachers and students struggling to manage the impact of complex trauma and toxic stress. Trauma sensitive school-based mindfulness programming that targets the development of teachers and students has the potential to offer more comprehensive, scalable, and more sustainable benefits to school communities impacted by these issues. Mindfulness training for both adolescents and adults has shown the potential to promote strong self-regulation skills that will limit student reactions to traumatic stimuli and erratic responses by teachers to such behavior.

The next chapter will explore the impact that toxic stress and complex trauma has on students as they attempt to navigate the demands of a normal school day. This will be done through the exploration of basic trauma theory, the impact of the fight, flight, and freeze responses, emerging epigenetic research and the importance of developing healthy human relationships to help regulate emotional arousal.

Chapter 2

The Truth About Trauma

To many, the term trauma evokes images of horrific singular incidents that are time-limited and life-threatening or the impact of devastating combat experiences on soldiers. For impoverished youth who face toxic stress and complex trauma, this is not always the case. Many students at Ballou high school have been exposed to a series of bad things that have happened on a repeated basis. Often these issues begin at an age when they are too young and vulnerable to protect themselves, and the adult caregivers charged with these responsibilities fail to meet this requirement. The chronic and toxic nature of community violence, multigenerational poverty, failing educational systems, substance abuse, and racism, in addition to singular traumatic events, creates complex traumatic stress disorders that students are forced to cope with daily.

The term "complex traumatic stress disorder" is widely used to describe the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma. A working definition of complex traumatic stress disorder is events or experiences that are repetitive, chronic and prolonged; involve harm, such as physical, sexual and emotional abuse; neglect or abandonment from parents' caregivers or responsible adults; occur at developmentally vulnerable times in a person's life and become embedded with an individual's growth and development (Bloom, 2013).

These issues can present with any combination of biological, psychological, social, or moral stressors that overwhelm an individual's ability to cope. In response to these stressors, one resorts to primitive means of survival in order to manage the intense physical and emotional reactions that appear to be beyond one's ability to understand or control.

Like other animals', humans have adapted primitive means to protect ourselves from various physical and mental stressors. Evolutionarily speaking, our ancestors were group living primates whose basic survival was necessitated by interdependence (Bloom, 2013). Safety in numbers was a defense mechanism that served multiple purposes but primarily worked to protect offspring born in a far less developed state than those of our closest related primates. Due to the evolutionary changes brought on by bipedalism and a proportionally larger brain, the human infant is the most dependent mammal at birth. This lack of development at birth creates a prolonged state of maternal dependency that requires human groups to protect the mother-child bond as an infant develops physically and learns new information.

During human development, the brain grows in a sequential and hierarchal manner from less sophisticated to more sophisticated. Each area of the brain becomes fully functional at different developmental periods. At birth, the brainstem areas work to ensure survival by regulating cardiovascular and respiratory functioning. Much of this development occurs in utero and early infancy. The diencephalon and limbic system responsible for arousal, learning, motor activity, and emotional regulation develop sequentially over the next three years (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). The more sophisticated frontal lobes and cortical areas of the brain, responsible for abstract cognition, planning, and self-control, will not be fully developed until late adolescents. These regions of the brain also show significant reorganization well into the early twenties, which is an essential concept for working with adolescents. (Perry et al., 1995). As a result of this sequential neurodevelopment, the organizing brain of an infant or developing child is far more susceptible to experience than a mature brain. Disruptions of experience during these critical developmental periods can result in deficits or abnormalities in neurodevelopment.

While similar disruptions of a mature brain might alter behavior in adults' early extreme, experiences have the potential to alter the organizing framework of a child's mind.

The most common set of behavioral responses to threats faced by humans is the fight or flight reactions. This response is most commonly seen in adult male mammals as it is a more reasonable response of the physically developed. During fight or flight, the brain releases adrenaline, which can dramatically increase heart rate and blood pressure. Given their lack of physical development, children are far less likely to utilize the classic fight or flight response as this is not always an adaptive means of ensuring survival. The two primary response patterns utilized by children and adolescents are the hyperarousal continuum and the dissociative continuum (Perry et al., 1995).

In the initial stages of the hyperarousal continuum, any sign of threat initiates the alarm reaction. Once triggered, the sympathetic nervous system works to increase heart rate, blood pressure, respiration, and muscle tone while tuning out all information that is nonessential for survival. These biochemical adjustments are intended to prepare the body to fight with or run from any perceived threat (Bloom, 2013). This response is intended to be time-limited to cope with a specific and obvious threat. Once the threat subsides, the hormones released dissipate, and the body returns to a more normal functioning level. When a child responds with a hyperarousal response, the brain regions that are activated play a critical role in regulating arousal, affect, behavioral irritability, attention, locomotion, and sleep (Bhaskaran & Freed, 1988). Once the immediate threat has waned, the brain's response system can be reactivated by specific or generalized reminders of the initial threat. In a traumatized individual, the stress hormones released take longer to be reabsorbed into the body and have the potential to spike quickly in response to mild stimulation (Van der Kolk & Bessel, 2015).

When a child is presented with multiple chronic and unrelenting stressors, the body must attempt to cope with a substantial overload of the stress response system. Under these conditions, the effectiveness of the response diminishes, and an individual might experience a state of chronic hyperarousal. When living in this state of constant fear, children often present as irritable, angry, guarded, unable to calm themselves, aggressive, and consumed with memories of the many stressors that have created this condition. Each stressful incident builds upon the previous issue so that the individual becomes increasingly sensitive to any perception of danger. Individuals with this perceived network of threatening connections often turn to temporary solutions for relief such as alcohol, marijuana, sexual activity, violence, acting out, and risk-taking behavior. In these situations, what began as an adaptive response to a traumatic event can quickly evolve into maladaptive emotional, behavioral, and cognitive conditions (Bloom, 2013).

The hyperarousal response exists because it promotes survival. Children and adolescents who are not as physically developed as adults might utilize more adaptive responses designed to initiate the support of their more developed caretakers to aid in the fight or flight response. This can be an adaptive response if the caretaker is able and willing to respond. Often this is not an adaptive response for traumatized children as parents and caretakers might be the source of the perceived threat. In these situations, children's and adolescents' adaptive responses will move from the hyperarousal continuum to the dissociative continuum (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

The act of dissociation can simply be defined by disengaging from external stimuli and focusing attention on the inner world. There are various types of dissociation that include daydreaming, fantasy, depersonalization, derealization, fugue states, and degrees that span from daydreaming to torture induced loss of consciousness (Putnam, 1991). The capacity to dissociate

varies from person to person, as some will dissociate early in the arousal continuum while others will only dissociate in a state of complete terror (Perry et al., 1995).

For children, the act of dissociation is natural and fluid, as it is often associated with healthy development. Normally developing children routinely engage with imaginary playmates that might represent dissociated parts of themselves. This type of play helps children master unpleasant feelings that need to be integrated into a more coherent sense of self (Bloom, 2013). Given this propensity to dissociate, it is understandable that this is a common reaction for younger children when stress becomes severe, prolonged, or chronic. In addition to age, the nature of a trauma plays an important role in the propensity to disassociate. The more immobile, helpless, and powerless individuals feel during traumatic experiences, the more likely that individual is to utilize a dissociative response (Perry et al., 1995). This is a particularly problematic issue for traumatized children whose caregivers present as threatening and untrustworthy.

The long-term impact of constant dissociation on children works to impact the sequential development of the brain. Children who are chronically traumatized do not have the advantage of fully developed coping mechanisms. These individuals often lack a healthy concept of what is normal because traumatic experiences have become their normative routine. Dissociation works best when the separation of feelings from memory and thoughts is allowed to exist isolated from the source of the traumatic stimuli. When stress is chronic or prolonged, a dissociative state can become the preferred response as it allows a victim to diminish the internal state of physiological hyperarousal (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). Observers of children in dissociative states will often report numb or robotic presentations. These children are often nonreactive, appear to be regularly daydreaming and withdrawing from relationships. Prolonged dissociation alters an

individual's sense of how they fit into the world and relate to others—being unable to integrate healthy thoughts, feelings, and emotions compromises these individuals' ability to engage in regular social interactions (Bloom & Farragher, 2013).

Post-traumatic stress inherently creates disintegration, as thoughts, memories, and emotions become cut off from day to day activities. How individuals work to integrate trauma is a crucial concept for understanding the impact and definition of what constitutes a traumatic event. After a traumatic event, the physical body responds with alarm, while survivors are forced to cope with a diminished sense of personal security. The success or failure to integrate traumatic experiences works to highlight events that an individual can or cannot metabolize. This idea allows for the expansion of what might constitute a traumatic event to concepts that fall outside the Diagnostic Statistical Manuals (DSM-5) definition of trauma. The effects of multigenerational poverty, racism, community violence, failing educational systems, and substance abuse create impacting forms of stress that correspond with the deepest levels of our psychobiology (Treleaven, 2018).

Toxic stress and complex trauma are not just concepts that impact individuals during their lifetime. In fact, traumatic stressors alter the genetic blueprint of an individual prior to conception. Research into cellular biology suggests the history individuals share with his or her family begins before conception. In one's most basic biological form, an unfertilized egg, three generations of cellular information are shared (offspring, mother, and maternal grandmother) (Wolynn, 2017). On the paternal side, inception can be traced similarly but with specific differences. While mothers are born with their lifetime supply of eggs, paternal sperm cells continue to multiply and be impacted by life experience into adolescence. This combination of factors suggests that at conception, individuals' stress response systems are already imprinted

with genetic coding designed to enhance survival skills created by the traumatic experiences of three previous generations (Sadler, 2011).

Genetic blueprints at conception are now recognized to be a starting point of development as current research clearly shows the impact environment has on the development of the biological, emotional, and psychological self. Cellular biologist Bruce Lipton's work demonstrates that our DNA is imprinted by both negative and positive thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. According to Lipton, a mother's emotions, either positive or negative, can alter her offspring's genetic expression (Lipton, 1998). This is accomplished during pregnancy when nutrients in the mother's blood nourish the fetus through the wall of the placenta. In this process, mothers release hormones and informational signals generated by the emotions they experience (Wolynn, 2017). Stress hormones produced by a mother who experiences an acute or chronic stressor are passed through the bloodstream and induce a similar emotional reaction in the unborn child. Given these findings, Lipton stressed conscious parenting, which constituted an awareness that from preconception through postnatal development, a child's health could profoundly be impacted by a parent's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors (Wolynn, 2017).

Lipton's research on cellular memory works to support the growing field of epigenetics. Epigenetics is considered to be the study of "heritable changes in gene function that occur without a change in the sequence of the DNA" (Wolynn, 2017, p.29). Genetic inheritance was once believed to transpire only through the transference of structural DNA that occurred at conception. Now structural DNA, which relays information such as the color of our hair and eyes, is believed to comprise around 2% of our total DNA (Wolynn, 2017). Current research suggests that the remaining 98% of noncoding or epigenome DNA is responsible for the inheritance and development of our emotional, behavioral, and personality traits (Vendramini,

2005). At birth, children inherit roughly 23,000 structural genes from their parents, which operate similar to the hardware of a computer. Using this model, the epigenomes function as the operating system of this computer and determine what functions the genetic code does and does not perform (NSCotD, 2010).

As noncoding DNA is known to be affected by environmental factors, epigenetic change is built over time and is impacted by positive and negative experiences. These positive and negative experiences leave a chemical signature on the genes which temporarily or permanently activates the expression. Some of these epigenetic changes are transferred generationally and work to expand one's range of responses during stressful situations. In this manner, the life experiences of a parent are genetically communicated to a fetus to create a specific toolset that will be adapted for survival outside of the womb (Yehuda & Seckl, 2011). Put simply, our brains are constantly adapting to the environment. Specific adaptions like effective learning and memory, result in the development of healthy skillsets, while negative adaptions develop unhealthy systems that prepare our bodies to respond to adversity.

Epigenetic research suggests that there is growing scientific evidence that the nature vs. nurture controversy is over. The neurodevelopment of children consists of a combination of genetic potential and life experiences. The impact life experiences have on development is correlated to the timing, nature, and pattern of these occurrences. In utero, the processes that direct development are chemical processes that proceed in genetically determined sequences. By adolescence, the majority of neurodevelopmental changes are determined by the individuals' experiences and relationships, not genetic make-up (Perry, Beauchaine, & Hinshaw, 2008). While traumatic experiences have the potential to alter neurodevelopment due to the brain's constant responsiveness to both internal and external environmental factors, there is increasing

evidence that even epigenetic modification, thought to be permanent, can be reversed (NSCotD, 2010).

The relational nature of our development begins at birth, as research indicates that newborns begin imitating facial gestures shortly after delivery (Bloom & Farragher, 2010). The attachment relationships that occur after birth provide the foundation for the physical, psychological, social, and moral development that comprises the individual's life experiences. This process begins with the serve and return interactions between a primary caregiver and a child. During these exchanges, the brain is developing new neuropathways and expanding brain circuitry (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). Two major neural networks that are developed during these loving interactions are stimulated simultaneously. The first set of sensory perceptions are associated with relational interactions and help a newborn recognize a caregiver's face, voice, scent, smile, and touch. The second set is the neural networks that mediate pleasure and activates our internal reward systems associated with the relief of distress (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). This interconnection between human interaction, pleasure, and relief of distress creates the neurobiological glue that works to cement healthy relationships (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

For newborn babies with responsible caretakers', pleasure and human interaction become woven together. The mirror neuron system is activated shortly after birth, and newborn babies begin the complicated process of learning how to signal their needs or respond to their caretakers (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). Mirror neurons are activated in the brain when an individual does something, but more importantly, they are also activated when we witness others doing the same thing. These cells essentially allow the brain to be stimulated by a pattern of activity without entirely copying the basic muscle movements. This mirroring dynamic works to develop

empathy and the ability to respond to relational needs as mother and child reflect each other's joy and sense of connectedness (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017).

These early attachment interactions are essential for an individual's development as they work to help us learn how to manage our emotions and make sense of the relational world around us. The early nonverbal communication between caregivers and children relays vast amounts of information by the manner in which a baby is held, the tone of voice used, facial expressions, eye contact, and the response caregivers have to their children's' needs. As children mature and develop the capacity for verbal expression, these nonverbal means of communication become unconscious and habitual. They exist under the surface of human interaction and, at times, conflict with verbal communication. This conflict allows for the potential of vast amounts of information to be communicated without any conscious awareness of what information is being relayed (Bloom & Farragher, 2013).

For the brain, conscious processing of information requires a significant amount of energy. To mitigate this issue, habits are formed that allow for automatic responses that can be managed in unconscious, more efficient ways. The formation of habits occurs in a predictable pattern, cue, routine, reward (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). When the brain identifies a cue, an automatic response is created that could be physical, mental, or emotional. If this routine creates a successful adaption, the resulting reward for this action reinforces the idea that this pattern is worth repeating. In this manner, habits are born by automatic responses to triggers often beyond the scope of an individual's rational mind and result in changes to the brain that allows for learning new patterns of activity. In contrast, old patterns remain dormant but accessible (Bloom & Farragher, 2013).

With healthy, productive attachment, relational development works to create positive, productive, and adaptive responses to the manageable stressors of one's environment. When disrupted attachments occur, the behavioral responses created through the absence of a healthy relational dynamic change the brain functioning in predictable and potentially devastating ways. The most troubling of these changes is the impact disrupted attachments have on the capacity to take pleasure in loving and being loved. This reflects the relational disturbances in early attachment that physiologically make social interactions less attractive, less comforting, and less pleasurable (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010). The epigenetic changes that disrupted attachments created not only impact how rewarding we find relationships with our parents and friends but also work to shape how we will parent our offspring.

Children who are the product of disrupted relational attachments find less value in bonding with others. This behavioral pattern often works to create individuals who view others as interchangeable objects to be manipulated for selfish desires as this adaptive response works to ensure short term survival. By lacking in relational experiences that create joy, children of disrupted attachments are often more difficult to soothe as each dose of affection has a smaller, less lasting impact upon their brain (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010). As the desire for human interaction and support does not subsist, the developmental holes created by disrupted attachments cannot be filled by the individual. In this case, the individual who struggles with relational issues often struggles to ask for help directly and, in turn, uses indirect methods that outwardly present as symptoms of the underlying problems (Bloom & Farragher, 2013). These lingering effects of terror present in behaviors that are often more impulsive, aggressive, less thoughtful, and reflect a less compassionate way of responding to the external world.

The relational nature of human existence, trauma, terror, and disrupted developmental experiences cannot be healed in solitude. Our brains change in use-dependent ways meaning the treatment of individuals suffering from toxic stress and complex trauma depends on moderate, predictable, and patterned relational experiences. The presence of safe, familiar, and capable caregivers allows children who have experienced developmental disruptions due to trauma or terror the opportunity to calm their internal stress response system. Once a sense of safety has been established, challenges to the stress response system can be met in more resilient and flexible manners (Perry & Szalavitz, 2010).

Neuroception is a term Steven Porges used in the Poly Vagal Theory to describe how our neural circuits work to distinguish if people and situations are safe, dangerous, or life-threatening (Treleaven, 2018). As opposed to conscious perception, neuroception occurs in the primitive parts of our brains and seeks to identify environmental and behavioral cues that help an individual determine safety. Relationships offer an authoritative domain to work with the concept of neuroception as children are often hurt or damaged by the nature of their relationships and learn to regulate their responses from mirroring their primary caretakers. Where the experience of toxic stress and chronic trauma actively disrupt the connection, the integration of these experiences begins in the presence of a strong therapeutic social web comprised of self-regulated community members.

Porges Polyvagal Theory works to explain the biology of safety and danger by examining the interplay between the visceral experiences of our bodies, the facial expressions, and verbal tones used by the people around us (Van der Kolk & Bessel, 2015). Polyvagal refers to the branches of the vagus nerve, which connects multiple organs, including the brain, heart, stomach,

and intestines. With this view, the focus of understanding trauma shifts from fight or flight and focuses on the importance of the relational web individuals' function within.

This approach also suggests the need for healing techniques that strengthen the body's system for regulating arousal as it would prove beneficial to hover peacefully over our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. The practice of mindfulness is most commonly associated with meditation but also refers to purposely paying attention to the moment, the breath, the feel or taste of an object, or the sound of a repeated mantra. Integral to the practice of mindfulness is that attention should be focused on the present moment instead of thoughts or images from the past or the future. In so doing, one must work to hold attention without judgment of any thoughts or feelings that arise. This practice trains the mind to focus on present moment awareness and, in so doing, seeks to regulate arousal by offering victims of trauma a mindful dual awareness (Rothschild, 2017).

The next chapter will explore the origins and growth of mindfulness as a healing practice in The United States. Before mindfulness can be implemented into urban high schools it is imperative to understand how the American mindfulness movement has managed to secularize, medicalize and psychologize a traditional Asian religious practice.

Chapter 3

The Practice of Right Mindfulness

Interest in the benefits of mindfulness practice to develop self-regulation has grown exponentially in the past 15 years. Based on Buddhist meditative practices, the modern American usage of mindfulness has spread into secular areas such as the fields of psychology, healthcare, business, the military, and education. From the early 1980s until the late 1990s, mindfulness-based publications grew at modest levels, mostly in behavioral medicine (Williams & Kabat-Zinn, 2011). As (figure 1) indicates, mindfulness publications began to grow in the late 1990s as interest in the practice moved into other disciplines (https://goamra.org/resources/).

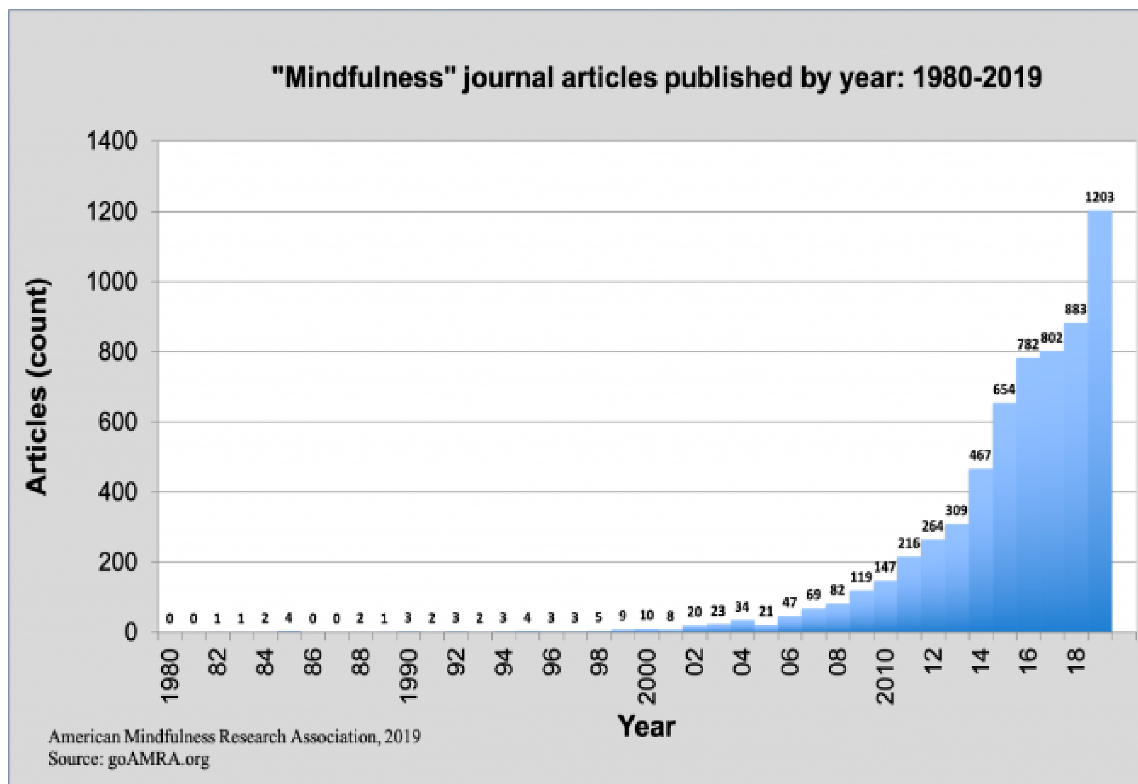

Figure 1

The growth of mindfulness practice in America represents the convergence of two different epistemologies and cultures. In combining Buddhist meditative practices with

westernized empirical science, mindfulness has been granted access to secular arenas by minimizing its religious roots in the service of helping to reduce human suffering. To understand how mindfulness grew out of its Buddhist roots, one must consider both the history of Buddhism in America and how Buddhism has traditionally migrated between cultures.

American interest in Buddhism is generally regarded to have begun in 1844 with Edward Salisbury's reading of his Memoir on the History of Buddhism to the American Oriental Society and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody's translation of an extract from the Lotus Sutra (Wilson, 2014). From 1844 until the 20th century, the term mindfulness played no role in Buddhism's growth, as much of the American interest focused on the principles and temperament of the historical Buddha (Wilson, 2014). When Buddhism was discussed in America, the focus concentrated on the practice of devotion as adulation and proof of Buddhist Asia's supposed inferiority in comparison to the Christian West (Wilson, 2014).

The roots of Buddhism go back to the 5th century BC to the teachings of the Buddha who lived and taught in what is now northeast India. The Buddha offered his teachings, called the Dhamma in Pali, a native language of the Indian subcontinent. They were presented as a body of principles and practices that aided human beings in their quest for happiness (Bodhi, 2011). The core value of these teachings was a system of training that led to personal insight and freedom from suffering. These basic principles spread throughout Asia as Buddhism was adopted by many countries and translated into multiple languages. As Buddhist traditions are not monolithic over time, a great diversity of philosophies, meditation techniques, institutional structures, and cultural expressions emerged (Dunne, 2011). This is an essential concept in discussing the roots of the Mindfulness movement as capturing the essence of a multitude of sub-branches can be challenging.

At the core of all classical Buddhist meditation is a specific discipline that has come to be known in modern times as mindfulness (Bodhi, 2011). The Buddha himself gave particular value to the practice of right mindfulness by including it in the noble eightfold path, the fourth of the four noble truths (Wilson, 2014). Right mindfulness (samma sati in Sanskrit, another ancient Indian language) is the seventh factor located between right effort and right concentration (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011A). Satipatthana Sutta, an influential scripture in the Pali Canon on the systemic practice of right mindfulness examines the purpose of right mindfulness by indicating that the goal of the practice is the extinction of suffering and the attainment of nibbana (nirvana in Sanskrit). The four establishments of right mindfulness involve reflective contemplation of one's own experiences regarding the four domains of the body, feelings, states of mind, experiential phenomena, and dhamma. In Pali, the word dhamma can be understood to mean the "experiential phenomena as organized into certain groups determined by the objectives of the Buddha's teachings, "the dhamma" in the broadest sense (Bodhi, 2011, p. 21)."

In the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha taught his monks a variety of methods for maintaining awareness of the body and mind. Right mindfulness meditation in this context was pursued as a means of disengaging from everyday suffering. This practice is presented within this scripture as a strenuous lifelong task that would lead to finding joy in peaceful meditation rather than the trappings of daily life (Wilson, 2014). This process of right mindfulness involves a collection of mental factors that must work in cohesion. Right mindfulness, according to the Satipatthana practice, occurs as part of an anupassana. Anupassana loosely translates to English as contemplation or close repetitive observation (Bodhi, 2011). The mental factors included in anupassana are atapi, which implies the energy or strength to engage in practice, sampajano,

which implies clear comprehension, and sati, which implies mindfulness or lucid awareness of the present (Bodhi, 2011).

The Pali term sati appears to be first translated into English and used to mean mindfulness by T. W. Rhys David in 1881 (Gethin, 2011). In Pali, the term sati is translated into English as "memory" but is commonly used in the often-repeated phrase "mindful and thoughtful" (sato sampajano) (Husgafvel, 2016). In his 1910 translation of the Mahasatipatthana Sutra, Rhys David noted that while sati is etymologically "memory" in the Buddhist context, this is an insufficient and misleading translation (Gethin, 2011). A more fair and accurate translation would be the association of mindfulness with consciousness as a primary message within the Mahasatipatthana Sutta is

> If you consistently "remember" what it is you are doing in any given moment, you will truly see what you are doing; and in truly seeing what it is you are doing, those deeds, words and thoughts that are motivated by greed, hatred and delusion will become impossible for you (Gethin, 2011, p.265).

It is essential to note the abstract and multilayered nature of the meaning in determining an accurate English translation of the Buddhist concept of mindfulness. The definition alone represents this issue as the term mindfulness is sati in the Pali language, smrti in Sanskrit, dran pa in Tibetan, and nian in Chinese (Husgafvel, 2016). The meaning of each of these terms has been altered and slightly altered due to how Buddhism is practiced within these varied cultures.

While the Pali Canon is an essential source of Buddhist thought and the Pali language is the oldest language of the documents containing the Buddha's teachings, it is a mistake to label the Pali Cannon's presentation of mindfulness as all-encompassing (Husgafvel, 2016). The Theravada tradition is based on many early Buddhist schools that developed after the Buddhist

community broke off into several sub-sections. The Theravada Abhidhamma defines mindfulness as a universal, wholesome fact present in wholesome mental states and connected to other beneficial qualities. Other sub-sections of Buddhism also have slightly different understandings of what the Buddhist practice of mindfulness is. The canonical Sarvastivada source describes a general mental quality present in skillful and unskillful states of mind. At the same time, another faction of Buddhism, Yocgacara, identifies mindfulness as some states of mind that are either skillful or unskillful (Gethin, 2011).

The difficulty of clearly defining the Buddhist origins of the term mindfulness is reflective of not just the diversity of how Buddhism is practiced but also how the philosophy adapts as it blends into different cultures. One of Buddhism's enduring principles is that all things change. With roughly 2,500 years of history, it can be argued that Buddhism has survived in part due to its ability to evolve and remain relevant despite changing circumstances. The mindfulness movement's selective adaption and modification of Buddhist principles are historically how Buddhism has adjusted to the needs of new cultures exposed to the teachings of the Buddha (Husgafvel, 2016).

Examples of the cultural adaptation of Buddhism can be found by examining the spread of the practice through Asia. In China, early support came from rulers who valued the teachings of the Buddhas and the Buddhist gods. When ruling kings were forced to deal with drought, plagues, and outside invaders, they could have the sutra performed as a means of protecting the realm. This practice allowed the Buddha sutra to join the real convergence of conventional hybrid religious and political belief systems that combined the supernatural, ritual, and governmental concerns that were common at the time (Wilson, 2014). In Japan, an example of Buddhism adapting to assimilate is the material culture consumed by amulets, lucky charms,

magical symbols, and fortune-telling devices. These items typically represent the basic desires that influence Japanese people to turn to Buddhism. Amulets that ward off evil, promise safety, health, or the fulfillment of wishes are used at all levels of society and have created practices unique to Japanese Buddhism (Wilson, 2014).

This pattern of successful integration into a new host culture is present in how Buddhist practices have blended into mainstream America. Instead of magical items or rituals for a benefit, Americans prefer to blend traditional Buddhist meditative practices with prevailing scientific world views. The removal of traditional Buddhism from modern mindfulness meditative practice might seem like an appropriation or distortion as it loses sight of a principle Buddhist goal of rooting out greed, hatred, and delusion (Gethin, 2011). The American modernist perspective of mindfulness strips Buddhism down to the original context so that it may be absorbed by those who are suffering but might otherwise have been blinded by religious packaging. As a result of this effort, the American mindfulness movement has gradually shifted authority away from monks and into the control of lay people, which contrasts with the traditional Asian Buddhist focus on monastic practice (Husgafvel, 2016).

The birth of the American mindfulness movement was the late 1970's. However, before this decade, American Buddhist consciousness of mindfulness techniques grew steadily throughout the first seventy-five years of the 20th century. This growth exploded in post-war America as several factors converged to support the structure of the mindfulness movement. After World War II, higher education grew as veterans took advantage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Wilson, 2014). The growth of Higher education led to the development of formal religious studies departments at many institutions. These religious studies departments often

included teachings on Buddhism in their curricula, and some programs included assigned mindfulness practice to expose students to Buddhism (Swear, 1971)

In 1965 Congress repealed immigration laws that had worked for years to minimize Asian immigration unfairly. This act led to a significant increase in Thai, Vietnamese, and other Buddhist immigrants and eventually in 1966 the creation of the Buddhist Vihara, the first Theraveda temple in America. This increase in Asian immigration, combined with a growing American military and political presence in South East Asia, exposed many Americans to Buddhist culture. This exposure to Buddhist culture, combined with the psychology industry's expansion, created a fertile ground for what would become a significant vehicle in the expansion of the mindfulness movement (Wilson, 2014).

During the 1970s, the mindfulness movement began to truly take shape with the growth of three sources of mindfulness teaching. In the summer of 1974, Chogyam Trungpa held a Buddhist summer school, called The Naropa Institute at the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center. While Trungpa was a colorful exiled Tibetan monk famous for womanizing, drunken behavior, and pretensions of royalty, he was a central figure in American Buddhist education at the time (Fields, 1992). Two prominent figures in the story of the American mindfulness movement attended and taught at this training: Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein. Both Kornfield and Goldstein were born into American Jewish homes post World War II and came into contact with Buddhism while serving in the Peace Corps in Thailand (Fields, 1992).

In preparation for The Naropa Institute event and without ever being introduced to each other, Kornfield and Goldstein met up to prepare. At this meeting, a partnership was forged that would forever shape the American mindfulness movement. After the Naropa Institute event, Kornfield and Goldstein began to tour the country offering mindfulness meditation events.

Together, in 1976, with Sharon Salzburg and Jacqueline Schwartz, the Insight Meditation Society was founded in Barre, Massachusetts. Shortly after this in 1981, Kornfield moved to California and started his program called the Spirit Rock Meditation Center. Together, the Insight Meditation Society and Spirit Rock Meditation Center became the prominent institutions for teaching mindfulness meditation to numerous students across the United States (Fields, 1992).

From its inception, the Insight Meditation Society offered mindfulness meditation that sought to balance traditional Theraveda themes and modern adaptions in the presentation of westernized mindfulness. The Spirit Rock Meditation Center chose a slightly different path by allowing teachers from non-Theraveda traditions and working to downplay the importance of chanting, ceremony, and other aspects of Buddhist cosmology (Kornfield, 2007). This effort was made due to the belief that such practices would be obstacles to American students. Spirit Rock took steps to integrate Western psychology into mindfulness training in addition to these specific alterations of traditional practice. In 1977 Jack Kornfield had earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, which influenced his perspective and led to the inclusion of teachers who had a similar interest in psychology or psychotherapy (Kornfield, 2007).

The second primary source of American mindfulness teaching during the 1970s was a crusading monk from the Vietnamese traditions named Thich Nhat Hanh. While Hanh was Vietnamese, he was familiar with American culture as he studied at Princeton and Columbia Universities during the early 1960s. Hanh and several other monastic colleagues chose to differentiate themselves from the communist and capitalist factions during the Vietnam War. For these efforts, Hanh was exiled from Vietnam in 1973 and eventually was granted asylum by

France. Because of Hanh's stance against the war, he became an international writer and speaker for peace who befriended and worked with Dr. Martin Luther King (Wilson, 2014).

Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings combined the practice of mindfulness with a dedicated and active engagement to the outside world. While he associated with the Mahayana form of Buddhism, his teachings struck a chord with many people in the western world, and he became especially popular in the United States. Hanh's focus on mindfulness exercises found in the Satipatthana Sutta reflects influences in his background from the Theraveda Buddhist traditions (Wilson, 2014). This combination allowed for his teachings to focus on exercises from the Theraveda tradition with Mahayanan interpretations. With the release of his book, The Miracle of Mindfulness in 1976, Hanh established himself as the most influential figure in Western Buddhism. He would publish more than 100 books in English that disseminated his teachings (Hanh, 2016).

The Third source of mindfulness teaching to be introduced during the 1970s was Jon Kabat-Zinn. Kabat-Zinn was raised in a highly educated eastern European family that immigrated to the United States at the beginning of the 20th century. Kabat-Zinn studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he was exposed to meditation practices. Kabat-Zinn studied mindfulness meditation with Thich Nhat Hanh, Seung Sahn, who founded the Providence Zen Center and was a student/teacher at the Insight Meditation Society, where he was trained by Jack Kornfield and Joseph Goldstein. Kabat-Zinn would go on to start the Cambridge Zen Center following Seung Sahn's model and earn a Ph.D. in molecular biology from MIT (Husgafvel, 2016).

The commonly accepted starting point for the medicalization of mindfulness was 1979 when Jon Kabat-Zinn founded the Stress Reduction Program at the University of Massachusetts

Medical School (Husgafvel, 2016). To better understand the roots of modern mindfulness practice, it is crucial to understand the Buddhist influences that impacted Jon Kabat-Zinn. Buddhism reached Kabat-Zinn through various routes, including the Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana interpretations. At the Insight Meditation Society, Kabat-Zinn was exposed to Theravada based vipassana meditation by Robert Hover, Jack Kornfield, and Joseph Goldstein (Gilpin, 2008). In addition to these direct student-teacher lineages, Kabat-Zinn has written about the influence of classical texts from the Pali Canon, Anapanasati Sutta, and the Satipatthana Sutta (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Noted influences that were central to the development of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program were the Dharma, Joseph Goldstein's The Experience of Insight (1976), and Nyanaponika Thera's The Heart of Buddhist Meditation (1962) (Gilpin, 2008).

The influence of Mahayana Buddhism on Kabat-Zinn is also based on written sources and his direct relationships with influential teachers. Kabat-Zinn was a Dharma teacher in training under the Korean master Seung Sahn and used this experience in founding the Cambridge Zen Center (Husgafvel, 2016). He notes that the teachings on emptiness in the canonical Mahayan texts The Heart Sutra were applied to the MBSR program (Husgafvel, 2016). The contemporary Mahayana influences on Kabat-Zinn's work consist of Shunryu Suzuki's book Zen Mind, Beginner Mind (1970), and Thich Nhat Hanh's The Miracle of Mindfulness (1976) (Kabat-Zinn, 1982).

The Vajrayana influences in Kabat-Zinn's background are not as well documented in his writing or his work. He identifies that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's Meditation in Action (1969) as an influential book as he was developing the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program (Kabat-Zinn, 2011) and openly discusses his work with Tibetan Dzogch'en teachers in

recent years (Gilpin, 2008). What is evident from this broad spectrum of Buddhist influences is that Kabat-Zinn was influenced by a wide variety of canonical and contemporary texts. This broad and inclusive exposure to a variety of Buddhist traditions helps explain how Kabat-Zinn synthesized his traditional Buddhist influences into the mindfulness movement.

While Kabat-Zinn has an extensive foundation in Buddhist training, he is explicit in his desire to work outside of formal Buddhist traditions. From its formation, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has sat at the intersection of Buddhism and psychology. Kabat-Zinn himself has never shied away from the Buddhist origins of his mindfulness-based program. In discussing the birth of MBSR, Kabat-Zinn is quick to point out that he intended to develop an American vocabulary to make Buddhist meditative practices more coherent to the western world. He aimed to remove the cultural aspects and traditions out of which the teachings of the dharma emerged because … "they would likely cause unnecessary impediments for people who were dealing with suffering and seeking some kind of release from it" (Kabat-Zinn. 1990, p.287-288). This westernization of Buddhist practices was intended to make these messages more suitable for a variety of audiences, including the hospital setting in which MBSR was initially intended to be implemented.

> Naming what we were doing in the clinic, mindfulness based stress reduction raises several questions. One is the wisdom of using the word mind-fulness intentionally as an umbrella term to describe our work and to link it explicitly with what I have always considered to be a universal dharma that is co-extensive, if not identical, with the teachings of the Buddha, the Buddha dharma. By 'umbrella term' I mean that it is used in certain contexts as a place-holder for the entire dharma, that it is meant to carry multiple meanings and traditions simultaneously, not in the service of finessing and confounding

real differences, but as a potentially skillful means for bringing the streams of alive, embodied dharma understanding and of clinical medicine together (Kabat-Zinn 2011, p. 290.).

As a result of removing the monastic presence and traditional practices from the mindfulness movement, the explicit connection with Buddhist morality was lost. Traditional Asian Buddhist practices generally attribute proper behavior and morality as a foundational component to a productive meditation practice (Wilson, 2014). The practitioner who sincerely desired to develop insight into their present life was expected to participate in the purification of conduct. In part, this specific devotion to morality is why mindfulness practices were considered a monastic endeavor (Husgafvel, 2016). By removing the conduct component, the mindfulness movement allows non-Buddhist to engage more directly in practice with the focus resting on awareness. Being able to approach mindfulness minus the religious components allows for a medicalization of the practice. With the focus of the practice now on biological or psychological health processes related to science, mindfulness becomes acceptable to a larger population regardless of their religious or secular foundations.

The first known example of the medicalization of mindfulness meditation is the story of Henepola Gunaratana. In 1947 at the age of 20, he had qualified for the higher ordination as a full Theravada monk. A few days later, he was granted the honor of participating in a week-long chanting of parrita, intended to ward off evil spirits. For days Guntaratana chanted vigorously as participation in this ceremony was one way in which monks at that time could serve the community of laypeople who supported them. Guntaratana's lack of sleep and intensity in this week-long effort resulted in a mental break down that cost him his memory and his ability to read (Guntaratana, 2005).

For months the monks and villagers did everything in their power to cure Guntaratana's condition. Various topical and internalized medications were used with no clear results. The obvious conclusion given the presentation was that Guntaratana had been the victim of evil spirits that required an exorcism. After this effort failed, a strange idea came to Guntaratana that meditation might heal his various health issues. At the time, Buddhist monks were more inclined to preach, chant, and perform blessings, but like all monks, Guntaratana learned about the four foundations of mindfulness as part of his training. Compared to traditional healing practices, Guntaratana began meditating in secret as the common usage of meditation was for purification, not healing. For months Guntaratana practiced mindfulness meditation and found that after two years, his symptoms had resolved (Guntaratana, 2005).

Today, in his 90s, Bhante Henepola Gunaratana is regarded as one of the foremost mindfulness teachers in the United States. He has lived to see Buddhist meditative practices transform into a method of healing conditions of the body and mind. What began as an expansion of Zen meditation grew into a tool to reduce stress and enhance relaxation. It has exploded into new forms of therapy designed to treat a growing variety of conditions. Due to the medicalization of Buddhist meditative practices, an entire industry has emerged designed to recontextualize the teachings of the Buddha into a universal dharma within the frameworks of science, medicine, and healthcare (Kabat-Zinn, 2011).

The first Asian meditative technique to be medicalized in the United States was Transcendental Meditation. Transcendental Meditation gained prominence in the United States during the 1960s as it was subjected to a variety of physiological and psychological tests to determine the impact of meditation on the body (Wilson, 2014). Unlike mindfulness, Transcendental Meditation failed to successfully integrate into mainstream American culture,

primarily due to limited access and inherently religious components. Actual meditative practices within Transcendental Meditation began only after a high fee was paid, and an initiation ceremony was conducted by an anointed guru (Williamson, 2010). This practice limited the availability of Transcendental Meditation as the power structure was concentrated, limiting Transcendental Meditation's ability to integrate into new environments quickly. Transcendental meditation was structured with an inherently religious component due to the devotional following of the gurus (Williamson, 2010).

These integrative practices contrast with the mainstreaming of mindfulness. The mindfulness movement has decentralized leadership and has focused explicitly on reducing religious, supernatural, and Asian components as Kabat-Zinn made efforts to teach the values of a universal Dharma. In his lectures before the 1990 release of Full Catastrophe Living Kabat-Zinn discussed…

> How the Buddha himself was not a Buddhist, how the word Buddha means one who has awakened, and how mindfulness, often spoken of as 'the heart of Buddhist meditation,' has little or nothing to do with Buddhism per se, and everything to do with wakefulness, compassion, and wisdom. These are the universal qualities of being human, precisely what the word dharma, is pointing to (Kabat-Zinn, 2011 p. 283).

In addition to these operational differences between Transcendental Meditation and mindfulness, it is worth noting the impact of race. The leader of the Transcendental Meditative movement was The Maharishi, who was a brown-skinned man of Indian descent who wore yoga robes and Hindu prayer beads. In contrast, Kabat-Zinn is a white American doctor who graduated from MIT and delivers his teachings in business attire (Wilson, 2014).

Transcendental Meditations' lasting impact on Western medicine and psychology is the Relaxation Response. Benson's (and Klipper) 1992 book, The Relaxation Response, was based on Benson experiences with Transcendental Meditation, yoga, and Zen Buddhism. This technique's primary goal is to focus on a specific thought to reduce stress and induce a relaxed physical state (Benson & Kalippr, 1992). The singular focus of this effort is different from the open awareness of mindfulness. Both Kabat-Zinn and Benson succeeded in narrowing their concentration efforts and prying away specific techniques from the organization and authority of larger institutions. By medicalizing Buddhist meditative practices, both efforts are attempting to reprogram cognitions in the mind to produce a change in thoughts and behaviors.

The mindfulness movement's success in domesticating itself into mainstream America, combined with the focus on deconditioning habitual response patterns, places the authority of the movement with professional counselors, psychologists, and doctors (Goleman, 1976). This process has demystified the practice of meditation as it is now allowed to be taught by non-Buddhists. As Jon Kabat-Zinn asserts, "far from being magical or mystical meditation is quite down-to-earth and practical" (Rippe & Southmayd, 1986, p.132). The strategy of promoting Buddhism by hiding the Buddhism allows for the engagement of secular settings, led by practitioners who are revered for their medical qualifications, not their spiritual connections (Wilson, 2014).

The irony in creating a universal non-cultural Buddhism is that this effort is directed by very Buddhist themes like recognition and acceptance of suffering and increasing one's capacity for compassion. The stripping away of more traditional Buddhist methods of practice repeats an ancient adaptive pattern that allows Buddhism to be reinterpreted to meet local needs and modern anxieties. In learning to cope with Dukkha (a Pali word that loosely translates to

suffering), the Buddha himself was dissatisfied with the life of pleasure he was leading and was attempting to find a more satisfying means of being (Teasdale & Chaskalson, 2011a). Modern mindfulness practice seeks to address these very same issues by offering practitioners an opportunity to reduce stress and become more aware of their social connections. No matter if spiritual leaders lead the practice or psychotherapists, mindfulness simply seeks to resolve suffering by changing what the mind is processing and how these thoughts are being processed.

The first examples of the use of mindfulness by psychotherapist appeared in Gestalt therapy, a method popularized by Fritz Perls in 1942. The core of this approach involves helping clients keep their awareness in the present moment by observing what is going on in the mind, body, and emotions (Rothschild, 2017). Through this method, personal growth is achieved by recognizing the changes from moment to moment, which is a distinct correlation to basic mindfulness principles. During the 1990s, the use of mindfulness to treat a variety of psychological conditions became widespread. As previously discussed, Jon Kabat-Zinn's MBSR program brought mindfulness into the medical world, focusing on treating pain, catastrophic illness, and stress. Marsha Linehan also served to popularize the use of mindfulness based psychotherapeutic techniques with her work and writing on the treatment of borderline personality disorder and the development of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) (Hayes, Follette, & Linehan, 2004).

On the surface, applying basic mindfulness principles to the treatment of traumatic stress disorders seems like an obvious extension of mindfulness to treat psychiatric conditions. The mind and body of trauma survivors are continually preoccupied with terrifying memories of past experiences, and often past traumatic experiences can be projected into anxiety about future situations. The use of mindfulness practices under these circumstances to help pull one's

attention into the present moment can be a useful technique. However, without careful consideration and thoughtful adaptions, mindfulness practice can cause further dysregulation for trauma survivors. Practitioners of meditation, yoga, MBSR, tai chi, and other mindfulness-based practices can, at times, experience psychological dissociation, depersonalization, and a re-experiencing of traumatic memories (Treleaven, 2018). All of these practices hold promise for the treatment of trauma survivors as long as appropriate modifications such as varying sensory focus, metering exposure, and tailoring mindfulness-based programming to the specific needs of an individual are considered (Rothschild, 2017). The next chapter will examine how to implement trauma-sensitive mindfulness into school-based environments while appropriately modifying the practice to serve the needs of urban youth.

Chapter 4

More Than Meditation

Pierre Janet was the first psychologist to create a systemic therapeutic approach to post-traumatic psychopathology, and his structure is often considered the gold standard for trauma treatment (Van der Hart, Brown &Van der Kolk, 1989). Janet considered the inability to integrate traumatic memories to be the core issue when dealing with traumatic psychopathology. He noted that his clients who failed to integrate traumatic experiences "…seem to have lost their capacity to assimilate new experiences as well. "It is … as if their personality which definitely stopped at a certain point and cannot enlarge anymore by the addition or assimilation of new elements: all [traumatized] patients seem to have had the evolution of their lives checked; they are attached to an insurmountable obstacle (Van der Hart, Brown &Van der Kolk, 1989, p. 183.)."

Janet's approach, comprised in 1880, consists of three phases of treatment that can be applied across a full spectrum of modern therapeutic modalities. According to Janet's system, phase one focused on establishing safety and stabilization, regardless of the time frame for which this task must be accomplished. Phase two involved the processing and resolution of traumatic memories. Phase three of this strategy emphasized the integration of traumatic memories and applying the strategies learned in phase 1 and 2 into the mainstream of daily life (Rothschild, 2017).

Phase one of this approach functions as the basis for all trauma treatment and is the most relevant to both teachers and students struggling to manage the impact of complex trauma and toxic stress. A safe, stable environment for trauma survivors' in essence, acts like a well-fitted plaster cast around a broken bone. In this example, a properly fitted cast provides safety and

stabilization and allows the bone to heal naturally. Without the stabilization provided by a plaster cast, a broken bone is at risk of being reinjured or fail to heal correctly (Rothschild, 2017). Similarly, individuals who suffer from acute post-traumatic reactions or chronic pathology, healing begins with a sense of safety, the stabilization of symptoms, positive, supportive relationships, and the development of improved self-regulation.

The primary goal of phase one recovery work is the fundamental improvement of the client's daily life quality. The focus of this stage of treatment is on the present moment, and the tools needed to achieve this goal are crisis intervention, mood stabilization, supportive therapy, and mindfulness (Rothschild, 2017). As the primary trademarks of traumatic stress are intrusive thoughts and images, the importance of anchoring one's attention on the present moment becomes increasingly essential for proper healing. The practice of mindfulness can be a useful tool throughout all of Janet's stages of treatment. However, in phase one, mindfulness works to strengthen an individual's awareness of the present moment and reduce the impact of intrusive thoughts and images.

The creation of safe and stable environments was central to Janet's approach. However, he also strongly emphasized the need to establish a special patient-therapist relationship before attempting to process traumatic memories. He noted how the development of rapport was indispensable for the resolution of trauma and considered this relational dynamic to be a vehicle for a cure (Van der Hart, Brown &Van der Kolk, 1989). Janet also noted that the therapist's personality characteristics played a vital role in the development of this relationship. To be impactful, Janet believed the therapist needed to play two contradictory roles. On the one hand, the patient needed to accept the therapist's authority and guidance. At the same time, the therapist needed to minimize control and encourage the independence of the patient. Janet noted that

patients who were too dependent upon the authority of the therapist would only find temporary cures as this effort would ignore the need to keep the patient fundamentally in control of their own lives (Van der Hart, Brown &Van der Kolk, 1989).

Phase one of Janet's systemic therapeutic approach to post-traumatic psychopathology lends itself naturally to urban secondary education and trauma work with high-risk adolescent populations. Janet identified the classic responses to trauma in stage one as a mixture of dissociative reactions, obsessional ruminations, and generalized agitation precipitated by traumatic events (Van der Hart, Brown &Van der Kolk, 1989). While this description was written in the 19th century, it serves to this day as an accurate description of general behavior from adolescents who have been exposed to violence, multi-generational poverty, high levels of drug use, and limited economic and educational opportunities. Proper phase one interventions in emotional regulation at a school-wide level may assist in modifying normal stress responses and altering the problematic trajectories faced by urban youth (Mendelson, Greenberg, Dartiotis, Gould, Rhoades, & Leaf, 2010A).

The first step for schools in attempting to support students who are coping with toxic stress, complex trauma, or any post-traumatic psychopathology is the creation of environments that value the importance of safe spaces. These environments must address traumatic psychopathology using a sensible and compassionate approach, nurturing, and focusing on the development of self-disciplined students and value personal accountability. The integrated approach necessary to create spaces that can act like emotional casts for traumatized students works best with a complete organizational commitment to this cause. A zero-tolerance policy towards violence of any kind is vital to create learning environments that are supportive and not punitive. In order to create this type of organizational culture, a variety of measures might need

to be implemented for the adults in the school to gain sufficient control over the behavioral challenges specific to each environment (Bloom, 2013).

Regardless of the level of organizational commitment to safety, the classroom in all schools serves as an opportunity for students to learn how to resolve internal and external conflicts by practical means. Through the creation of classrooms that serve as therapeutic communities, ' students can learn healthy group interactions while preserving individual integrity (Bloom, 2013). Classroom environments that stress cooperative strategies for problem-solving, conflict resolution, and self-regulation allow students to create positive relational attachments to a variety of different individuals. Teachers in this type of supportive classroom will be allowed to create relationships with students that serve the dual purpose of teaching traditional academic content while modeling appropriate social and emotional manners. In addition, the student-teacher relationship lends themselves naturally to the dual relational component that Janet described as being part of his phased approach to treating traumatic psychopathology.

The process of converting traumatic experiences into positive growth and resilience is a procedure that involves balancing one's attention and working to build inner resources. The practice of mindfulness and self-compassion can help students exposed to trauma, better tolerate distress, decrease self-criticism, develop relationships through building kindness, clarify feelings, make thoughtful decisions and promote bodily relaxation (Turow, 2017). The primary goal of implementing trauma-sensitive mindfulness into classroom environments would be to help all parties involved better manage the complicated relationship between external stressors and internal struggles. As the adults in the room, teachers have an opportunity to model a mindful perspective that emphasizes having a balanced approach towards thoughts and feelings while

developing relationships that help students better integrate the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma.

The use of mindfulness-based practices to cope with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma helps serve the healing process in a variety of ways. Mindfulness practice has been linked with the capacity to increase emotional tolerance and flexibility. By understanding that all emotions have a beginning and an ending, an individual can gain hope that the feelings they are experiencing are time limited. In learning to relate to one's feelings with less tension and a greater sense of ease, mindfulness practice can help promote feelings of relaxation. Cultivating relaxation works to soothe the physical impact of being overly alert, agitated, and on edge either before, after, or during a traumatic experience (Turow, 2017).

Often individuals who experience toxic stress and complex trauma develop automatic survival instincts that help them cope with their surrounding environment. The use of mindfulness practice can help these individuals understand these automatic reactions and a better perspective on how to vary their responses. In learning to increase attentional control, survivors of trauma can change patterns of attention that are focused on reliving past experiences or anxiously anticipating future exposures. The use of mindfulness practice offers increased opportunities to observe how we treat ourselves and how we respond to others. Cultivating self-compassion mindfulness practice allows the opportunity to help individuals respond to their challenges with kindness, patience, and compassion (Turow, 2017).

As discussed, earlier Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p.4)." In the context of using mindfulness to treat trauma, it is essential to identify how these three basic

tenants of mindfulness - purposeful attention, nonjudgmental attention, and present moment awareness- can impact individual survivors.

Purposeful Attention

The first core component of mindfulness is paying purposeful attention, which is comprised of learning to direct and sustain one's focus intentionally. In a given moment, the human mind can think about many things at once with varying degrees of consciousness. This is especially true for individuals who have experienced traumatic stress and are reflexively scanning their environments for trauma-related stimuli. The use of proper mindfulness practice can help train an individual to become skilled at observing thoughts, understanding when one's attention roams and learning the necessary skills to help redirect intentional focus. Through practice, the act of paying purposeful attention to our thoughts is like using a spotlight to focus the audience's attention during a theatrical performance (Treleaven, 2018).

By learning to observe thoughts, emotions, or sensations connected to our breath, mindfulness can help trauma survivors direct their attention in purposeful ways. The development of this skill set creates a sense of hope and can empower individuals with the knowledge that they have some control over the direction of their intrusive thoughts. By taking charge of their emotional spotlight, trauma survivors can learn that they are no longer at the mercy of their attention and regain a sense of agency and control. While the mind may still wander, mindfulness practice allows one to observe his/her thoughts and feelings with a greater sense of perspective (Turow, 2017).

Nonjudgmental Attention

The next primary tenant of mindfulness practice that works to the benefit of individuals coping with toxic stress and complex trauma is the cultivation of a nonjudgmental perspective. By working to reduce self-judgment, mindfulness practitioners have the potential to lessen the impact of shame, self-blame, and depression that is commonly associated with traumatic psychopathology. If one can broaden the perspective of the moment, then the potential to recognize the positive, negative, and neutral components of a situation is heightened. The practice of nonjudgmental attention can be difficult for survivors as often traumatic experiences induce feelings of shame and self-judgment. While justified feelings of anger are often directed at the individuals or institutions that inflict trauma, it is common for survivors of trauma to engage in self-critical behavior (Deitz, Williams, Rife, & Cantrell, 2015).

As humans, we are continually evaluating, labeling, and judging moments to help make sense of the world. This impulse to categorize is useful in helping us differentiate between situations and relationships that are safe or dangerous, but for survivors of trauma, this practice can become isolating. In using the painful memories of the past to guide present moment decisions, trauma survivors allow their automatic judgments to limit the richness of an experience. In learning to approach new situations with open curiosity, mindfulness meditation offers a path to work with the judging mind. Survivors who learn to embrace nonjudgmental curiosity and self-compassion can learn to treat intrusive traumatic thoughts, feelings, or sensations without labeling the experience. In doing so, these traumatic issues can be dealt with mindfully by recognizing their presence and returning the attention to the present moment without judgment (Turow, 2017).

Present Moment Awareness

As the core mechanism of mindfulness involves anchoring the attention, often to the breath, the idea is to notice when one's mind wanders to thoughts, feelings, or sensations that are not of the present moment. For trauma survivors, the present moment is often rich with reminders of the past or anxieties of what the future might offer. A survivor's lens can be focused on unintegrated fragments of trauma, disorienting thoughts, and agonizing memories that encroach on their ability to stay grounded in the present. Through learning mindfulness and prioritizing the moment, the emphasis is not to invalidate the past or minimize what is to come but rather to focus on the workable material of the present. In The Body Remembers, Volume 2: Revolutionizing Trauma Treatment, Babette Rothschild notes, "The present moment focus of mindfulness is an obvious natural antidote for PTSD, a condition where the mind and body of trauma survivors are continually wrenched into memories of a terrifying past (Rothschild, 2017, p.166)."

Present moment focus can be deepened and enlarged by mindfulness practice. It allows for problems to be broken down into manageable sizes and works to decrease the impact of pain from past experiences and the anxiety from future concerns. Past experiences and future concerns often feel unmanageable while focusing on the present moment allows trauma survivors the ability to focus on controlling the singular moment at hand. This subtle shift in perspective is often more tolerable as it allows individuals to focus on handling specific moments in time that require actionable efforts. Learning to stay rooted in the present while coping with unintegrated trauma also helps develop dual awareness, an essential skill needed for trauma recovery (Treleaven, 2018).

Rothschild's described that the dual awareness distinguishes between the observing self and the experiencing self. She notes that the experiencing self is the individual's internal sense

of trauma, which often presents in the visceral signs of traumatic psychopathology. The observing self, which can be enhanced by mindfulness practice, represents the individual's ability to create distance from a traumatic experience while maintaining some awareness of a broader perspective (Rothschild, 2017). This approach's duality is essential in recovery as it allows individuals suffering from the weight of traumatic stress to maintain multiple perspectives at the same time. Mastering this skill can prove to be a difficult task for trauma survivors as the experience of trauma leads to a barrage of disturbing memories, difficult physical sensations, and traumatic reminders brought on by simple day to day interactions (Treleaven, 2018).

Mindfulness practice for trauma survivors works to help strengthen the development of the observing self. With guidance, survivors can develop the capacity for dual awareness by learning to experience their traumatic stimuli without becoming consumed by this identity. The development of dual awareness works to help individuals coping with traumatic psychopathology to maintain a firm grip on the present moment instead of being transported by reminders of past experiences or anxious about future concerns.

For trauma survivors, mindfulness meditation offers the opportunity to enhance self-regulation (Ostafin, Robinson, & Meier, 2015). Self-regulation can be defined as the ability to monitor and control one's behavior, emotions, and thoughts while altering them in accordance with the present moment demands of a situation (Treleaven, 2018). For those who have experienced traumatic psychopathology, feeling a sense of control can be difficult. When your thoughts, feelings, and actions are often dominated by intrusive thoughts, disturbing memories, and unbearable physical sensations, one can feel that one lacks necessary control over simple bodily functions. With the development of increased self-regulation skills, one can theoretically regain a sense of agency by learning to tolerate complicated inner feelings skillfully. The

practice of mindfulness and the development of increased self-regulation is not just beneficial to survivors of trauma. It is also an incredibly useful skill for trauma-sensitive professionals, such as teachers in large urban schools who work with students coping with toxic stress and complex trauma. In learning to increase self-regulation, professionals exposed to traumatic psychopathology can more effectively tolerate the stories and behaviors of the individuals they are teaching. In so doing, teachers can be better prepared to manage and teach students who are regularly exposed to toxic stress and complex trauma.

Guidelines for Implementing Trauma-Sensitive Mindfulness

Teachers looking to implement trauma-sensitive mindfulness into their classrooms for the benefit of their students should consider four guidelines. As each school and classroom environment is different, these guidelines are not intended to be rigid but organic and evaluated continuously. In working to implement these guidelines into a classroom environment, the focus should be on the development of authentic relationships as this will enhance both student learning and acceptance of mindfulness practice (Himelstein, 2020).

Safety

As previously discussed, safety is the most fundamental principle of Janet's gold standard approach to treating traumatic psychopathology. In the context of a school or classroom, the importance of this standard cannot be stressed enough. The nervous system of students that have been exposed to traumatic stimuli will react by the slightest appearance of a threat. If a sense of safety is not established, youth coping with traumatic psychopathology will not be able to focus on academic content or any mindfulness-based exercises appropriately. A basic definition of safety is being protected from loss, danger, or harm. One's sense of safety can

be physical, material, and having access to food or water and relational. When people feel a sense of safety, they trust that they are cared for and that their survival is not in jeopardy (Treleaven, 2018).

Neuroception is one method coined by Steven Porges to describe how humans distinguish if situations or people are safe, dangerous, or life-threatening. As opposed to perception, which depends on cognitive awareness, neuroception is an unconscious process that occurs in the primitive components of the brain and works to evaluate behavioral and environmental cues to assess the presence of safety. If a sense of safety is established, the nervous system inhibits the primary animal defenses of fight, flight, and freeze and allows for the social engagement system to be activated (Porges, 2004). Only when the social engagement system has been activated will students who are coping with traumatic psychopathology be open and capable of engaging in a learning environment.

Establishing safe environments to practice school-based mindfulness is critical in part because the goal of this process should be to counteract faulty neuroception. Survivors of trauma often struggle to recognize nonthreatening situations because their systems are flooded with intrusive thoughts, traumatic memories, and threatening physical sensations. By continuing to neurocept danger in nonthreatening situations, survivors essentially work to sabotage their efforts to appropriately integrate the traumatic experiences they are attempting to process (Ogden & Fisher, 2015). While there are many benefits to learning mindfulness practices to help cope with trauma, it is essential to recognize that faulty neuroception can lead to continued traumatic experiences. The best cautionary example of this issue would be to imagine oneself as a teenager who has been exposed to physical violence and is now being asked to close their eyes and participate in a mindfulness-based meditation in a room full of potential threats.

Relationships

As Janet indicated in his three-step approach, relationships offer a great domain to work with neuroception and traumatic psychopathology. Survivors of trauma are often hurt in the context of some form of direct or indirect relational context. As school-based mindfulness practice does not occur without a relational component, teacher-student relationships can be used as vessels to foster interpersonal safety and aid in the development of healthy attachments (Perry & Szalavitz, 2017). Relational mindfulness can best be described as the explicit practice of building relationships to foster trust, safety, and authenticity (Himelstein, 2020). This represents a strategic approach to relationships that emphasizes the importance of evaluating how teachers and students relate rather than viewing this as a passive component to the development of trauma-sensitive school cultures. When valuing the importance of every interaction is at the forefront of building an authentic relationship, then even the most difficult of students can be reached.

At birth, humans are born with a limited capacity to self-regulate as babies are dependent upon their caregivers to help regulate arousal within a normal window of tolerance. Infants learn self-regulation primarily through the external mediated interactive regulation of their primary attachment figures (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006). Even as humans age, the soothing voice or gentle touch of someone we care about can ease the pain of a stressful day. Mindful teacher-student relationships have the potential to help trauma survivors learn how to regulate arousal appropriately. When students feel their relationship with a teacher is authentic and trustworthy, then nonverbal cues such as settling eye contact, appropriate physical touch, thoughtful tone of voice, or even merely offering a calming presence can provide positive inter-relational psychobiological regulation. Students who feel they are safe and in attuned contact with others will be more easily able to access their social engagement system. Whereas the experience of

trauma works to disrupt relationships feeling a sense of interpersonal community works to develop a state known as synchrony, which aids in the development of self-regulation (Treleaven, 2018).

An essential component to the development of synchrony and relational mindfulness is the understanding of intersecting oppressive forces that reinforce or impose threatening messages. We all belong to groups, some of which we choose, and some of which are assigned to us by social context. The interconnected web of these identities has consistent influence over our lives and our relationships. Understanding how the social context of a moment impacts behavior and relationships, enables the ability to be more attuned to the needs of trauma survivors. The acronym ADRESSING is useful in helping to identify nine categories of social classifications that can impact the context of trauma-related work in urban secondary educational settings, age, disability, religious culture, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender (Nieto et al., 2010).

The first step towards understanding how intersectionality impacts relationships are to develop an awareness of social context and the dynamics of how privilege, oppression, and power contribute to the formation of personal identity. Once individuals become familiar with the social identities that they carry, they can then use this knowledge to identify how they might interact with others and make the appropriate relational adjustments. In making these social assessments, it is imperative to be open to a student's full experience as being the truth, comfortable with the fact that one's own identity may have contributed to the oppression of another, open to sharing diverse experiences and willing to learn more about how the intersectionality of identity impacts relational dynamics (Himelstein, 2020).

This dynamic process of developing cultural safety requires constant self-evaluation. Without an intentional focus on intersectionality, it is possible to reinforce racist, sexist, or other oppressive dynamics that are often intimately connected to an individual's traumatic experiences. Basic questions that should be asked when working to be sensitive towards privilege and oppression include:

1. How is social context influencing this specific moment or relational dynamic?
2. How might fundamental beliefs, values, or assumptions not explicitly related to this interaction impact this relational dynamic?
3. In what areas related to the populations one works with, does one need to increase their cultural competence in order to be interacting with a culturally sensitive lens?

To establish a sense of relational safety and a willingness to participate in mindfulness practice, students needed to feel cared for and understood as the complex individuals they are. Once this sense of safety has been established, the development of self-regulation skills becomes possible as emotional regulation can be maintained within a healthy window of tolerance.

Window of Tolerance

The goal of trauma-sensitive mindfulness is to help trauma survivors cultivate the ability to avoid the extremes of hyperarousal and hypo arousal. While a flight or fight response mobilizes a powerful injection of survival-based energy, a freeze response manages to capture this same force. One way to help trauma survivors safely observe and tolerate this broad range of experience in the window of tolerance (Siegel, 1999). The window of tolerance is a middle path of support between two extremes and is often thought of as an essential element of all trauma-informed care. Dan Siegel coined the term "window of tolerance" and described this optimal zone for mindfulness practice as a body of water that flows between two riverbanks. On

one side of the riverbank, according to Siegel, exists emotional chaos where life is turbulent and unstable. On the other side of this riverbank exists rigidity where life is stagnant, and individuals feel stuck. The balance between these two extremes exists in the flowing water between the riverbanks that Siegel referred to as the river of integration shown in figure 2. (Siegel, 1999).

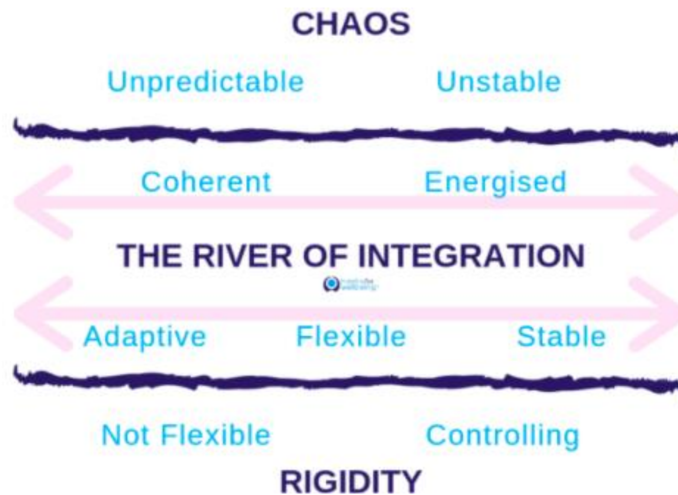

Figure 2

Students who present in a state of hypo arousal will tend to be oversensitive to sensations or sounds, hypervigilant to their surroundings, and highly emotionally reactive. In this chaotic, rigid state, they can experience an absence of sensations and general indifference. Students who present in a hyperarousal state tend to exhibit disorganized cognitive processing, struggle to pay attention, report feeling spacey, and are often unable to concentrate. Given this presentation, it is clear how students coping with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma struggle to perform up to their academic potential and often exhibit behavioral challenges while in school. The window of tolerance concept works for school-based mindfulness as it seeks to optimize one's emotional ability to practice mindfulness and learn academic content.

The size of an individual's window of tolerance is related to their threshold of response or the amount of stimulation necessary to provoke arousal. An individual with a low threshold for

arousal will require minimal stimulation to evoke a response while an individual with a high threshold will require significant input to react. The concept of thresholds also applies to triggers which represent stimuli that initiate flashbacks related to previous traumatic events. Common triggers typically include people, places, smells, memories, or interpersonal dynamics that are unique to each individual's life experience. As it is impossible to create trigger free environments, it becomes crucial for trauma survivors to gain some sense of agency over their windows of tolerance. The following are some signs that suggest a student is outside of their window of tolerance and that an intervention of some kind might be beneficial:

- Muscle tone appears collapsed, and there is a noticeably flat affect
- Muscle Tone appears rigid, and there is a noticeably agitated presentation
- Hyperventilation
- Exaggerated startle response
- excessive sweating
- excessive cursing
- Disassociation
- Emotional volatility
- Disorganized speech
- Lack of eye contact
- Reports of flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts.

The list above is not comprehensive but can serve as a guide to help teachers recognize when a student is outside of their window of tolerance and might require some form of special relational attention (Treleaven, 2018).

Academic growth, self-regulation, or cultivating mindfulness becomes significantly more challenging when one's emotional regulation is outside of their window of tolerance. When an individual is outside of their window of tolerance, their social engagement system is offline and relating to the present moment becomes increasingly tricky. This concept is useful for both teachers and students coping with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma. Teachers who operate within their window of tolerance will have access to their social engagement system and be far more likely to communicate effectively while appropriately regulating classroom environments. Teachers who are operating outside of their window of tolerance risk being easily triggered while having less patience for their students' behaviors and potentially losing their ability to communicate their needs effectively. The width of a teacher's window of tolerance directly impacts the quality of the relationships they have with their students and works to establish the cultural values of a classroom environment.

Body-Focused Care

The natural state of the human condition exists in a somewhat guarded manner as we are continually evaluating the safety of our surrounding environment. However, in order to develop relationships and feel emotionally close to another individual, we need to relax our defensive systems temporarily. Many methods used to treat traumatic injuries tend to bypass the emotional engagement system and focus on recruiting the cognitive capacities of the mind (Van der Kolk & Bessel, 2015). Despite the well-documented impact of anger, fear, and anxiety on cognitive functioning, educational institutions often ignore the brain's safety systems before developing cognitive skills. As traumatized adolescents are often too hypervigilant to enjoy ordinary pleasures or too numb to expose themselves to new experiences, the foundation of care exists

within any school-based activities that promote movement, rhythm, play, companionship, and joyful engagement.

By emphasizing body-based treatments or what van der Kolk (van der Kolk & Bessel, 2015) described as bottom-up treatments, one can become more open to approaches that develop interpersonal rhythms, emotional awareness, and nonverbal forms of communication that work to shift individuals out of the fight, flight or freeze stages. For those that have experienced complex trauma or toxic stress, the physical experience of the body can resemble a battlefield filled with sensations related to horrific and overwhelming events. The physical body can serve as the theatre in which the agony of these past traumas is on display, often resulting in survivors dissociating and pulling their attention away from their inner worlds. While this adaptive technique serves to protect survivors from painful memories, it effectively disconnects individuals from physical sensations allowing survivors to lose the sense of being fully alive (Treleaven, 2018).

Mindfulness practice can serve to help survivors in learning to regain agency and control over their bodies. By working to improve one's awareness of inner body sensations and striving to observe and tolerate painful internal stimuli, mindfulness can help survivors learn to manage their inner turmoil. This makes the body an essential domain for healing when working with survivors of trauma. In recovery, survivors need to regain a sense of connection with their inner worlds. While the idea of being mindful about the body can be an intense and frightening experience for survivors, certain modifications to basic mindfulness practice can make this experience more tolerable.

The first modification to mindfulness practice that serves to aid helping survivors connect with their bodies is the most fundamental principle of all trauma-sensitive work.

Creating a safe school environment requires a focus on the entire concept of safety, not just physical safety, but also psychological, social, and moral safety (Bloom, 1995). Respecting these boundaries for all survivors is critical to ensure that students feel safe and in control of their choices. There is often an interpersonal component to trauma that leaves survivors with violated personal boundaries. For this reason, trauma-sensitive mindfulness must occur with a constant focus on how one's physical and verbal presence can impact another.

The second modification, leaving people in choice, relates directly to the development of safe interpersonal dynamics. Nobody ever chooses to experience traumatic injury, and the impact of such events often leaves survivors feeling violated and absent a sense of control. Due to this, it is imperative that survivors feel a sense of choice and autonomy in when, where, and how mindfulness is practiced. The goal should be to allow survivors to understand that nothing is being forced upon them and that their personal mindfulness practice can move at the pace that works best for them. By emphasizing choice, survivors develop a sense of autonomy and understand that they will not be forced to engage in activities that work to push them outside of their window of tolerance (Treleaven, 2018).

The third modification is the use of informal forms of mindfulness. When working with traumatized adolescents in school-based environments, informal forms of mindfulness such as orienting, mindful check-ins, mindful movement, mindful walking, mindful eating, and mindful games should be emphasized over cognitive forms. Cognitive forms of mindfulness, such as formal meditation, can be difficult for trauma-impacted youth who might have short attention spans or be easily triggered by nonthreatening stimuli.

Informal mindfulness practice offers the opportunity to introduce students to the benefits of mindfulness practice through daily activities that can be initiated within the school day

(Himmelstein, 2020). Informal mindfulness practices can be infused into regular school activities and can be practiced without ever using the words, mindfulness, or meditation. These activities can function as building blocks towards the development of more formal mindfulness practice and will organically serve to help students sustain present moment awareness while developing bodily awareness.

The final modification used to help survivors of complex trauma and toxic stress become more in tune with their bodies is the incorporation of movement into mindfulness practices. It will be easier for many adolescents to cope with the impact of trauma to stay present and connected to their bodies while moving. Yoga, walking meditations, and other active mindfulness activities can offer more impactful interventions for survivors of trauma than a static meditation session. Recent research has shown that a modified trauma-sensitive yoga program works to regulate heart rate variability (HRV), which is a biological marker of arousal. Well-regulated individuals tend to have a robust HRV, which aids in their ability to have control impulses and emotions. Individuals who suffer from low HRV tend to be more reactive to minor stressors and prone to develop a variety of physical illnesses, which are in line with common symptoms of complex trauma and toxic stress (Emerson & Hopper, 2012).

Summary

The creation of school environments that are conducive for the integration of trauma-sensitive mindfulness practice begins by educating the adults in the system about the importance of safety. This includes every adult in the building, from security guards and custodial staff members to teachers' administrators, support staff, parents, and board members. All adult parties involved must work together to create school environments that function as safe containment systems for the overwhelming feelings that toxic stress and complex trauma create. Without an

organizational focus on safety, school environments will continue to contribute to the traumatization of students by creating environments that do not allow for the temporary relaxation of students' natural defensive systems. This paradigm shift begins when the organizational approach to each student changes from "What is wrong with you?" to "What has happened to you?" and "How can we help?" (Bloom, 1995, p9). This type of change towards viewing students from an injury-based perspective dismisses the notion of sickness and badness and allows the adults in the system to function with the necessary sense of compassion (Bloom, 1995).

Because many urban secondary schools will struggle to create environments that are capable of successfully mitigating violence, classrooms must function as safe therapeutic communities. These holding environments need to be supported by school administrations and protected from the negative influences of the broader school community in order to provide students with an opportunity to process their traumatic experiences. The goal for these environments is to maximize the potential for learning, not just academic content, but also to enhance emotional and relational development. As many students who suffer from toxic stress and complex trauma come from dysfunctional home settings, it becomes the school's responsibility to model appropriate social, emotional, and relational boundaries as if the school community was a highly functioning family unit. For this reason, the well-being of the entire school staff needs to be prioritized as unhealthy parental figures cannot provide a safe and loving home for traumatized children (Bloom, 1995).

Adolescents living with toxic stress and complex trauma heal in the context of relationships. These relationships provide physical and emotional safety to shelter individuals from shame and judgment while enhancing the ability to integrate traumatic experiences into

one's daily life (Van der Kolk & Bessel, 2015). In the absence of a supportive family, individuals coping with toxic stress and complex trauma are dependent upon community members or school environments that value their safety and well-being. The impact of toxic stress and complex trauma often remains trapped in nonverbal domains and can be expressed through acting out behaviors directed at the self or others (Treleaven, 2018). The integration of this traumatic stress necessitates the ability to make these unconscious and nonverbal experiences conscious so that they may be expressed with others.

Students living with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma lose the ability to access their social engagement systems. Relationships become difficult as trauma often occurs in the context of oppression and interpersonal violence. The use of mindfulness offers a tool to help students develop their abilities to direct their focus by paying purposeful attention to their thoughts and feelings. Developing this sense of empowerment over emotional well-being creates a feeling of agency and control that is often lost due to traumatic stress. When students learn to broaden the perspective of the moment, they can develop a nonjudgmental view of the positive, negative, and neutral components of a feeling or situation that will help them remain within their window of tolerance and focused on the present moment (Treleaven, 2018). Present moment awareness acts as an antidote to traumatic memories that can force students to be focused on flashbacks to past incidents or anxious thoughts about future concerns.

The Be Easy curriculum that has been developed as part of this dissertation seeks to integrate informal mindfulness-based activities into daily classroom schedules to help students remain in the present moment and harness the power of relationships. Each activity that has been included in the Be Easy curriculum seeks to promote movement, rhythm, play, companionship, or joyful engagement. By emphasizing body-based treatments (Van der Kolk &

Bessel, 2015), these activities seek to help students develop interpersonal awareness that minimizes the impact of the fight, flight, and freeze response, which is so closely associated with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma.

Chapter 5

The Be Easy Curriculum

Introduction

The goal in the development of the Be Easy curriculum was threefold: 1) to offer an easy, fun way of creatively inserting short mindfulness-based activities into daily classroom lessons 2) to introduce basic mindfulness concepts in hopes of highlighting the benefits of present moment awareness for both students and teachers and 3) to create relational cohesion that might begin to mitigate some of the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma. This mindfulness-based curriculum seeks to integrate mindfulness and psychotherapy's best practices into secondary educational environments for work with urban adolescent students. The impetus for creating this curriculum was simple: to provide teachers with informal, mindfulness-based strategies to enhance authentic relationships, foster greater self-awareness, greater self-regulatory capacity, and do so within the time constraints of daily lesson plans.

Using This Curriculum

The three cornerstones of group work with adolescents involve creating relevance, creating connections, and working with resistance (Sofer & Brensilver, 2019). While this targeted curriculum attempts to ease some of these barriers, a constant focus on adapting to these three pillars is the only way to ensure a successful group experience. Teachers who implement this program play an essential role in creating environments conducive to open and authentic conversations. The more genuinely teachers are willing to learn and be changed by their students, the more naturally classroom environments that emphasize open, honest communication will be enhanced.

Creating Relevance

One of the main tasks in working with adolescents is to keep content relative and appealing in order to hold the attention of your audience. The Be Easy curriculum is designed with this in mind, but solely relying on this curriculum will not be sufficient. The best practice would be to continually focus on adapting this material to your students' personalities in order to tune the content to the specific needs of your classroom environment (Sofer & Brensilver, 2019). Enlisting your students' guidance in this process is an excellent method for keeping this content relevant and creating authentic relationships. Two techniques that might be useful for building upon the content of this curriculum are:

-Incorporate stories, metaphors, current events, and pop culture to help make the content more exciting and relevant to the participating students.

-Integrate relevant content from other disciplines in order to help students make connections across subject matters.

The process of making content relevant should be a shared classroom experience. This process can be a golden opportunity to learn more about your students as they make connections between what they have learned and what they care about. One strategy for accomplishing this task is to introduce an activity from the Be Easy curriculum and then invite your students to recreate their version of that activity.

Creating Connections

One of the Be Easy curricula' primary goals is the creation of classroom cohesion. It is imperative that all participating members feel safe and respected. The following suggestions are

strategies that will enhance the effectiveness of using this curriculum to create cohesive classroom environments.

- Creating a safe, comfortable environment, both physically and verbally, is imperative in helping student engagement. This can be accomplished by identifying simple rules and guidelines for classroom behaviors that should be established through a collaborative classroom effort.
- Be your authentic self as adolescents have highly developed authenticity meters and will disengage if they suspect you are disingenuous. The use of appropriate self-disclosure can be a handy tool in helping to create connections and model strength through vulnerability.
- Model self-regulation as adolescents struggling with toxic stress and complex trauma are still learning this skill. Students who might feel dysregulated are desperately seeking a grounded, stable presence to help them learn to relax and deescalate their feelings. The managing tone of voice and body language are excellent methods of modeling self-regulation as often, our internal feelings are transmitted through tone and nonverbal communication.
- Tracking nonverbal information from the students in your classroom is an excellent way to engage an understanding of the experience of your audience. By learning to read your students' nonverbal expressions, you can better determine what is needed to support individuals and the group as a whole.
- Developing group facilitation skills will help students' engagement by shifting from educational content into collaborative group discussions.

Working with Resistance

When working with adolescents, it is only natural that they will seek to assert their autonomy. While implementing the above-listed strategies will help to negate the impact of resistance, behavioral challenges will inevitably arise. The following are some additional strategies that will aid in working with resistance.

- Learn to interpret adolescent resistance as information that students are offering to communicate their needs. This simple shift in thinking can help minimize the frustration of working with students who seem intent on being disruptive.
- Monitor your responses by checking your assumptions and refusing to take situations personally. Often, we assume that we understand all that is being expressed through acting out behaviors and interpret these actions as malicious. Once behaviors are perceived as personal attacks, it can be challenging to respond compassionately and skillfully.
- Try to transform resistance by redirecting negative energy into positive, productive outcomes. This strategy often works best when students are engaged in collaborative efforts to solve problems as punitive solutions can trigger a flight, fight, or freeze response.
- Seeking out support from friends, colleagues, or even other students is an excellent tool for identifying creative solutions to working with resistance.

Teacher Participation

Teaching mindfulness to adolescents' entails helping students cultivate an awareness of the present moment. This is best accomplished and exhibited through an instructor's connectedness to their inner and outer experiences. Embracing a mindful attitude in a classroom

is the direct opposite of being "zoned out" or unaware of what is happening around you. It is best accomplished when each new moment provides experiential material. Mindfulness practice can offer significant benefits to health and well-being by allowing one to alter their relationship to experience. The cultivation of an even-handed and open-hearted approach towards interacting with students can strengthen emotional balance, resilience, and interpersonal effectiveness (Broderick, 2013). These are skill sets that benefit both teachers and students; thus, the implementation of the Be Easy curriculum has the potential to serve every individual who is present for the activity.

In using the Be Easy curriculum, merely emphasizing the cognitive understanding of mindfulness will not be sufficient. Teachers who seek to implement this curriculum into their daily classroom activities do not need to be trained as mindfulness instructors but would greatly benefit from a basic understanding of simple mindfulness concepts. Ideally, teachers who seek to implement this curriculum would have participated in some form of retreat, workshop, or traditionally structured program such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. While this is not required, as each activity is designed to enhance classroom experiences organically, a basic understanding of mindfulness concepts would add to the authenticity of the educational experience.

At a bare minimum, proper implementation of the Be Easy curriculum demands instructors who can consider the content matter that is being taught (curriculum delivery), how these messages are being delivered (embodied teaching), and an authentic attempt to be sensitive to the social and emotional histories of the participants. While the activities described in the curriculum below are designed to be relevant to a particular audience of urban adolescents, the leader of these activities must recognize how their presence can shape the emotional atmosphere

of a classroom. Teachers who can model being present, stable, and available can play a pivotal role in helping students learn these skills as they would be effectively functioning as a soothing caregiver.

Implementation of the Be Easy Curriculum

The Be Easy curriculum is comprised of two parts that are designed to be easily implemented into a regular classroom lesson plan. The first component of the Be Easy curriculum is Whip Around conversation starters that attempt to get urban high school students thinking about subjects related to basic mindfulness principles. The second set of activity flashcards are designed to be 1to 5-minute exercises that help students begin to practice basic mindfulness skills. In combination, the two sets of activity cards function as a basic introduction to mindfulness practice and seek to help students and teachers recognize the benefits of present moment awareness.

The Whip around's and activities listed as part of the Be Easy curriculum are intended to serve the needs of urban high school students in 9th-12th grades. The curriculum works best in combination when a whip around is used at the beginning of class as a means of an intellectual and emotional warmup, and an activity card is used as a mid-lesson break. Both sets of activities are designed with flexibility in mind, and teachers are encouraged to incorporate specific subject matter when possible. As students and teachers began to relate their personal experiences to these activities, it can also be beneficial to the entire class to creatively build upon the exercises listed as part of this curriculum. While the cards are designed to be used as a warmup and a mid-lesson break, teachers should also feel comfortable using any activity at any time if, for example, they feel a class needs a movement break or needs to be refocused.

The Be Easy curriculum is comprised of some original activities and modifications made to existing mindfulness-based curriculums for teens. The modifications made to the existing exercises are intended to make the mindfulness-based activities more suitable for an urban educational environment. The curriculums that have been modified will be noted in each section.

The Be Easy Curriculum Activities

Whip Arounds

Whip Arounds are short conversation starters designed to get students thinking and talking about who they are, what they like, and how the world around them impacts them. Each question in this section is aimed at the development of four specific skill sets (Connect, Appreciate, Relate, and Insight) that enhance an emotionally balanced and mindful way of living. Whip Arounds serve the dual purpose of encouraging student engagement and participation while creating discussions about the essential fundamentals of living an emotionally balanced life. Teachers can utilize these Whip Arounds at the beginning of class as a means of checking in with students, engaging creative yet mindful conversations, and for the development of classroom rapport (Zeger & Koffler, 2017).

Connect – Questions that focus attention and increase awareness of the present moment

Appreciate – Questions that seek to inspire a heightened sense of gratitude

Relate – Questions that seek to challenge assumptions and promote relational understanding

Insight – Questions designed to expand social and emotional intelligence

How to Use

Choose a Question

- Teachers or students chose a card from the deck of questions below and present that question to the class. Each question poses a prompt that should be answered based on the life experience of

the individual who is answering. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, and students should be encouraged to be as creative with their answers as possible. Have students write down or think about what their answer is to the question that was presented. While each student should be encouraged to participate, they will also be allowed to pass if they do not feel comfortable sharing.

Discuss

- After completing the Whip Around, and if time allows, it can be useful to have students discuss ideas or themes present in a majority of the responses. Sometimes this portion of the process can occur during the exercise as students might want to expand upon their answers.

When to Use

- Whip Arounds work best at the beginning of a class as a means of encouraging participation and allowing students to ease into discussions. They can also be used as…
- A warmup activity or means of introducing a new idea
- A social and emotional check-in
- An icebreaker to establish positive classroom environments and discover common connections
- A brainstorming activity
- A mid-lesson break to help regain focus
- A closing activity to summarize the lesson

Variations

To encourage variety or to include movement, the following variations might be considered.

- Stand and Whip; in this version, students are encouraged to stand up to indicate that they have an answer. Alternatively, the entire class is forced to stand and cannot sit down until all parties have participated. Again, this variation should allow students who feel uncomfortable to pass if need be.

- Speed Round Whip; in this version, students are encouraged to answer the question as quickly as possible.

- Point and Whip; in this version, students are allowed to call upon their classmates after answering the question. It is important in this version to allow students to pass if they do not feel comfortable sharing; however, students who choose to pass should still be required to call upon a classmate.

Each page of Whip Around questions below should be printed and then cut up into individual cards. Each card represents one Whip Around question. The category that each card attempts to address is listed as the heading on the card (Zeger & Koffler, 2017). This format has been adapted from The Rethink card deck. The questions and categories have been altered to make this exercise more suitable for an urban secondary school environment.

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CONNECT
Name one aspect of your life that is currently bringing you happiness.

CONNECT
Identify something or someone that currently inspires you.

CONNECT
Identify one task you wish to accomplish today and one task you need to accomplish today.

CONNECT
If your life had a theme song what would it be and why?

CONNECT
Share one idea that is running through your head no matter how random that thought might be.

CONNECT
Share one random thought that makes you laugh.

CONNECT
Identify one experience you have had today that has captured your attention.

CONNECT
Identify one item in this classroom that stands out to you. What about this item caught your attention?

CONNECT
Name something that has surprised you recently.

CONNECT
Name one thing that is currently causing you stress.

APPRECIATE
Offer a compliment to a person near you.

APPRECIATE
How do you react when you receive a compliment.

APPRECIATE
Describe a quality about yourself that you appreciate.

APPRECIATE
Identify one thing, no matter how small, that you are grateful for.

APPRECIATE
Share a challenge you have faced that has made you a better person.

APPRECIATE
Identify a strength in another classmate that you admire.

APPRECIATE
What is the best gift you have ever received?

APPRECIATE
What is the best gift you have ever given?

APPRECIATE
What does practicing gratitude mean to you?

APPRECIATE
Do you smile at strangers? Why, or why not?

RELATE
Share one random moment of kindness that you have done.

RELATE
What does the word compassion men to you?

RELATE
Share something you do to cope when you are stressed out.

RELATE
Share a story about a time when change was a good thing.

RELATE
Share a story of a time when someone helped you.

RELATE
How do you show that you care for your friends?

RELATE
Share a story about a time when you helped a friend.

RELATE
Share a story about the last time you laughed so hard you cried.

RELATE
Identify one skill that people would be shocked to find out you have.

RELATE
Identify your favorite song or artist.

INSIGHT
Name something you find challenging.

INSIGHT
Describe your perfect day.

INSIGHT
What is the best advice you have ever received?

INSIGHT
What is the best advice you have ever given?

INSIGHT
Share a social or political issue that you are passionate about.

INSIGHT
If you could live anywhere in the world where would you live?

INSIGHT
If you could change one aspect of your life, what would it be?

INSIGHT
Are you a better person today then you were yesterday?

INSIGHT
Name one person who inspires you and describe why?

INSIGHT
If you could give one piece of advice to a newborn child what would it be?

Present Moment Play Flashcards

The activity portion of the Be Easy curriculum is comprised of short activities, presented on flashcards, that can be utilized to promote present moment awareness. Each game card intends to serve the dual purpose of encouraging student engagement and participation while allowing students to practice the critical fundamentals of living an emotionally balanced life. The identified activity cards seek to promote informal mindfulness-based practice in a fun and natural way that can easily be implemented in a classroom environment. Teachers can utilize these activity cards during regular classroom happenings to develop classroom rapport and offer an enjoyable activity to break up classroom routines. The models offered in this section of the curriculum can be enhanced by creatively combining appropriate subject-relevant material into these activities. However, ultimately these activities seek to help participants focus on the present moment. These flashcards combine original group activities with modified group activities from established mindfulness-based curriculums. The gem cards that have been modified will note the original source. In each case these activities have been modified in order to make these activities more suitable for an urban secondary educational environment.

Discuss

- After completing an activity card, and if time allows, it can be useful to have students discuss ideas or themes that each activity brought to their attention. Sometimes this portion of the process can occur during the exercise as students might want to expand upon the experiences they are having.

When to Use

- Present Moment Play activity cards work best at the beginning of a class as a means of encouraging participation and allowing students to settle into a learning environment.

They can also be used as…

- An icebreaker to establish positive classroom environments and discover common connections
- A mid-lesson break to help regain focus
- A closing activity to summarize the lessons

Keep the Beat 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention, Organized Movement

- To practice mindful listening while simultaneously developing classroom cohesion.

- To emphasize present moment awareness.

- To harness student attention in an enjoyable manner.

Directions

-The first participant creates a "Beat" by whatever means they choose. Often this involves clapping, snapping, vocal noises or drumming on a desk.

-The second participant repeats the beat of the leader and adds their own personal flavor.

-This pattern continues with each additional participant repeating the previous beats and adding their own wrinkle until a player can't keep the beat. At this point the game begins again and continues until all participants have had a chance.

Variation

-One variation that can be more inclusive is for the leader to start with a beat. Each following participant adds their own beat and the beats continue around the classroom until all participants have joined the drum circle (Brown and Rizzo, 2018).

Opo Bopo 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- To stimulate both hemispheres of the brain by forcing purposeful attention to a common activity.

- To encourage mindful focus.

- To enhance present moment awareness.

Directions

- As a class identify a simple object that students will be able to draw.

- Set a timer for 2-5 minutes and inform students that they must draw the identified object with their least dominant hand.

- Have the students who are willing share their work with the class and identify the challenges they experienced (Brown & Rizzo, 2018)

The Numbers Game 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- To stay present and increase focus.

- To enhance concentration.

- To increase mindful listening skills.

- To encourage present moment awareness.

Directions

- Instruct all students to write down the stated numbers in the order they are read.

- The teacher or class leader reads off the following numbers or any random order in a slow clear manner.

-1953 2761 9837 1386 3987 2648 3794 4730 0189 6831 5493 7010 8376

-8 2398 45 3018 371 5890 3381 94 7772 2218 21 1 9990 0132 66 3304 9

- After the exercise is complete the students check their answers to identify who has remembered the most digits.

- Discuss the challenges that students might have experienced in remaining focused during the exercise (Brown & Rizzo, 2018).

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The Missing Link 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- To increase mindful observation.
- To enhance mindful focus.
- To increase present moment awareness.

Directions

- Identify 12 to 15 random objects and display these objects for all the class to see.
- Set a timer for 2 minutes and allow students in the classroom to observe the object that have been selected.
- After two minutes the exercise leader removes an item without allowing other members of the class to know which item has been removed.
- All students are then asked to identify which item has been removed (Brown & Rizzo, 2018).

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Word 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- To train the brain to stay on task and to think creatively.
- To enhance present moment awareness.
- To enhance focus.

Directions

- Establish a set duration for the length of this challenge between 1-5 minutes.
- Identify an object that is within the vantage point of all students.
- Instruct students to write down as many words as they can think of that relate to or describe the identified object.
- Once time expires create a word bank of the identified words that the class used to describe the object (Greenland & Harris 2017).

Pop a Lock 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention, Mindful Movement

- To help students focus their minds and calm their bodies.
- To enhance present moment awareness.
- To enhance mindful focus.

Directions

- Establish a set time for this challenge between 1-5 minutes.
- Instruct all students to stand up at their desks and strike a pose that they must hold for the duration of the agreed upon time.
- The game ends for each student once they are no longer able to hold their pose. At this point students are expected to sit down and observe their classmates until the challenge has completed.

Modifications

- Turn this game into a one on one challenge by getting students to partner up and strike a pose in front of the entire class (Himelstein, 2013).

Try Not to Laugh Challenge 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- To help students focus their minds and control their actions.
- To enhance self-regulation.
- To emphasize present moment awareness.

Directions

- Establish a set time for this challenge between 1-5 minutes.
- Instruct students that they are to sit at their desks silently without making a sound, yet they are allowed to engage with their classmates nonverbally in an effort to get them to laugh.
- The game ends when either students break their silence, or the identified amount of time has elapsed.

Modifications

- Turn this game into a one on one challenge or a tie breaker if time elapses but asking the students to partner up and face off individually. This activity can be done in a large group format or as a one to one competition before the entire class.

Focus & Movement Flashcards

The Focus & Movement portion of the Be Easy curriculum is designed to help students manage anxiety and learn to navigate stressful situations without feeling overwhelmed. The flashcards provided on page 98 seek to address issues such as being grounded in the present moment, developing breathing techniques that help mitigate stress and develop classroom cohesion by fostering compassion and understanding. The activities are designed to fit easily into daily classroom schedules while developing essential mindfulness strategies (Cohen, Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 2017). The flashcards provided in this portion of the Be Easy curriculum combine original activities with modified exercises from established mindfulness-based curriculums. Each flashcard that displays a modified activity will note the original source of the exercise.

Discuss

- After completing the Focus and Movement activities, and if time allows, it can be useful to have students discuss ideas or themes that each exercise brought to their attention. Sometimes this portion of the process can occur during the exercise as students might want to expand upon the experiences they are having.

When to Use

- Focus and Movement cards work best at the beginning of a class as means of encouraging participation and allowing students to settle into a learning environment but can also be used as a means of helping an active class settle in and regain focus. These exercises can also be used as…

  - An icebreaker to establish positive classroom environments and discover common connections

- A brainstorming activity
- A mid-lesson break to help regain focus
- A closing activity to summarize the lesson

Nice Kicks 1-5 Minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

To regain control over your attention through a dual point focus activity. This exercise can be used when there is a constant stream of activity and students are struggling to settle into the moment.

Directions

- Sit in your chair with your back straight and your body relaxed.
- Breathe naturally and try to focus your attention on pressing the souls of your shoes into the ground.
- As you actively focus on pressing your shoes into the ground focus your sight on the details of either the shoes you are wearing or the shoes of a student near you.
- Take a few deep breathes and actively use your sense of touch to explore the feelings of your feet and the visual details of the object you are focused on (Greenland & Harris 2017).

Snack Time 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- This classic mindfulness exercise remains a hit no matter the population and is used to focus attention, relax, and ground yourself in the present moment. Mindful eating is often so popular that this exercise can be used both as a mindful moment or as a reward for accomplishing a task.

Directions

- Choose a simple food that can be eaten one at a time. The classic example is a raisin, but this exercise can be done with M&M's, Skittles, Starbursts, Mentos, Potato Chips, Popcorn or any item that might be of interest to your students. It can also be a fun exercise to expose students to new food items that might be outside of their comfort zone.

- Sit upright in your chair in a relaxed position and pick up the food that has been presented.

- Examine the food closely, notice the details of how it looks, how it feels and how it smells. Pay close attention to how you feel while you are holding the item of food before you consume it.

- Place the food in your mouth but resist the temptation to chew it right away. Pay attention to how the item of food feels in your mouth and how is your mouth responding.

- Now slowly begin to chew the food item presented and pay careful attention to how it feels as you chew and as you swallow.

-Talking points for the end of this exercise should include a classroom discussion of how each student experienced the above exercise (Sofer & Brensilver, 2020).

Object of My Affection 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention

- To bring mindful awareness to the role technology plays in your life.

Directions

- Sit in a tall and relaxed position in your chair.

- Without engaging any operations in your phone sit with your phone in your hands and identify the physical characteristics of your phone. How does it feel in your hands?

-Next open up your text messaging app. Without reading any messages scroll through the totality of your messages. As you scroll what thoughts arise? What emotions are you feeling? Do you feel a strong urge to open specific messages? If so, what feelings do these messages convey to your body?

- Next open up any social media app that you use. Scroll through this feed without interacting or engaging with the app. As you scroll what feelings can you identify in your body? What thoughts are you having as you scroll? What emotions are you experiencing as you force yourself to resist interacting with this app (Greenland & Harris, 2017).

Finger Focus 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention, Mindful Movement

- A moving meditation that helps focus concentration and can assist in settling students down.

Directions

- Sit upright in your chair in a relaxed position with your hands in an upright position, either in your lap or on your desk.
- Breathe in naturally and breathe out. While breathing apply light pressure between your thumb and your index finger and count 1…
- Next touch your thumb to your middle finger and count 2…
- Next touch your thumb to your ring finger and count 3…
- Next touch your thumb to your pinky finger and count 4…
- Continue with this pattern of slowly touching your fingers to your thumb while counting for as many cycles as you can without losing focus.

Modifications

- Once the basics of this exercise have been mastered counting can be replaced by supportive four beat statements such as "I'm living the dream" or "Be present right here." It can be an interesting discussion to have students identify their own personal statement and explain what that statement means to them (Greenland & Harris 2017).

Catch and Release for Me 1-5 minutes

Objective: Non-Judgmental Attention, Mindful Movement

- This activity seeks to help students identify feelings and emotions they are currently experiencing while engaging them in short rhythmic movement.

Directions

- This activity requires a soft ball or bean bag like object that can be used to safely toss to students as a means signaling their engagement.
- Instruct students that once they are in possession of the soft talking object, they must identify a feeling, emotion, or physical sensation that they are currently experiencing.
- Once students have identified a feeling, emotion, or physical sensation they are currently experiencing they are to toss the soft talking object back to the teacher.
- This exercise ends when all students who are present have participated in the activity.

Modification

- A slight modification to this activity is to allow students to toss the ball to a classmate in order to engage their participation.

Classroom Wave 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention, Mindful Movement

- This activity emphasizes teamwork to coordinate movement in hopes of creating classroom cohesion.

Directions

- This exercise seeks to recreate a stadium wave. Either have the students participate at their desks or stand up and form a circle around the room while remaining seated.

- Identify one student to start the wave and have this student stand up while lifting their hands over their head. Each student will repeat this action by standing up and lifting their hands over their head in succession until all students in the class are standing. Feel free to repeat this process as many times as desired.

Modifications

- The wave can alter forms by either speeding up the wave, slowing down the wave or by splitting the class in two and creating two waves that flow in opposite directions and eventually bounce off each other (Kaiser Greenland & Harris, 2017).

Slow Motion for Me 1-5 minutes

Objective: Purposeful Attention, Mindful Movement

- This activity practices purposeful focus by forcing students to examine the feelings in their bodies as they move around the classroom in slow motion.

Directions

- Instruct students to stand up from their desks while ensuring that they have enough space to move around in a safe manner.
- Explain to students that they will be following the leader's instructions similar to playing a game of Simon Says only this time they will be performing these actions in slow motion.
- Guide students through a series of physical movements such as basic stretches, ankle roles, arm circles and neck roles.
- Ask students to identify the feelings they have in their bodies and use these observations to lead a discussion about the impact of stress on the body (Cohen, Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 2017).

Shaky Shaky 1-5 minutes

Objective: Mindful Movement

- This activity seeks to help students release energy in order to regain focus.

Directions

- Instruct students that this activity can be done in either a seated position or standing up and ask them to count out loud while participating.

- Ask students to begin the exercise by shaking out one hand for a count of 8 seconds and then repeat this exercise by shaking out the opposite hand for another 8 seconds. Finally shake out both hands simultaneously for an additional 8 seconds.

- Next ask students to shake out one foot for a count of 8 seconds and repeat this exercise with the opposite foot for another 8 second count.

-Students who have chosen to sit can now shake out both feet for a count of 8 seconds while students who have chosen to stand can run in place for the same 8 second count.

- Repeat the same sequence of activities but shorten the count to 4 seconds and then to two seconds if needed.

Modifications

- This exercise often works best with the addition of a drum to help keep rhythmic count.

- Music can also be added to this exercise in order to allow students to personalize this experience (Cohen, Gonzalez & Gonzalez, 2017).

Group Walk 1-5 minutes

Objective: Mindful Movement, Non-Judgmental Attention

- This activity is designed to help develop class cohesion by allowing students to get to know each other.

Directions

- Instruct students to stand up from their desks and form a line at one end of the classroom.

- Explain to students that a series of questions will be asked and if the statement is true for them, they should take one step forward. Please note that if students are uncomfortable stepping forward, they do not have to do so.

- As each student takes a step forward it is important to pause and allow the students to acknowledge their shared experience.

Sample Questions

- This activity works best when the questions are tailored to the specific needs of your student population, but the following examples can help start the process.

- Have you ever been bullied?

- Have you ever lost a loved one?

- Have you ever done something you are ashamed of?

- Have you ever done something you are proud of?

- Have you ever traveled outside of the country?

- Have you ever had a job?

Basketball Breath 1-5 minutes

Objective: Mindful Movement, Connecting with the Breath

- This breathing strategy seeks to help students get in touch with their breath while adding basic physical movement to help define the technique.

Directions

- Instruct students to stand at their desk as if they were preparing to shoot a free throw in a basketball game.
- Allow students the opportunity to create their own free throw shooting routine but emphasize that two deep breathes must be a part of that routine.
- Prior to allowing students to shoot their imaginary free throw instruct students to breath in through their nose and allow their stomach and chest to inflate.
- Instruct students that after they inhale and inflate their chests, they should breathe out through their mouths repeating this cycle at least twice.
- Finally, allow students the opportunity to shoot an imaginary free throw.

Discussion

Increasingly schools are tasked with serving as the primary setting for teaching, not just academic content but also valuable social and emotional training. The Be Easy mindfulness curriculum was designed with this in mind to serve as a trauma-sensitive mindfulness-based method of addressing behavioral and emotional concerns that are common in urban secondary school settings. The activities listed as part of this dissertation serve to combat the issues that are often associated with the impact of toxic stress and complex trauma by focusing on enhancing student's capacity for emotional regulation and present moment awareness. Current research has recognized that school-based interventions are a useful and innovative tool for meeting the needs of at-risk youth (Zirkelback and Reese 2010) and serve to support the mental health, overall wellness and behavioral functioning of school-aged adolescents (Durlak et al. 2011; Owens and Murphy 2004).

For the purposes of this dissertation, the Be Easy curriculum has been preceded by four chapters that provided a detailed understanding of trauma theory and mindfulness. When this curriculum is implemented into schools, the classroom leaders of this curriculum will likely not have read this dissertation or consider themselves experts in either of these fields. While the Be Easy curriculum was designed with this in mind, teachers seeking to implement this curriculum into their daily classroom routines would benefit from training to increase their knowledge base and the likelihood that this curriculum will be appropriately related to their students.

The choice to use teachers as the vehicle to implement the Be Easy curriculum was made in hopes of capitalizing on and enhancing the relationships that teachers have with their students. Youth impacted by toxic stress and complex trauma often suffer from fractured relationships and come from home environments that struggle to provide sufficient support. For this reason, the Be Easy curriculum is specially designed for school-based use. However, expansion into a home-

based version could offer continued benefits to at-risk youth and their families. This concept should be considered for future versions of the Be Easy curriculum but only implemented if parents or guardians can engage without creating additional relational issues.

It is understood that teaching in urban secondary education is already a demanding job and that adding the responsibilities of a school-based mindfulness intervention could make this task even more difficult. The Be Easy curriculum was designed to fit into busy classroom schedules comfortably and hopefully increase performance by enhancing classroom cohesion and improving emotional regulation. If this curriculum proves successful in accomplishing these feats, the use of teachers to facilitate mindfulness interventions holds significant implications for the administration of long-term, large-scale interventions. Mindfulness-based interventions led by third-party mindfulness facilitators can be expensive, while teacher-led interventions would be a cost-effective method for schools that often lack sufficient funding. In addition, teacher-led interventions offer the possibility of yearlong exposure for students, while outside providers' interventions are often time-limited.

A clinician created the Be Easy curriculum for a doctoral dissertation. While this effort included consultation with teachers and school administrators' further steps to include educational expertise would enhance the development of this curriculum.

Including teachers in the further development of this intervention could promote teacher engagement and program buy-in. This is imperative with this type of model, as it is essential to consider the many demands placed on teachers. Involving teachers in the development of an intervention is one way to possibly increase their sense of agency, and the likelihood that they engage with the program instead of viewing it as a burden imposed by school administrators.

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