



Teen Leadership 20

Intended Audience:

- Teens

Lesson Objectives:

Participants will:

- Slow down and learn to do a simple mindfulness exercise to help them increase their ability to focus and relieve stress.

Time: 20 minutes

Equipment and supplies:

- Watch or timer
- Index cards (three per person)
- Pens, pencils (one per person)

Do Ahead:

- Review lesson
- Prepare equipment and supplies

Mindfulness: Breathe Deeply

BACKGROUND

Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us (mindful.org).

Teens and adults lead very hectic, crazy lives. They rush from activity to activity and multi-task, without taking time to stop and enjoy the moment.

Research shows that mindfulness:

- Reduces stress, anxiety and depression
- Improves concentration, and
- Benefits overall physical health.

Teaching teens to practice basic mindfulness will help improve their overall health and well-being.

WHAT TO DO

Activity:

This is a simple breathing exercise that will help participants focus. The exercise will only take one minute.

Start off by asking all participants to sit up as straight as they can, on the floor with their legs crossed or in a chair. Ask them to let go of all their thoughts and only focus on their breathing.

Tell participants to breathe in and out slowly, taking about six seconds for one breathing cycle. They should breathe in through their nose and out through their mouths. While they are breathing, they should not be thinking about things they need to do later, only about inhaling and exhaling. Think about what it feels like as your body fills with air and then as you exhale and that air leaves your body. Continue doing this exercise for one minute.

After they have completed this activity, give all participants two index cards and writing utensil. Ask them to write down all the things that make them worry, feel irritated or stressed out. Things like:

- I am worried about my grade in algebra.
- I am worried about making the baseball team.
- I am worried about getting college scholarships.



Sources:

James, A. (2017). *Pocket mindfulness*. Retrieved from <https://www.pocketmindfulness.com/>

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources 4-H Youth Development Program (2016). *4-H Mindfulness*. Retrieved from <http://4h.ucanr.edu/files/241590.pdf>

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This list is just for them. They do not have to share their worries with anyone else. Once they are done with their list, ask them to read it to themselves and see what they can do to take care of the stress caused by the things they wrote. Have them write down their action plan on the second index card. Examples may be:

- Make a phone call and let someone know you are thinking of them and care about them.
- Schedule a meeting with a teacher to ask what you can do to improve a grade or better understand a subject.
- Talk to a school counselor about opportunities.

Oftentimes, developing a plan and following through with it will help relieve the tension and stress in our lives, instead of fretting and worrying about things.

Encourage them to be mindful. Take positive action to relieve their worries. If there is nothing positive they can do about one of the items on the list, they may need to simply admit that and move on, knowing that things work out for the best in the end.

Finally, give participants a third index card and ask them to take it with them. Tell them to notice five things throughout the day that they normally would not give attention. Maybe it is the sound of a leaf blowing across the sidewalk in front of them. Or, maybe it is the sound of the birds in the morning while they wait for the bus.

Make it your goal to find out about these things.

- How do they work?
- Would you miss them, if they were not there?
- How is it connected to other parts of your life, community and world?

TALK IT OVER**Reflect**

Look back at your list of worries.

- Are there positive steps or actions you came up with to eliminate those worries?
- Are there things you have no control over? If so, let them go.
- Are there other situations that you can think of where being positive might change the outcome?

Apply:

- Make time every day to take a minute and breathe deeply. Learn to relax and clear your mind.
- When you are overwhelmed, take time to be mindful. Slow down and appreciate the intricacies of the things around you.
- Make an effort to be positive. Smile at people. Find joy.

Please take time to complete the Participant and Facilitator evaluations, found online at go.osu.edu/TeenLeadership20.

Considerations for Conducting Virtually:

- Ask participants to bring an index card or piece of paper and a pen or pencil to the meeting.
- During the breathing exercise, ask participants to close their eyes. The instructor can give instructions for inhale and exhale if desired, or participants can count in their heads as they breathe.