WHY IS MINDFULNESS IMPORTANT?

Mindfulness has been described as being aware of one’s thoughts, experiences, and emotions. When the Early Childhood Education teacher decides to incorporate strategies to promote mindfulness into his or her classroom, it can positively affect how children view and manage their behavior and maintain their focus in the classroom. Teaching mindfulness can help students become more aware of behaviors that are needed to sustain greater focus in the classroom. Students can also learn how to self-regulate their behaviors in order to stay on-task and positively interact with their peers. In this presentation, we will examine the effects of mindfulness in an early childhood inclusive setting, and its benefits for students with ADHD and autism. Students who are diagnosed with ADHD and autism may have difficulty focusing on their academic lessons in the classroom. Creating a mindful classroom can benefit every student because it can ease their anxiety and refocus their attention on classroom learning. The ultimate goal of having a mindful classroom is to bring greater self-awareness and self-regulation to students.

MINDFULNESS & ITS POWERFUL IMPACT

The Origins of Mindfulness

- Mindfulness practices are often taught secularly, but their roots reach back to the early teachings of the Buddha.
- The current wave of mindfulness therapies, mindfulness coaching, mindfulness exercises, etc., are based on a stress-reduction program developed in the late 1970s by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor of medicine at the University of Massachusetts.
- The effectiveness of this eight-week program, aptly named Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), to lower stress and enhance well-being has been – and increasingly is – supported by thousands of scientific research studies.
- The success of MBSR in healthcare settings sparked what is now called “The Mindfulness Movement.” The widespread application of MBSR and other mindfulness practices have been incorporated into numerous areas of life, including primary schools, prisons, and professional sports.

How Early Childhood Educators Can Incorporate Mindfulness into their Classroom

- Promoting mindfulness through the modeling of breathing exercises
- Promoting mindfulness through sensory experience
- Promoting mindfulness through guided imagery
- Promoting mindfulness through movement
- Promoting mindful moments
- Promoting mindful listening
- Promoting mindful breaks
- Promoting self-reflection and frequent emotional check-ins

Useful Resources for Educators

- www.mindful.org/mindfulness-in-education
- www.mindfulschools.org
- www.mindfuleducation.org

BENEFITS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

- ADHD: Mindfulness can improve a student’s behavior and his or her ability to be more focused in school. When students have negative experiences in school, this can lead to them showing frustration in the classroom. This sense of frustration can make students feel anxious, unsuccessful, and less motivated during teacher instruction. However, mindfulness can help students bring their attention back to their teacher’s lesson. It can also help students become more self-aware of their emotions and surroundings.
- Autism: Mindfulness can help students on the autism spectrum pay more attention to social interactions and statements around them in an inclusive setting. By practicing awareness of their peers’ emotions, mindfulness may lead to students being able to better understand their own emotions, as well as the emotions of their peers in the classroom.

ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS:

- Bell Exercise: A teacher can ring a bell and the students can close their eyes and listen to the vibration of the bell. This can help students shift their attention to the present moment and their surrounding environment.
- Mindful Walks: Teachers can take their students on a nature walk. Students can pay attention to the sounds that they hear such as leaves crunching under their feet or the feeling of a breeze in their hair. Students could also stop around and notice how their heartbeat may increase.
- Glitter Jar: Fill a jar with water, glitter, and baby oil. When a student is having a stressful day and cannot focus, have the student shake the jar and watch the glitter settle after it has swirled around. When shaken, the glitter in the jar represents all of the things that may cause a student’s mind such as running bears, parents arguing, or not getting a good night’s rest.

LASTING EFFECTS ON STUDENTS

- The implementation of mindfulness practices can serve as a gateway to developing emotional intelligence and social-emotional well-being in students with ADHD and autism.
- The Early Childhood teacher should model to students how to be more metacognitively aware of their own thoughts and actions. Mindfulness can be taught to students with ADHD through positive reinforcement and role-play exercises. It can also be taught to students with autism through social stories. These interventions should be used to promote a more healthy and content mind. Children who are content learn best as they are more flexible, open, and adaptable to new experiences.

BIBLIOGRAPHY