



Outdoor Mindfulness

Grades: 1st through 8th

Time: 20-25 min

Objective: The practice of mindfulness takes us off autopilot, allows us to pause, experience the present moment and give gratitude for all the elements of the natural world that support our daily lives. Stepping out of our classrooms or houses to practice mindfulness allows us to connect, appreciate and develop a relationship with the natural world.

Materials: none

Instructions:

1. First, take your students outside perhaps on the playground and ask them to sit down on the ground, on a bench, or whatever works for the space you are in. Encourage them to spread out (within reason) so they feel like they have some space of their own.
2. Start by asking your students to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then ask them to put their attention on the sounds around them -- seeing if they can focus on the calls and movements of birds or any other natural sounds within earshot. Their attention will naturally dip back into their thoughts -- gently remind them to bring their focus back to the sounds every minute or two. When the timing feels right, move on to the next part.
3. Next, ask your students to feel the sun on their skin -- their faces, hands, arms or any place exposed to the sun. Ask them to keep their attention on all the parts of their body where they can feel the sun, reminding them that all the life and energy on earth comes from the power of the sun.
4. Ask them to feel the air moving across their skin. After doing this for a minute or two, ask your students to concentrate on a specific part of their body where they can feel the wind -- it could be the tip of their nose, their hands or the back of their neck. Ask them to keep their attention in this specific place until you feel ready to move on to the next part.
5. Instruct your students to feel their bodies sitting on the earth. See if they can keep their attention focused on any part of the body that is touching the earth -- it could be their feet or the whole lower half of their body (if they are sitting on the ground). Ask the students to really connect with the earth and feel the earth supporting them.

6. Next, ask your students to connect with their breath. See if they can focus on their breath for 1-2 minutes, paying close attention to each inhalation and exhalation. Ask them to keep their focus on each breath while thinking of how the air passing in and out of their lungs comes from the trees.

7. End with a gratitude practice. Ask students to envision their favorite place or thing from the natural world. It could be a park, an animal or a tree -- whatever comes to their mind. Once they have something in mind (it will take a moment or two), ask them to send thoughts of gratitude to this place or element of the natural world. Encourage them to fully appreciate their surroundings. Remind the students how special it is to have the natural world around them.

After you have done these exercises, ask your students to end by gently opening their eyes. Then have a discussion about what they just experienced together. Discussion topics might include:

- Which one of the elements did the students connect with the best?
- What did this feel like?
- Does anyone feel more like part of the Earth?

Tips for the activity:

- Use your intuition to figure out how long to spend on each part. The whole exercise can last between 10 and 25 minutes depending on your students. You can also break up the exercise and have a discussion in between the different parts.
- You want your tone to be gentle and inviting.
- Before teaching this, it is good if you have a time before the school day or before teaching this lesson to go outside and practice the exercise yourself.

*For more details and Source visit: edutopia.org