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Building a Healthier Future



Kids participating in a yoga class. Media from [wix.com](https://www.wix.com) free media files

The Health Benefits of Yoga and Meditation for the Adolescent Mind and Body

There are several issues facing our adolescent population that are affecting their mental health and how they can handle stress, anxiety, bullying and self-esteem issues. If that was not enough, the increasing children obesity epidemic seems to be compiling more health concerns on to this already stress out population. With the continuation of COVID-19 social distancing guidelines and the implementation of distance learning among the countries schools districts, how much more of an impact on the children's mental health is jeopardy? Certain studies have looked into the possible health benefits of incorporating yoga and meditation practices for adolescent children to see if there are mental and physical health improvements that could increase the quality of life for this future generation.

Through the practice of yoga and meditation several studies have shown extreme health and mental health benefits among the adolescent community. A 2019 case report states that “mindfulness-based interventions have been shown to reduce generalized anxiety and depressive symptoms” (Stephens, 2019). While also

concluding that these types of practices may also “improve cardiovascular health and sleep [while also] enhancing [the] ability to adapt to social and personal challenges”(Stephens, 2019). The ability to adapt and cope is extremely important into today’s society, as everything seems to be moving at such a high pace. By including yoga and meditation into a daily routine seems to slow things down, which allows the mind to process daily evolving situations.

What could help improve mental health?

Even in the age of the “Anti-bullying” movement, there are 3.2 million daily reports of bullying among school children (Centeio, 2017). These incidences have a large impact on their mental and physical health, which



School children
interacting together.
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continue to be at an all time high. A 2017 study set out to see if implementing a yoga program within an urban inner-city school could lower instances of bullying by teaching adolescent children ways to control stress through this mindfulness-based intervention. The researches were able to conclude that after implementing yoga practices, that bullying had significantly decreased within these urban inner-city school setting. Could the findings from this study suggest that implementing a yoga style routine within the school-day may improve not only social interactions among students but improve how the students handle stress, anxiety and depression?

While yoga has been shown to be useful in decreasing bullying and improving how adolescent students handle stress, another effective mindfulness-based practice that may continue to improve stress, anxiety and depression is meditation. “Meditation in a broad sense, may be considered “a family of techniques which have in common a conscious attempt to focus attention in a non-analytical way and an attempt not to dwell on discursive thought””(Wisner, 2010). A 2010 study showed that when mindfulness meditation is practiced for a 3 month period of time with 10 minute sessions of meditation at school and again at home, 20 minute walk and a 20 minute educational lesson on

diet, physical active and losing weight, that students “resting systolic blood pressure [decreased while also, decreasing] daytime and after-school ambulatory systolic and diastolic blood pressure and they also showed decreases in heart rate”(Wisner, 2010). This

“Yoga is a particularly powerful active mindfulness practice...improving one’s well-being...and enhancing self care”

-INA STEPHENS (2019)

study also showed adolescent children were able to improve their ability to calm themselves, destress, relax and were able to improve their emotional coping skills.

Final Thoughts

Throughout researching the effect yoga and meditation can have on our adolescent populations, it became glaringly obvious that there are immense mental and physical health benefits that this mindfulness-based practice can provide. By providing a way to alleviate stress, emotional hardship and decrease depression, this style of mental health intervention could be deemed invaluable to the growing minds of our future generation. Allowing them a chance to destress in what could be considered a daily stressfully charged environment, seems to have a huge impact on how adolescent children interact with each other. It would also seem that if a mindfulness-based practice was in place at schools the “anti-bullying” movement may have a larger impact and help decrease the number of bullying calms that happen on a daily basis. As with anything, nothing is a quick fix, however providing the opportunity to learn how to cope, relaxation and emotional control techniques could have the greatest impact on our adolescent populations mental and physical health.



Young boy meditating

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Unit 1 – *Oh the Pressure!* examines the concept of pressure from a variety of perspectives.

Lesson 1 – *Pressure Points!* explains the varied contributions pressure makes to human activity as well as ways in which pressure influences our health. **Lesson 2 – *Feeling It!*** examines positive and

negative experiences with stress and explore how stress manifests itself in the body, mind and emotions. **Lesson 3 – Making Choices!** invites students to commit to and prepare for making healthy choices to nurture body, mind and spirit now and in the future.

Unit 2 – Take a Breather! – Breathing to Control Blood Pressure and Stress examines the role of breathing in reducing negative effects of pressure. **Lesson 1 – It’s Only Human!** explains the respiratory system and how breathing works to sustain human life. **Lesson 2 – Just Plain Old Breathing** examines how conscious breathing can help students deal with stress. **Lesson 3 – More ways to Breathe** introduces more breathing techniques and explains how to put them into practice in everyday life.

Unit 3 – Meditate to Create! – Centering for Accomplishment focuses on practices that can help students incorporate meditation into their lives. **Lesson 1—It’s Easy!** focuses on the whats and whys of meditation. It also encourages students to try different body postures that support meditation practice. **Lesson 2 – Simply!** focuses on some of the hows of meditation, introduces a several simple meditations students can try. **Lesson 3 – Move It!** introduces a moving meditation. A script is provided for you to guide the entire meditation which takes about 20 minutes.

Unit 4 – Visualize to Maximize! -- Envisioning the Positive to Empower focuses on the practice of visualization as a way to think creatively about what students want to accomplish. **Lesson 1—I See It!** introduces visualization as a tool for facilitating change, explains why it is useful, describes the brain’s role in producing results, and provides opportunities to practice. **Lesson 2 – De-Stress!** challenges students to apply what they have learned about visualization to reducing stress in challenging situations. Students learn about how cues can remind them to visualize. Working in small groups, they demonstrate how using a cue can affect how they deal with anger, sadness, worry, or fear. **Lesson 3 – Go for Goals!** encourages students to use visualization in creating a healthy future. It focuses on how visualization supports personal goal-setting.

Unit 5 – The Amazing Power of Sleep! – Sleep Your Way to Health focuses on how sleep affects our health. **Lesson 1 – What Is It? Why Do It?** explains what happens when people sleep and how sleep supports our health. **Lesson 2 – How to Be Good at Sleeping** examines habits that affect sleep and challenges students to develop personal plans for making the most of sleep. **Lesson 3 –Lifelong!** invites students to integrate what they have learned in units 1-5 with the personal plan they began in Lesson 2.

Bonus Unit: Yoga!

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