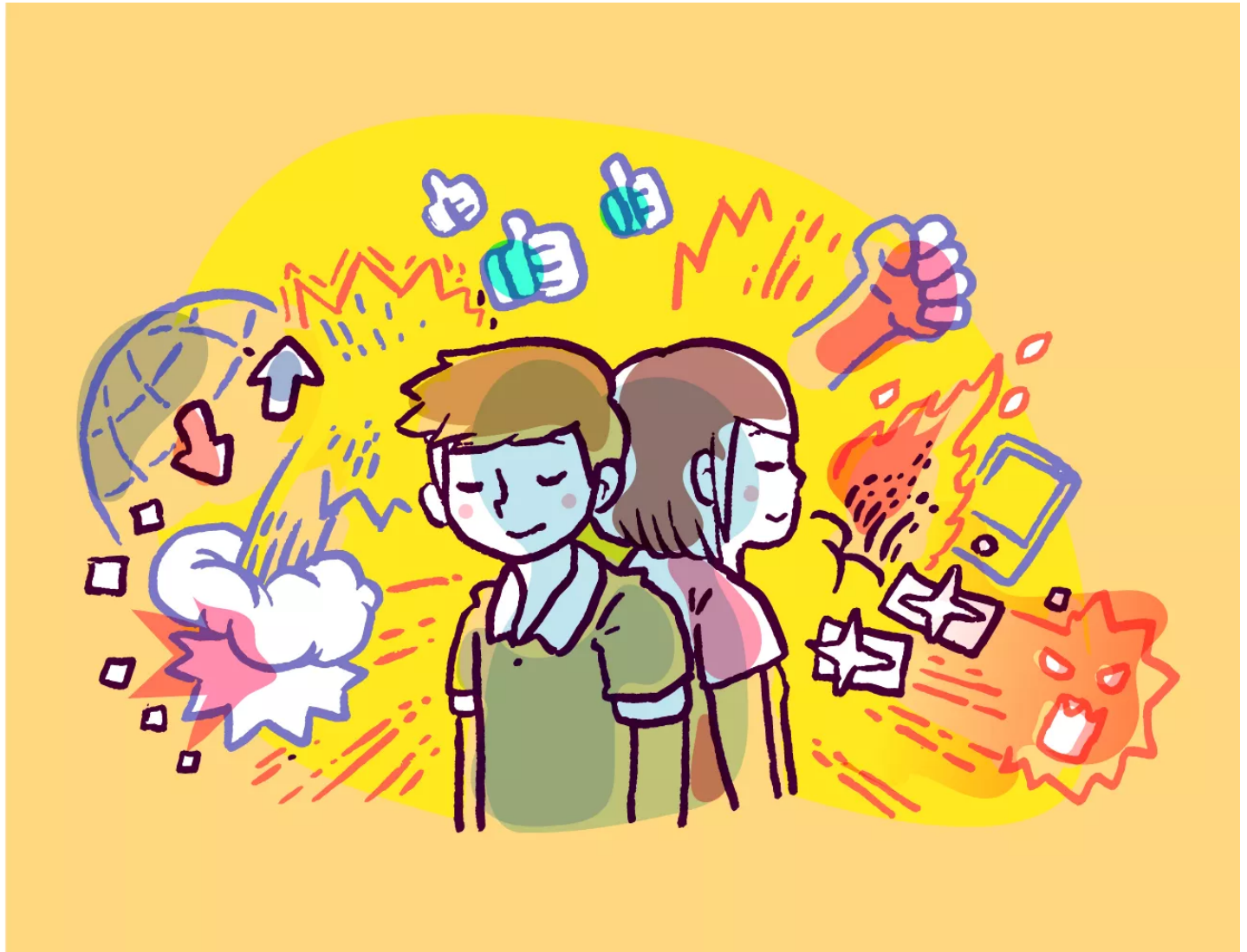


SCIENCE &amp; WELLNESS

# Can Teaching Kids Mindfulness Replace Discipline?

BY  
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Imagine this... instead of sending your children to their room kicking and screaming, taking away their iPad for a week, or giving them a time-out in the corner, you ask them to spend a few minutes alone to meditate and work through the anger, frustration, stress, or other emotions causing them to act out.

This new form of discipline is now a huge success at several schools, and those schools are seeing some major changes among students.

Can we take these lessons learned from schools and add them to our parenting toolbox?

## Mindfulness versus traditional discipline in schools

According to a recent [article](#) in Forbes, traditional punishment in schools, like detention and suspension, are ineffective ways to address bad behavior. This approach creates resentment and damages the relationship between the student and teacher. Students only feel more negativity when they have to miss recess or extracurricular activities they enjoy.

Taking a groundbreaking approach, the [Holistic Life Foundation](#) (HLF) works with schools to initiate mindfulness programs as opposed to the traditional punishment methods. HLF is a local non-profit in Baltimore committed to nurturing the wellness of children in underserved communities by helping them develop their inner lives through yoga, mindfulness, and self-care. HLF trains teachers and guides schools to develop mindfulness programs on their campuses. It also serves as a resource to programs all over the country by hosting workshops and other training programs.

### **Successful school programs**

Schools all over the country are now incorporating mindfulness into their curriculum, but what makes the schools partnering with HLF so unique is the way they're using mindfulness to address negative behavior in the classroom. In particular, two schools, working together with HLF, are seeing a huge shift in their students' behavior.

#### **Robert W. Coleman Elementary School**

[Robert W. Coleman Elementary School](#) in Baltimore offers mindful meditation as an alternative to detention. Instead of punishing disruptive kids or sending them to the principal's office, the school has a "Mindful Moment Room." This is a comforting room filled with lamps, decorations, bean bags, and pillows where students can learn how to diffuse their stress and anger.

While in the room, kids who have misbehaved are encouraged to try deep breathing exercises and meditation to help calm themselves down and regain a sense of inner balance before going back to the classroom. They're also encouraged to talk to a trained staff member about what happened and how it made them feel. The students and staff work together to create a plan to help them use mindfulness techniques to address similar situations in the future. Teachers can refer a student to the Mindful Moment Room to cool down, or students can request to spend time there.

Since the Mindful Moment Room was created at Coleman, students appear to be more relaxed and are able to control their emotions more effectively. To wit, there were no suspensions in [2015](#) and, as yet, none in 2016. This is an improvement from the four suspensions given during the 2013–2014 school year.

#### **Patterson High School**

At [Patterson High School](#), also in Baltimore, the Mindful Moment Room is a special calm area available throughout the day. Students can request to spend time in the room, or teachers may send distressed or disruptive students there to work through their emotions. Social workers, psychologists, and the nurse all refer students to the Mindful Moment Room for assistance with anxiety, stress, and other emotional issues.

When a student enters the Mindful Moment Room, they're assigned a "Mindfulness Instructor" who first talks to the student about the situation and then guides him or her through a mindfulness practice, such as breathing exercises and yoga poses. After 20 minutes in the Mindful Moment Room, students return to their class refreshed and ready to go on with their day.

Since the room opened, the school has seen an increase in attendance and a drop in the number of suspensions. Teachers have also noticed that the school is quieter in general, with fewer fights and disagreements among the students.

### **How mindfulness helps**

Mindfulness is the awareness that arises through purposefully paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgemental way, according to [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#), the leading expert on mindfulness and creator of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the [Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society](#) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

As we practice mindfulness, we begin to understand our mind-body connection better and learn not to be so reactive to thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations. With mindfulness, we develop a quality of attention that can be present no matter what is happening around us. This helps us feel more peace, ease, and balance in our lives and we develop more empathy, compassion, and love.

Mindfulness has gained so much attention in recent years because the research has shown the incredible impact it can have on our lives. Several studies demonstrate that meditation can help children reduce stress and anxiety, increase attention and focus, and improve academic performance. Scientists have actually witnessed individual's brains thicken in areas in charge of decision-making, emotional flexibility, and empathy during meditative practices.

The best evidence for the positive change that mindfulness brings is to listen to the students in Baltimore talk about how they, and their friends, have transformed from spending time in the Mindful Moment Room:

"I have learned how to calm myself down and focus better in class."

"It has taught me how to calm myself and listen to my thoughts"

"I can calm down and breathe. When I'm hyped up or having a bad day, I can relax. It makes me feel better."

"It helped me deal with so much I was going through. It helped me to be able to talk about my feelings more and to stop focusing on all the drama going on in school."

"Mindfulness gives me more self-control. It helps me get my mind straight when I'm worried about something."

"It helped me get over what people were saying. I learned to mind my business and move on."

"It is a fun place to go and I have learned that there are other ways to release your anger."

### How to use this approach at home

The principal of Patterson High School, Vance Benton, has seen such success at the school that he now practices mindfulness at home with his son every morning before they start their day.

One of HLF's main tactics is to "use a reciprocal teaching model so that the youth go back to their homes and teach the techniques to their parents," explains Andres A. Gonzalez, Director of Marketing at HLF.

Wouldn't you love to see your children deal with their emotions more effectively? Consider creating a calm corner in your home where your children can spend time when they're irritated, frustrated, or angry.

And while our children are having a mindful moment, maybe parents should do the same.



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Pamela Marks • 10 months ago

"Wouldn't you love to see your children deal with their emotions more effectively? Consider creating a calm corner in your home where your children can spend time when they're irritated, frustrated, or angry."

Even though I like the premises of the thought Mindfulness I think the above goes back to what lots of parents have done for decades.

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Brigitte • a year ago

I'd love to see this applied to the criminal justice system

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



Suzanne Mclean • 10 months ago

I did raise my children this way... but once society hit them. completely different story,,, now they r grown up parents... and their morals were set accurately?? (for lack of other words) my GRANDCHILDREN are soooooo absolutely amazing... loving... polite... helpful...and of course ADORABLE ALL AROUND !!!

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Elizabeth Manneh • a year ago

As a retired educator, I think there's so much truth in this article. I often found that the kids who acted up were from difficult backgrounds, and they usually responded well to someone showing them some empathy. I'd love to see this approach used more widely.

^ | v • Reply • Share >

