

## Using Research to Inform Best Practices: The Kindness Mindfulness Curriculum for Young Children

Haines, B. A., Phillippi-Immel, K., Ruffing, M., Edamala, S., Greene, C., Ruiz Hinkle, N., Yuan, C., Martinez, N., & Weng, C.

**Problem:** Our Kindness Project, based at the Community Early Learning Center (CELC), is in its fourth year of bringing mindfulness training to community agencies serving primarily lower-income preschool and 4K children. In the first two years, we established the efficacy of the mindfulness-based Kindness Curriculum (KC) and demonstrated positive impact on children's social-emotional, self-regulation, cognitive and academic skills. The mindfulness training also benefited teachers in reducing stress and increasing mindful teaching. In years three and four, this community-funded project used the research findings to expand mindfulness training by reaching out to leaders at additional early childhood programs. Our goal was to use child, teacher, and parent data to inform curricular best practices

**Methods:** Findings of positive KC impact from the first year randomized-control study were disseminated through community talks, Leadership Training, and professional conference presentations. Parenting classes on mindfulness were developed and refined through class evaluations to optimally serve immigrant parents participating in a literacy program.

Determination of curricular best practices for increasing skills and reducing problem behaviors came from several types of teacher assessments. Participants evaluated the 26-hour teacher training classes following all five offerings. In addition, teachers completed adherence surveys following each of 24 KC lessons, indicating implementation successes and challenges and adaptations they made, to provide insights into what worked best with children of different ages and abilities. At the end of the school year, teachers completed a questionnaire on classroom impact of the KC, and parents completed a similar survey of impact on their child(ren) at home.

**Results.** Dissemination efforts brought in 26 additional classrooms (about 700 children are receiving the KC this year), and one school district adopted the KC for all 4K classrooms (approximately 900 additional children). Colleagues in Chile received funding to replicate our work in their lower-income community. Training evaluations were consistently and overwhelmingly positive, with teachers enthusiastically embracing personal mindfulness training and noting appreciation for the KC resources provided. Adherence data, teacher and program leader focus groups, and training evaluations identified important best practices including:

- Paying teachers to attend KC and personal mindfulness training
- Providing ongoing mindfulness coaching support to teachers (classroom assistance, booster and video training, movement and mindfulness sessions)
- Flexibility in KC implementation (e.g., shorter lessons for younger children; additional mindfulness-themed books to complement lessons)
- Revisiting lessons and reinforcing mindfulness practices throughout the school day.

**Conclusions.** Sharing best practices findings and resources with programs through community discussion and the CELC website (<https://www.communityearlylearningcenter.com/teacher-resources>) has led to additional innovations (e.g., pairing experienced teachers to mentor newer teachers) and collaborations (PBS produced training videos on the KC). We continue to assess how mindfulness training impacts young children, their teachers, and parents, including benefits for specific groups (e.g., low SES, toddlers, recent immigrants).

**Suggested Citation:**

Haines, B. A., Phillippi-Immel, K., Ruffing, M., Edamala, S., Greene, C., Ruiz Hinkle, N., Yuan, C., Martinez, N., & Weng, C. (2022, August 4-6). *Using research to inform best practices: The Kindness Mindfulness Curriculum for young children*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association 2022 Annual Convention, Minneapolis, MN, United States.