



**Evidence-Based Interventions in Mindfulness**


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**Mindful Moments Practice**


Let's take a few minutes to drop into the present moment with a guided meditation practice so our minds are more available to receive and integrate the wisdom shared today.



**What is Mindfulness?**



“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”  
-Jon Kabat-Zinn



- Anchoring yourself to the present moment by being aware of your five senses, thoughts, and emotions
- Attending to a sensory experience (e.g. breath), and anytime the mind wanders, as it naturally will, gently bringing your attention back to the sensory experience (breath)
- Mindfulness is awareness
- This builds the mindfulness muscle
  - Our capacity to attend

(Kabat-Zinn, 2009)




1. Awareness
2. Of present experience
3. With acceptance



## Attitudinal Foundations


1. Non-striving
2. Beginner's Mind
3. Acceptance
4. Letting go
5. Non-Judging
6. Patience
7. Trust

(Kabat-Zinn, 2009)



## How do I introduce such an abstract subject to students?

- Being a mindful scientist where our lives are the experiment!
- How do scientists study natural phenomenon?
  - Through observation with the five senses
  - We also include thoughts and emotions with mindfulness
- This helps create an attitude of curiosity and openness to learning
- Introduce mindfulness through a more concrete activity like mindful eating where all five senses are engaged




"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."  
-Viktor Frankl



## Responding vs. Reacting

Stressor-**R**eaction  
Vs.  
Stressor-----M-I-N-D-F-U-L-N-E-S-S-----Response

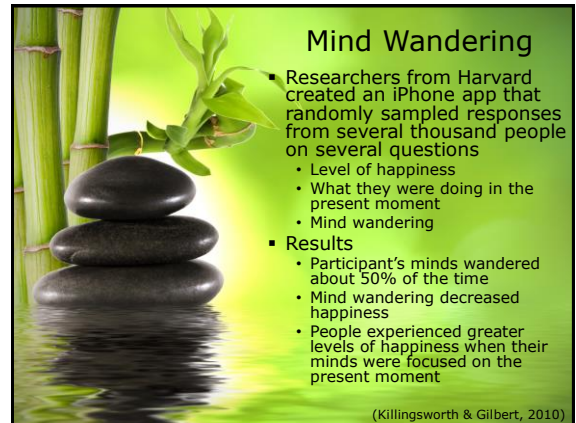
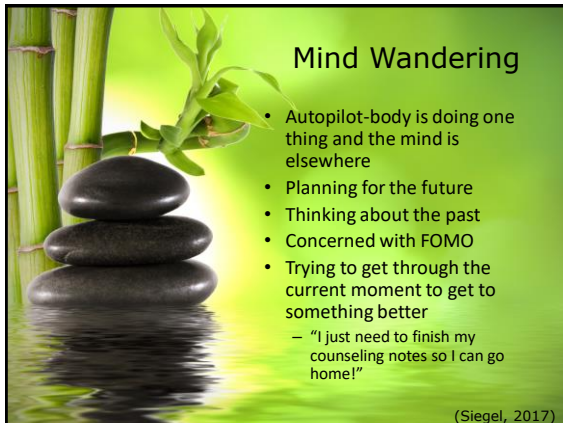
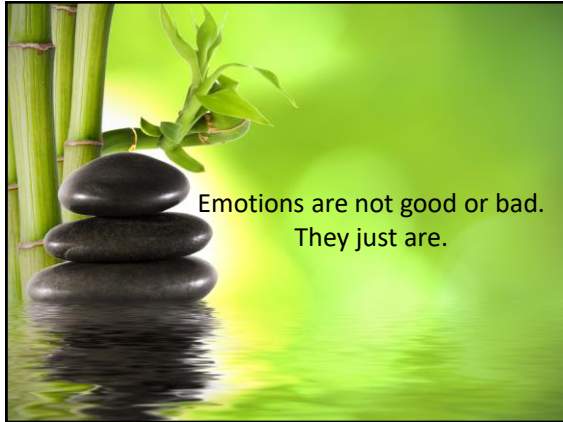
(Goldstein, 2015)





## Breaking the Feedback Loop

- Expanding the space between stimulus and response
  - Responding vs. reacting
- Noticing negative unconscious thoughts that perpetuate the feedback loop
- Understanding our thoughts are not facts
  - In fact, they are often inaccurate
  - The misperception that our thoughts are facts can lead us to getting caught in the feedback loop
- This awareness gives you control of behavior as opposed to being at the whim of your thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations

(Goldstein, 2015)





## The Thinking Disease

- Reviewing past pleasure and pain
- Maximize future pleasure and minimize future pain
- Negativity bias
- Mindfulness helps see our thoughts just as thoughts so we don't believe all of them

(Siegel, 2017)



## Research



## Neuroscience of Mindfulness

- Increased gray matter/cortical thickness
  - Prefrontal cortex
  - Hippocampus
  - Anterior Cingulate Cortex
  - Insula
- Decreased amygdala size
- Right to left shift in prefrontal activity
- Decreased activation of the Default Mode Network

(Davidson et al., 2003; Lazar et al., 2005; Siegel, 2017)



## Neuroscience of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is associated with increases in

- Executive functioning
- Sustained attention
- Short-term memory
- Perceptual speed
- Fluid reasoning

(Siegel, 2017)



## Emotional Well-Being

- Improvements in ability to cope with short and long-term stress
- Decreases in perception of physical and emotional pain

(Kabat-Zinn, 2013)



## Biological Effects

- Increased telomerase activity
- Improved immune system functioning
- Reduces blood pressure

(Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Schutte & Malloff, 2014)



### Benefits of Diaphragmatic Breathing

- Also known as belly breathing or abdominal breathing
- Decreases in negative affect
- Increases in sustained attention
- Activates Parasympathetic Nervous System
- Lowers cortisol levels
- Reduces blood pressure
- Reduces anxiety, stress, and depression

(Ma et al., 2017)



### Mindfulness with Preschoolers


- Flook et al. (2015) implemented a 12 week mindfulness-based kindness curriculum with preschoolers
  - Increased social competence
  - Higher report card grades in the areas of
    - Learning, health, and social-emotional development
  - Increased cognitive flexibility and delays of gratification



### Mindfulness for Teachers

- Reduced stress
- Less burnout
- Greater efficacy
- More emotionally supportive classrooms

(Roeser et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2013; Jennings et al., 2015)




### Gratitude

- A close cousin of mindfulness
  - In research completed by Emmons (2003), those who kept a gratitude journal experienced more optimism, felt better about their lives, exercised more regularly and visited physicians less frequently than groups that journaled about negative or neutral events.
  - People who wrote gratitude statements were more likely to attain personal goals (ex. academic, interpersonal, and health-based goals).




### Prepping for Mindfulness Interventions



### Trauma Informed Mindfulness and Yoga

- Keep the room well lit. While it may seem more relaxing to turn the lights off, a dark or dimly lit room may feel unsafe.
- If instructing students to lay down, always give an option to sit instead. Laying down may be triggering.
- Do not instruct yoga poses such as Downward Facing Dog, Tabletop, or Forward Fold to students who have experienced sexual abuse. These could be very triggering.
- Always give students an option to skip any yoga posture that does not feel right or safe for them. Give them an alternative thing to do, such as stand in mountain pose or sitting in easy pose (criss cross).
- Do not provide physical adjustments for yoga postures.



### Trauma Informed Mindfulness and Yoga


- If closing a practice with a bell, let students know before ringing the bell to avoid students feeling triggered
- Being asked to sit in stillness with the breath during breathing practices may be initially overwhelming for students who have experienced trauma. Emotions that have been repressed may start to surface, which could lead to students feeling trapped if forced to sit. Start with short durations of breathing practices (ex. 1 min) and work your way up. Give students an option for an alternative practice if they start feeling triggered, such as noticing the connection of their feet with the ground, noticing the connection of your hands in your lap, or giving an option to get some water.



### Teaching Tips


Communicate clear expectations and boundaries on behavior before beginning a mindfulness practice. Try communicating positive expectations and boundaries (i.e. communicate what you want students to do as opposed to what you do not want them to do). Here are a few suggestions:

- Find a comfortable sitting position (or laying down if appropriate)
- Stay in your seat
- Keep your hands and feet to self
- Practice mindful silence which means not making noise with your mouth or bodies
- Be a mindful listener
- Be mindful and respectful of others experience




### Teaching Tips

We live in a very fast paced, driven, and hurried society. Our society sends many messages about self-worth being tied to accomplishments, and this can be quite harmful to one's emotional well-being. Additionally, our youth are overstimulated with technology. So the practice of mindfulness, the practice just being, may feel very uncomfortable to students at first. Cultivate patience and compassion as students are learning. Do not expect perfection, because there is really no such thing as perfection with a mindfulness practice.



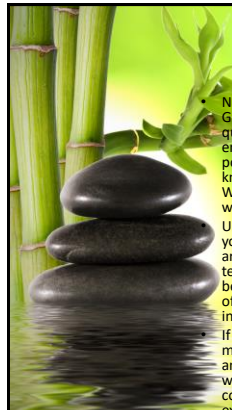
### Teaching Tips

Allow students to know that however they are practicing mindfulness is right (as long as they are following the behavioral expectations and staying safe). Students are so used to being graded on completing work right or wrong. When students are reassured that there is no wrong way to practice mindfulness and that whatever they are doing is right (again, as long as they are following the behavior expectations), they are more receptive to the practices. These practices can be particularly beneficial to students who struggle academically or behaviorally and are used to receiving negative feedback about their performance. It can be refreshing to know that however they are being in the mindfulness practices, is right.



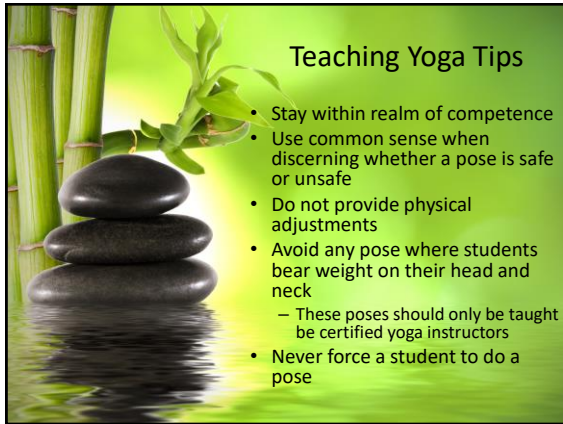
### Teaching Tips

Because the mindfulness practices may be novel and unfamiliar, some students may find them to be silly or feel concerned that they look funny. Children are typically very concerned with not looking different and fitting in at this age. It can be helpful to normalize this experience. For example, "I know this may look or feel kind of silly, and that can be a very normal experience when mindfulness is new to you. But we can all be silly together. Sometimes when something is new, it can feel uncomfortable at first, but once you become familiar with it, it starts to feel normal. You might even begin to enjoy it. Let's make an agreement to respect everyone's feelings in here and not make fun of anyone. Try giving mindfulness a chance, and I bet you will find that it's not silly at all! Mindfulness can help you focus your attention better, feel less stressed, and feel happier." When mindfulness is new, give students a chance to giggle and let their nervous or uncomfortable laughter out.



### Teaching Tips

- Never force a child to participate in an exercise. Give students an alternative option like sitting quietly in their chair. In yoga, it is very important to encourage students to listen to their bodies on what poses are ok and not ok for their bodies. Let them know it is ok to skip poses that do not feel good. We do not always know when a child is not feeling well or experiencing an injury.
- Use common sense when considering whether a yoga posture is safe or not for you to instruct. If you are unsure of whether a yoga posture is safe, avoid teaching it. Avoid any yoga pose where students bear weight on their heads and necks. Those types of poses should only be taught by a trained yoga instructor.
- If you direct students to lie down on the floor in a mindfulness exercise, it's important to give students an opportunity to sit in chairs as well. Not everyone will feel comfortable lying down on the floor, and it could be triggering for individuals who have experienced trauma in the past.



**Teaching Yoga Tips**

- Stay within realm of competence
- Use common sense when discerning whether a pose is safe or unsafe
- Do not provide physical adjustments
- Avoid any pose where students bear weight on their head and neck
  - These poses should only be taught by certified yoga instructors
- Never force a student to do a pose



**Interventions**



**Mindful Eating**

- Practice of paying attention to the sensory experience of eating
- Setting: Counseling and Classroom
- Materials
  - One bite of food (raisin, chocolate, etc.)
    - Be mindful of student allergies
- Useful times to implement
  - When introducing mindfulness
  - After a transition
  - Reward
  - When students appear uninterested in academic topic
  - When students seem lethargic
- Refer to handout for more instructions and script

(Kabat-Zinn, 2013)



**Mindful Listening**

- Practice of focusing the mind on the sensation of sound
- Setting: Classroom and counseling
- Materials: bell, chime, or singing bowl
- Useful time to implement
  - Transitions
  - At the beginning of class
  - At the end of class
  - To mark shift between structured and unstructured class time
  - To gain student's attention
  - Redirection
- Can build into classroom routine as a cue to attain students' attention
  - i.e. quiet mouths and eyes on me
- Cultivate student engagement by inviting them to ring the bell
- Refer to handout for instructions

(Saltzman, 2014)



**Mindful Listening**

- Cultivate student engagement by inviting them to ring the bell
  - They love this!
- Mindful speaking and listening can be facilitated with the bell
  - For listeners
    - A cue to attend fully to the speaker
    - Let go of thinking about how you will respond when it's your turn to speak and fully attend to the speaker
  - For speakers
    - A cue to speak mindfully and on-topic
  - Helps develop patience

(Saltzman, 2014)



**SIFT into Presence**

- Sensations
- Images
- Feelings
- Thoughts

(Willard, 2017)




## Breathing Practices

### Rock breathing

- Anchors the breath with a rock
- Students lay down on their backs, place their rock on their belly, and watch the rock rise and fall with the breath
- Setting: Classroom or counseling
- Materials needed: rock (ex. smooth river stone)
- Useful time to implement
  - Start of day
  - After transitions
  - When students are demonstrating high energy or seem distracted
  - When students appear tense or stressed
  - Before stressful school experiences such as tests or presentations
- Very helpful to implement consistently for a few minutes a day
- Refer to handout for more information and script example

(Saltzman, 2014)




## Breathing Practices

### Bell Breathing

- Breathing with the sound of the bell
- The sound is an anchor for the breath
- Setting: Classroom or counseling
- Materials: bell, chime, or singing bowl
- Useful time to implement
  - Start of day
  - Re-focus the mind
  - After transitions
  - When students are demonstrating high energy or seem distracted
  - When students appear tense or stressed
  - Before stressful school experiences such as tests or presentations

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 2011)



## Breathing Practices

### Bell Breathing

- Directions
  - Ring the bell at the rate you want students to breath
  - Students will alternate in-breaths and out-breaths with the bell
  - A good place to start is breathing in for two seconds and breathing out for two seconds
  - Instruct students to use their belly breath
- Engage students by inviting them to lead the exercise!

(Thich Nhat Hanh, 2011)



## Breathing Practices

Breathing practices can be short, fun, and simple!


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pbhr0TMmg9I>

- Bee breath
- Balloon breath
- Rainbow breath



## Mindful Movement/Yoga


- Practice of moving with intention
- Helps cultivate calmness, emotional balance, focus, and mental alertness
- Physiological benefits include increased blood flow, flexibility, and strength
- Setting: Classroom or counseling
- Useful time to implement
  - Brain break
  - Beginning of day/class
  - When students are lethargic
  - When students are hyperactive
  - When students are distracted
  - When students are anxious
  - Before a stressful school experience such as tests
- Refer to handout for further instructions and a script example



## Brain Balancing Exercises

- Short exercises created by Shanti Nolen, owner of Keller Yoga
  - Each exercise can be completed in 1-2 minutes
  - Fun and engaging for students
  - Perfect for brain breaks to focus attention and create mental alertness
- Refer to handout created by Shanti Nolen






## Mindful Walking

- Grounding practice through noticing the connection of the foot with the ground each step taken
- Setting: Classroom or counseling
- Useful times to implement
  - Walking in hallways
  - To focus a wandering mind
  - To redirect hyperactivity

(Willard, 2016)



## Mindful Walking

- Directions
  - Direct students to bring their full attention to the process of walking. Direct them to notice how it feels for the foot to lift up, swing, and connect to the ground. Let them know when they become distracted to notice, and then bring their attention back to the feeling of walking in the feet.
- Make it fun by challenging them to walk making no noise. You can even try this outside which will pose more of a challenge with leaves and twigs on the ground!
- Bring students' attention to the sensation of each foot touching the ground by inviting them to explore how the ground feels below them. Explore how a tile floor will feel very different than walking on grass.


(Willard, 2016)



## 5-4-3-2-1 Walking


- While walking notice
  - 5 beautiful things you see
  - 4 sounds you like
  - 3 sensations you feel
  - 2 things you smell or taste
  - 1 thought you are having

(Willard, 2016)



## Grounding Exercise

- Noticing the sensations of your feet against the ground
- This helps bring you back to the present moment
- There are many different grounding exercises
  - One way is to lead students through a guided imagery exercise where they visualize roots growing out of their feet deep within the ground. Instruct them to direct their attention to their feet and imagine what this would feel like.
    - \* Let's practice this!
  - Another way is to engage in deep breathing and spend a moment directing your attention to the sensation of your feet against the ground.



## Working with Thoughts

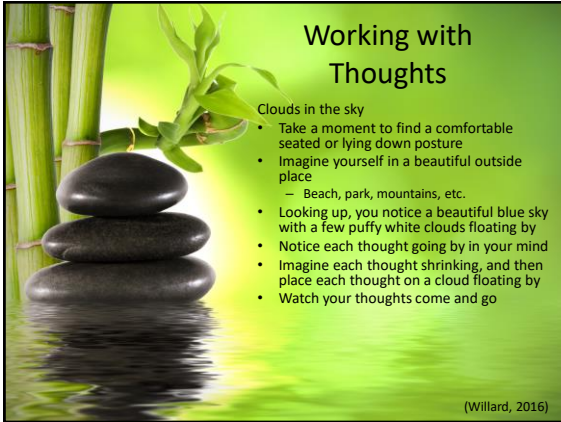
- These exercises emphasize
  - The impermanence of thoughts
    - Thoughts come and go
  - That thoughts are not who we are
    - Again, they come and go
  - Thoughts are not always true
  - Our previous life experiences color the way we perceive the world
- Great for the counseling setting and can also be implemented within the classroom



## Working with Thoughts

- Thought bubbles
  - Take a moment to find a comfortable seated or lying down posture
  - Visualize your thoughts as bubbles
  - Imagine each thought floating away until they float off or pop
  - Notice how some bubbles float around a bit longer
    - These might be thoughts that keep coming back or thoughts that are stuck in your mind
  - Notice how some bubbles float away quickly and others float away more slowly
    - If a bubble becomes stuck, can you blow on it with your out breath to help it float away?
  - Notice how some bubbles are big and some bubbles are small
  - Some bubbles are perfect circles and some are asymmetrical

(Saltzman, 2014)



## Working with Thoughts

Clouds in the sky

- Take a moment to find a comfortable seated or lying down posture
- Imagine yourself in a beautiful outside place
  - Beach, park, mountains, etc.
- Looking up, you notice a beautiful blue sky with a few puffy white clouds floating by
- Notice each thought going by in your mind
- Imagine each thought shrinking, and then place each thought on a cloud floating by
- Watch your thoughts come and go

(Willard, 2016)



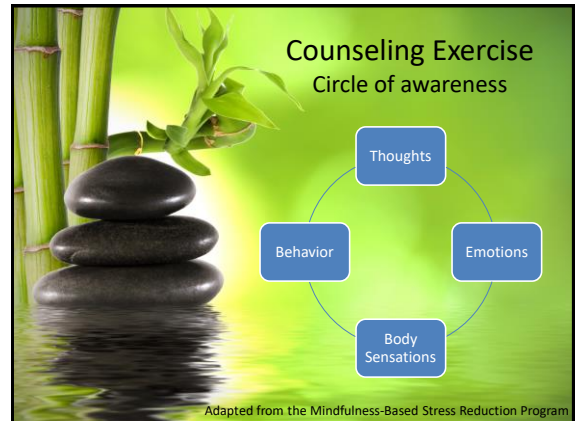
## Body Scan

- Practice of systematically guiding attention throughout body
- Setting: Classroom and counseling
- Useful times to implement
  - When students are anxious or tense
  - Before stressful school experiences such as tests and presentations
  - When students are distracted
- Refer to handout for instructions and a script example



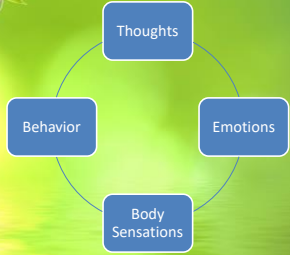
## Body Scan

- Suggested length of time
  - 2 minutes: K-2
  - 2-5 minutes: 3-5
  - 5-8 minutes: 6-8
  - 5-10 minutes: 9-12
- May shorten practice to fit schedule



## Counseling Exercise

### Circle of awareness



Adapted from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Program

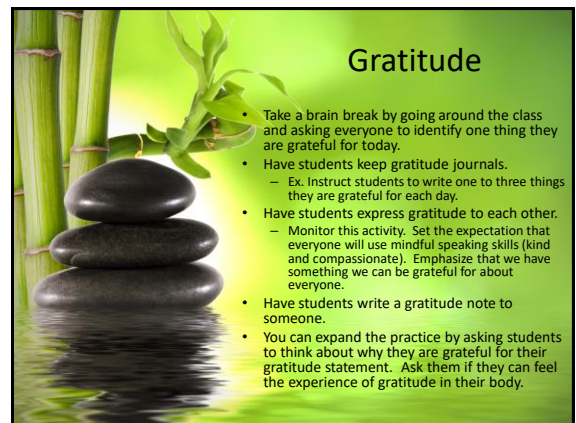


## Counseling Exercise

### Circle of Awareness

Adopted from the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program  
Helps students understand how our thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behavior are all connected

- Have students identify a situation where they lost self control or didn't make a good decision with their behavior
  - Write the trigger in the middle of the circle
    - You or the student can write it
- Ask them to identify which of the four happened first when they were triggered
  - Thoughts, emotions, body sensations, or behavior
- They will draw a line from the trigger to the appropriate category
- Then ask them what happened next, and they will draw a line from where the line was last to the new location
- Repeat until the event is over
- Ask students where they could have implemented mindfulness (or some other strategy) to respond as opposed to react
- Then go through the circle of awareness demonstrating this
  - Ask the student what they think that would have looked like



## Gratitude

- Take a brain break by going around the class and asking everyone to identify one thing they are grateful for today.
- Have students keep gratitude journals.
  - Ex. Instruct students to write one to three things they are grateful for each day.
- Have students express gratitude to each other.
  - Monitor this activity. Set the expectation that everyone will use mindful speaking skills (kind and compassionate). Emphasize that we have something we can be grateful for about everyone.
- Have students write a gratitude note to someone.
- You can expand the practice by asking students to think about why they are grateful for their gratitude statement. Ask them if they can feel the experience of gratitude in their body.



## Resources in DFW


North Texas Center for Mindfulness  
[www.northtexasmindfulness.com](http://www.northtexasmindfulness.com)  
[jaime@northtexasmindfulness.com](mailto:jaime@northtexasmindfulness.com)

Keller Yoga  
[www.kelleryoga.com](http://www.kelleryoga.com)  
[kelleryoga@gmail.com](mailto:kelleryoga@gmail.com)




## Resources

- Mindfulness Trainings
  - Mindful Schools
  - Heart-Mind Education
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Trainings
  - University of California San Diego Mindfulness-Based Professional Training Institute
  - University of Massachusetts Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society
- Kids Yoga Trainings
  - YogaKids International
  - Little Flower Yoga



## Suggested Books

Growing up Mindful: Essential Practices to help Children, Teens, and Families Find Balance, Calm, and Resilience  
 Full Catastrophe: Using the Wisdom of your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness Living by Jon Kabat-Zinn  
 Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindful Meditation for Everyday Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn  
 Uncovering Happiness: Overcoming Depression with Mindfulness and Self-Compassion by Elisha Goldstein



## Children's Mindfulness Books

Puppy Mind by Andrew Jordan Nance  
 Visiting Feelings by Lauren Rubenstein  
 Mind Bubbles: Exploring Mindfulness with Kids by Heather Krantz



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