



Slide 1 - This presentation will be discussing how mindfulness can be used as an intervention for children and young people who have experienced adverse childhood experiences



Slide 2 - Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present and engaged in the current moment. It's about paying attention to what's happening right now—our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and surroundings—rather than getting caught up in worries about the future or regrets about the past.

Mindfulness has been shown to have numerous benefits for mental well-being. By bringing our attention back to the present moment again and again, we can break out of unhelpful patterns of thinking and reacting. We can learn to observe our thoughts and feelings with curiosity and compassion, rather than getting caught up in them. This can lead to greater peace of mind, better decision making, and improved relationships.

Reduced stress and anxiety: Mindfulness can help us manage stress and anxiety by teaching us to respond to difficult situations with greater calm and clarity.

Improved focus and concentration: By training our minds to stay present, mindfulness can enhance our ability to focus and be productive.

Greater self-awareness: Mindfulness promotes self-awareness by allowing us to observe our own thoughts and emotions more objectively.

Enhanced relationships: By cultivating compassion and non-judgment, mindfulness can improve our interactions with others and deepen our connections.

Cleveland Clinic (2024); NHS Wales (2023)

How can mindfulness be used?

Mindfulness Breaks

Mindfulness Meditation

Mindful Activities

At the workplace

To improve Mental Health

Children and young people

Cleveland Clinic (2024); Hülshager et al. (2013); Zelazo & Lyons (2012); Schreiner & Malcolm (2008)

Slide 3 - how can mindfulness be used? Mindfulness can be beneficial for anyone looking to improve their mental well-being. It's particularly helpful for those dealing with stress, anxiety, depression, or chronic pain.

It can be used through various techniques and in different environments.

Mindfulness Breaks: Take short mindfulness breaks throughout the day to reset and refocus.

Mindfulness Meditation: Set aside time for a more formal mindfulness practice, such as mindfulness meditation, this can be in the form of yoga, tai chi or guided meditation by focusing on your breathing or focusing on a particular object.

Mindful Activities: Incorporate mindfulness into everyday activities like eating, walking or listening to others.

Cleveland Clinic (2024)

Mindfulness has been introduced in the workplace, it has been found that

mindfulness can lead to increased productivity, improved focus, and reduced stress. Employers are recognising the benefits and increasingly offering mindfulness training to their employees. Mindfulness in the workplace can lead to better decision making, increased creativity, and improved interpersonal relationships (Hulsheger et al., 2013).

Mindfulness has been shown to have numerous benefits for mental health. By promoting present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of feelings, mindfulness can improve emotional well-being. In addition, mindfulness practices can reduce stress and anxiety by helping individuals better manage stress triggers and develop healthier coping mechanisms. Over time, regular mindfulness practice can enhance resilience, focus, and concentration, as well as promote healthier relationships and improve communication skills. There is substantial evidence supporting the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions for a variety of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, long-term mindfulness practice has been associated with structural changes in the brain that support mental health. Finally, mindfulness practices have also been shown to have positive effects on physical health, including improved immune function, reduced inflammation, and better cardiovascular health (Schreiner & Malcolm, 2008).

Mindfulness practices offer numerous benefits for children, including improved emotional regulation, enhanced focus and attention, stress reduction, increased self-awareness, better social skills, improved sleep quality, increased resilience, and enhanced academic performance. By teaching children to be present and non-judgmental, mindfulness fosters emotional well-being and equips them with essential life skills. Whether through school programs, guided meditation apps, or family practices, integrating mindfulness into children's lives can promote their overall development and prepare them for success in various aspects of life (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012). Also research has found that mindfulness can be used as a tool to help children who have experienced ACEs.

What are Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)?

Domestic violence

Parental abandonment through separation or divorce

Parent with a mental health condition

Abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional)

Neglect (physical and emotional)

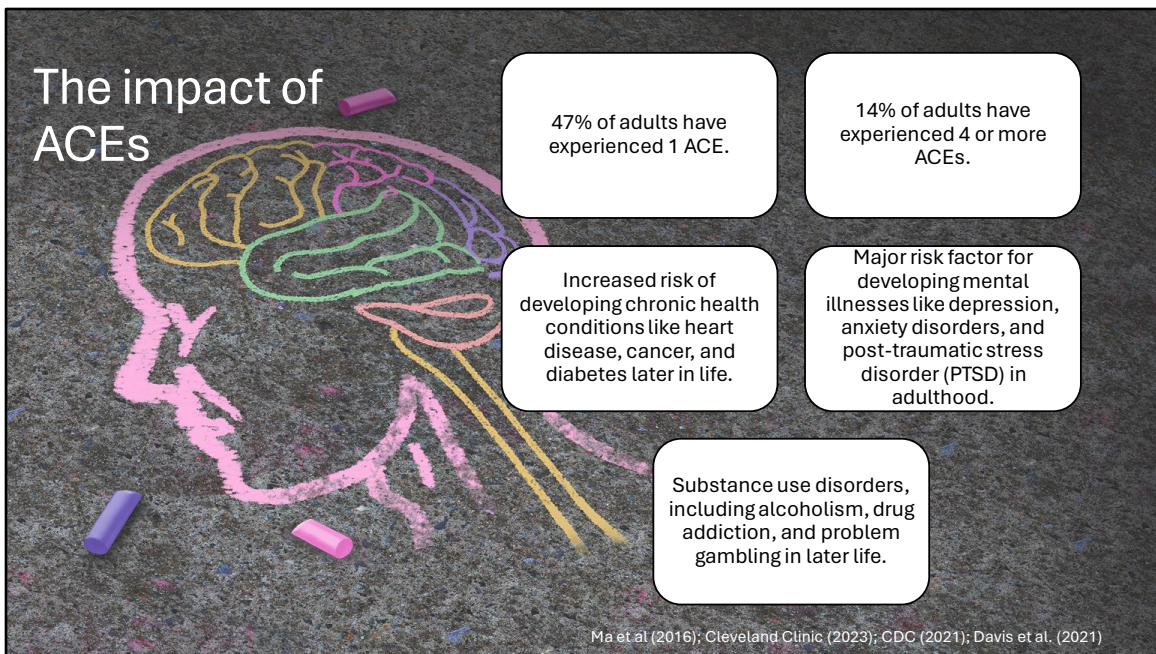
A member of the household being in prison

Growing up in a household in which there are adults experiencing alcohol and drug use problems.

Having a parent who was himself/herself abused or neglected as a child

Public Health Scotland (2021); Schickedanz et al (2021)

Slide 4 - what are ACEs? Aces are traumatic or stressful events which occur during childhood, these events happen between the ages of 0-18 years old. It is possible that children can experience more than 1 ace, with research showing that the more aces which a person experiences the more likely they are to have negative effects into adulthood, however it is important to note that not all individuals who experience ACEs will have these negative effects. Some of the most widely recognised ACEs are, Domestic violence, Parental abandonment through separation or divorce, Parent with a mental health condition, Abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional), Neglect (physical and emotional), A member of the household being in prison, Growing up in a household in which there are adults experiencing alcohol and drug use problems (Public Health Scotland, 2021), also research has found that ACEs can be passed down to the next generation through the parents' behaviour. The study highlighted how parents' own ACEs can lead to problems like PTSD, which increase the risk of ACEs in their own children (Schickedanz et al., 2021).



Slide 5 - what are the impacts of adverse childhood experiences. It was found in a 2016 study that 47% of adults in Wales had experienced at least 1 ace. This included experiences such as abuse, neglect, or growing up in a dysfunctional family. Additionally, 14% of the adults had experienced four or more ACEs during childhood (Ma et al., 2016). ACEs have profound and long-lasting impacts on an individual's health and well-being. They are linked to an increased risk of developing chronic health conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes later in life. Also research has found that mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are also more common in people with a history of ACEs. (CDC, 2021; Cleveland Clinic, 2023). ACEs have also been found to be aa strong predictor of substance use disorders, including alcoholism, drug addiction, and problem gambling in later life (Davis et al., 2021).

Preventing and Mitigating the Effects of ACEs

- Promotion of positive parenting practices
- Community-based interventions
- School-based programs
- Screening and early intervention
- Trauma-informed care
- Mental health services
- Support groups and peer networks
- Resilience-building programs

(Di Lemma et al., 2019)



Slide 6 - Preventing and Mitigating the Effects of ACEs. A variety of interventions can be used to prevent and mitigate the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Promotion of positive parenting practices: Programs that educate parents on effective communication, discipline strategies, and the importance of nurturing their children's emotional well-being can help prevent ACEs.

Community-based interventions: Initiatives that strengthen community supports, such as affordable housing, quality child care, and accessible health care, can reduce the likelihood of ACEs.

School-based programs: Interventions in educational settings that promote resilience, provide mental health support, and foster positive relationships with teachers and peers can help prevent ACEs.

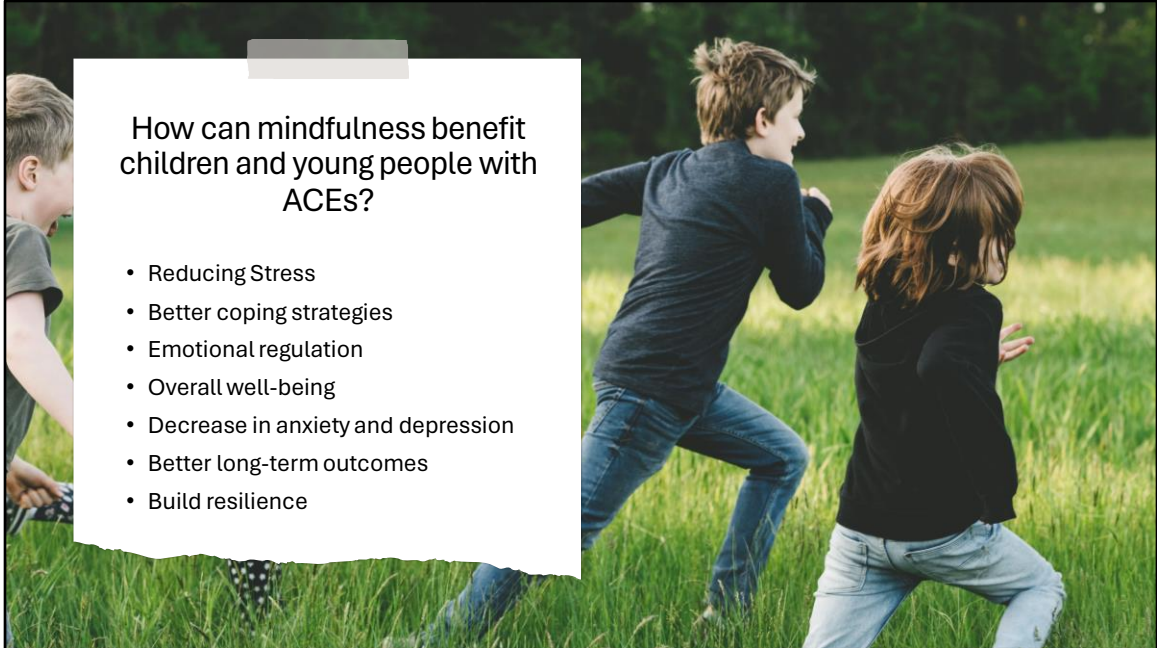
Screening and early intervention: Regular health and developmental checks for children, along with early identification of at-risk situations, can allow for timely interventions to prevent ACEs.

Trauma-informed care: This approach recognises the potential impact of trauma on individuals and aims to create a safe, supportive environment that promotes resilience and recovery.

Mental health services: Access to counselling, therapy, and other mental health resources can help individuals cope with the aftermath of ACEs and reduce the risk of long-term negative impacts.

Support groups and peer networks: Connecting with others who have experienced similar traumas can provide a sense of community, validation, and practical advice.

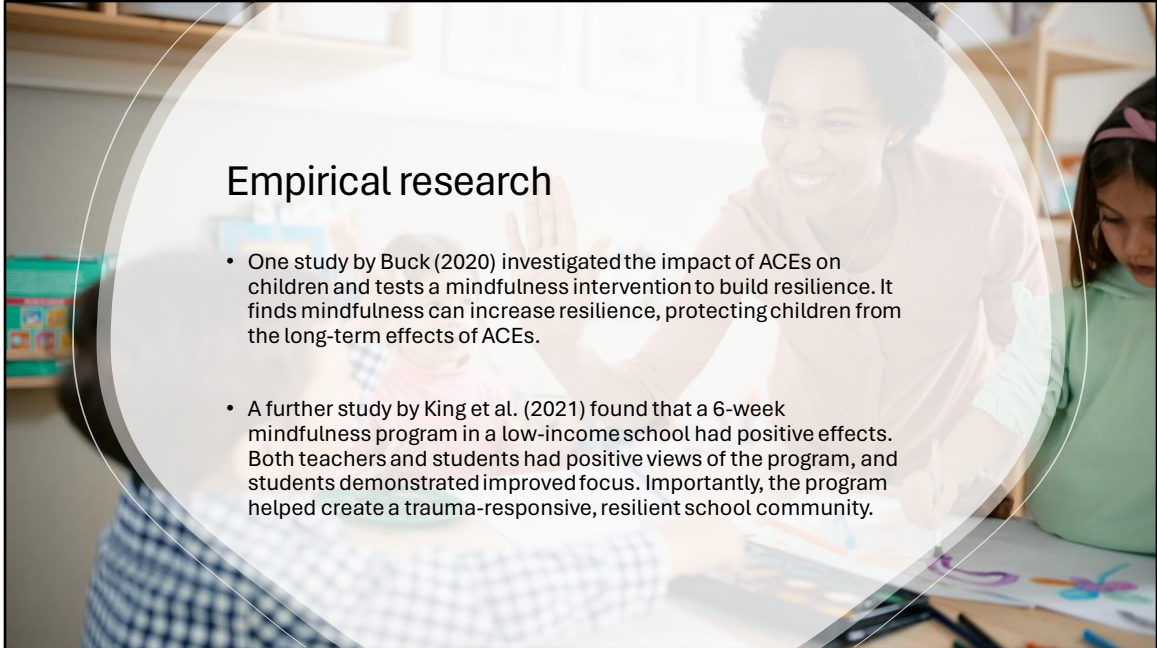
Resilience-building programs: Interventions that focus on developing skills like problem-solving, emotional regulation, and positive thinking can help individuals overcome the challenges associated with ACEs, this can also be used through practices such as mindfulness.



Slide 7 - How can mindfulness help children and young people with ACEs?

Mindfulness has been found to help children and young people by

Reducing Stress, implementing better coping strategies , helping with emotional regulation , increasing Overall well-being , Decrease in anxiety and depression symptoms, aiding in better long-term outcomes ,Building resilience



Empirical research

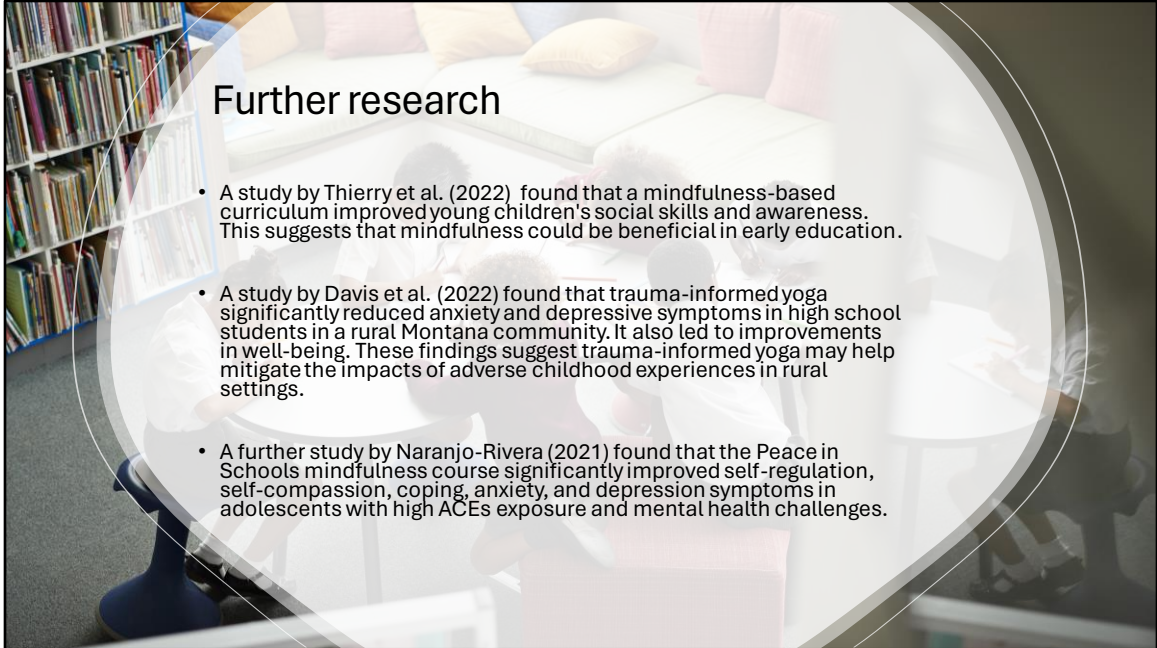
- One study by Buck (2020) investigated the impact of ACEs on children and tests a mindfulness intervention to build resilience. It finds mindfulness can increase resilience, protecting children from the long-term effects of ACEs.
- A further study by King et al. (2021) found that a 6-week mindfulness program in a low-income school had positive effects. Both teachers and students had positive views of the program, and students demonstrated improved focus. Importantly, the program helped create a trauma-responsive, resilient school community.

Slide 8 – Empirical research

One study conducted by Buck in 2022 explored the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on children's development and the role of mindfulness in building resilience. It highlights that ACEs, such as abuse, neglect, or parental mental illness, can lead to toxic stress, impairing brain development and increasing the risk of future behavioural problems and illnesses. The study focuses on a mindfulness intervention in a second-grade classroom, using techniques like breathing exercises and meditation. It finds that mindfulness can foster resilience, as defined by increased self-confidence, one of the key components of resilience. The study concludes that mindfulness can be a powerful tool for mitigating the effects of ACEs and toxic stress, promoting resilience in children.

A further study by King et al. (2021) implemented a 6-week mindfulness program in a low-income school. Both teachers and students had positive views of the program, and students demonstrated increased on-task behaviour during mindfulness practice.

Importantly, the implementation of the program contributed to the development of a trauma-responsive, resilient school community. This suggests that teacher-led mindfulness programs can have positive effects on student well-being and the overall school environment within low-income schools. However, further research is needed to explore long-term outcomes and potential challenges in sustaining mindfulness practices within such settings.



Further research

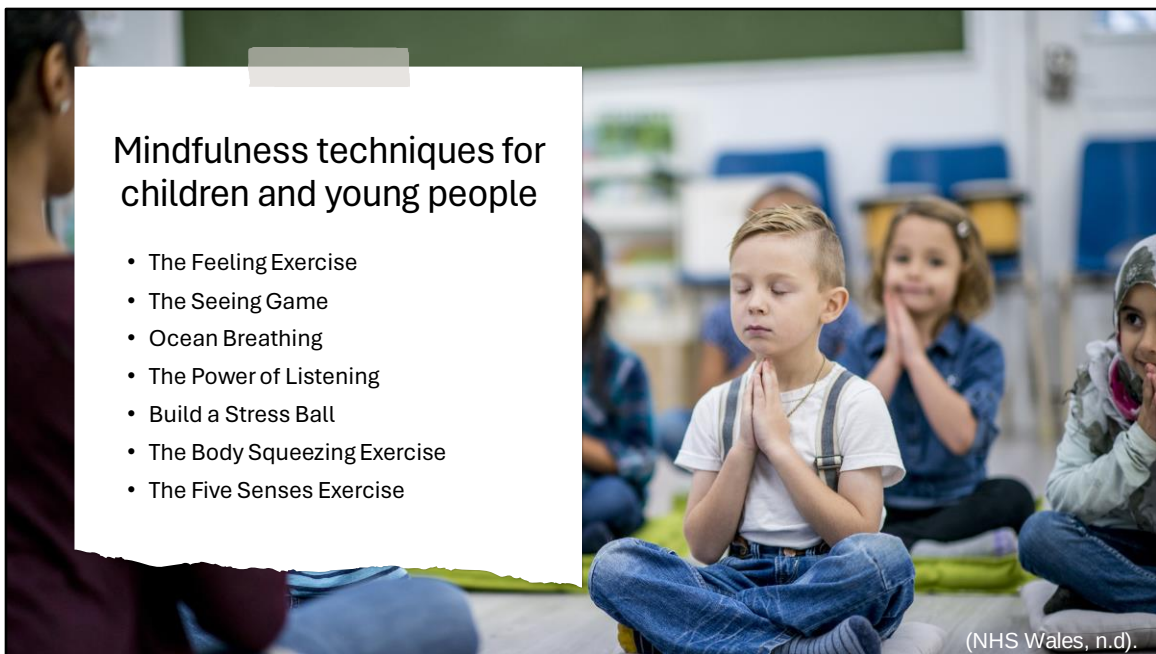
- A study by Thierry et al. (2022) found that a mindfulness-based curriculum improved young children's social skills and awareness. This suggests that mindfulness could be beneficial in early education.
- A study by Davis et al. (2022) found that trauma-informed yoga significantly reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms in high school students in a rural Montana community. It also led to improvements in well-being. These findings suggest trauma-informed yoga may help mitigate the impacts of adverse childhood experiences in rural settings.
- A further study by Naranjo-Rivera (2021) found that the Peace in Schools mindfulness course significantly improved self-regulation, self-compassion, coping, anxiety, and depression symptoms in adolescents with high ACEs exposure and mental health challenges.

Slide 9- - The study investigated the impact of a mindfulness-based curriculum on young children's relationship skills and social awareness. It used a randomised controlled trial design, with one group of students participating in the mindfulness program along with regular academics, and another group only receiving regular academics. The results showed that students who underwent the mindfulness program had significant improvements in emotional recognition, self-control, and social problem-solving compared to the control group. These findings suggest that integrating mindfulness into early education could enhance children's relationship skills and social awareness by promoting emotional recognition, self-control, and the ability to solve social issues. (Thierry et al., 2022).

A study by Davis et al. (2022) found that a trauma-informed yoga intervention in a rural Montana community significantly reduced anxiety and depressive symptoms in high school students. Importantly, it also led to improvements in well-being, as evidenced by increases in SDQ-11 scores and decreases in stress

levels. Qualitative feedback highlighted benefits in focus and relaxation. These findings suggest trauma-informed yoga may be a useful tool for mitigating the impacts of adverse childhood experiences in rural settings.

The study found that the Peace in Schools mindfulness course significantly improved self-regulation, self-compassion, coping, anxiety, and depression symptoms in adolescents with high ACEs exposure and mental health challenges. Importantly, readiness for change and ACEs levels positively influenced program outcomes. These findings suggest that mindfulness interventions can be an effective tool for addressing adolescent mental health and ACEs in schools, especially with consideration for diversity and readiness (Naranjo-Rivera, 2021).



Slide 10 - Mindfulness techniques for children and young people.

There are various techniques which can be used to implement mindfulness for children, NHS Wales (n.d) have created some exercises which can be used with young children and these include.

Feeling exercise - This exercise includes, having various different objects of different textures and having the children spend time feeling the object in their hand, encouraging them to use their senses in the moment.

The seeing game - This exercise invites the children to take a moment to observe their surroundings in the room , and encourage them to search for things they may not have noticed before.

Ocean breathing - Have the children sit or lie comfortably. Instruct them to breathe in slowly through their noses and out through pursed lips, mimicking the sound of blowing through a straw, like ocean waves.

The power of listening – by ringing a bell and having the children focus on that noise,

then as the noise fades ask them to focus on the other noises they can hear.

The body squeezing exercise - Have the children sit or lie comfortably. Guide them to squeeze and relax each muscle group, holding each squeeze for five seconds. Help them visualise by curling toes, tensing legs, sucking in stomach, making fists, and scrunching faces.

The five senses - take the children outside and have them lie quietly in the grass. Call out each of the five senses (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch) one by one.



What are the Limitations to Mindfulness?

- Lack of Time and Training
- Reluctance to Implement
- Limited Evidence of Impact
- Risk of Misuse or Overuse
- Individual Differences
- Potential for Harm
- Quality of Programs

Munk (2020); Wigelsworth & Quinn (2020); Odgers et al. (2020); Whitaker et al. (2014)

Slide 11 - Lack of Time and Training: it was discussed in a study that lack of time and inadequate training in mindfulness-based programs can be significant obstacles to implementation in schools (Munk, 2020).

Reluctance to Implement: Teachers may be ambivalent or resistant to implementing mindfulness programs, citing concerns about time commitment, lack of expertise, and potential disruption to the classroom dynamic (Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020).

Limited Evidence of Impact: A meta-analysis found that mindfulness-based interventions had limited effects on reducing anxiety in children and adolescents, highlighting that mindfulness may not be a one-size-fits-all solution. (Odgers et al., 2020).

Risk of Misuse or Overuse: it was found in a study there is a risk of mindfulness being used inappropriately or excessively, potentially leading to unhealthy patterns of thought or behaviour. (Whitaker et al., 2014)

Potential for Harm: There is a risk that mind-body interventions like mindfulness could potentially be harmful if not carefully implemented. This risk is particularly

relevant for children with ACEs, who may be more vulnerable to negative interpretations or experiences with mindfulness practices.

Quality of Programs: The quality and appropriateness of mindfulness programs for children with ACEs is crucial. Well-designed programs with appropriate guidance and monitoring are more likely to be beneficial.

A photograph of several children playing outdoors with water balloons. The children are in the foreground and middle ground, some holding balloons and others in the process of throwing them. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with trees and foliage. The overall tone is bright and positive, representing childhood and play.

Conclusion

- Mindfulness can be seen as an effective tool for mitigating the negative effects of ACEs in childhood.
- The evidence suggests that mindfulness-based interventions can help mitigate the psychological, behavioral, and physiological impacts of trauma.
- More research is needed to fully understand the implications of mindfulness interventions for different groups of children and young people with ACEs.
- Mindfulness has the potential to be a powerful tool for supporting the mental health of children and young people.

Slide 12 - In conclusion, mindfulness offers a promising approach for supporting children and young people who have experienced ACEs. The evidence suggests that mindfulness-based interventions can help mitigate the psychological, behavioural, and physiological impacts of trauma. By promoting mindfulness in schools and other settings, we can equip these young people with the skills they need to manage stress, regulate emotions, and build resilience. This could lead to improved mental health outcomes and greater well-being in the long term. However, more research is needed to fully understand the implications of mindfulness interventions for different groups of children and young people with ACEs. With careful implementation and ongoing evaluation, mindfulness has the potential to be a powerful tool for supporting the mental health of our youth.

References

- Buck, K. (2020). *Building Resiliency in Children through Mindfulness*. Augsburg University.
- CDC. (2021, August 23). *Preventing adverse childhood experiences*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/aces/index.html>
- Cleveland Clinic. (2023). *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/24875-adverse-childhood-experiences-ace>
- Cleveland Clinic. (2024, April 30). *21 tips for mindfulness*. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/what-is-mindfulness>
- Davis, J. P., Tyscher, J. S., Stein, B. D., & D'Amico, E. J. (2021). Longitudinal effects of adverse childhood experiences on substance use transition patterns during young adulthood. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 120, 105201. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chabn.2021.105201>
- Davis, L., Ashward, A., & Buchanan, R. (2022). Trauma-Informed Yoga: Investigating an intervention for mitigating adverse childhood experiences in rural contexts. *Educational Studies :Educational Studies*, 58(4), 530–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2022.2102495>
- Di Lemma, L., Davies, A., Ford, K., Hughes, K., Homolova, L., Gray, B., & Richardson, G. (2019). Responding to Adverse Childhood Experiences: An evidence review of interventions to prevent and address adversity across the life course. *Public Health Wales*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031313>
- Hicksheger, U. R., Albers, H. J. E. M., Feinholdt, A., & Lang, J. W. B. (2013). Benefits of mindfulness at work: The role of mindfulness in emotion regulation, emotional exhaustion, and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98(2), 310–325. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031313>
- King, L., Lewis, C., Richie, D. M., Carr, C., & Hart, M. (2021). Implementation of a teacher-led mindfulness program in a low-income pre-and early-elementary school as part of a trauma-responsive, resilience-building community initiative. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 49(6), 1945–1964. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22557>
- Ma, B., Ashton, K., Hughes, K., Ford, K., Bishop, J., & Paranjotly, S. (2016). Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Wales and their Impact on Health in the Adult Population. *European Journal of Public Health*, 26(suppl. 1). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ejpub/ckw167.009>
- Munk, K. (2020). *Mindful Matters: Addressing Barriers To Classroom-Based Mindfulness* [San Jose State University]. <https://doi.org/10.31979/wtd.pwrg-4g67>
- Naranjo-Rivera, K. (2021). *The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Mindfulness, and Adolescent (AMA) Health Study: Addressing Health and Well-being in Schools and Advancing the Science of Social Justice in Public Health and Education* [Dissertation]. Johns Hopkins University.
- NHS. (2023, August 14). *Mindfulness*. nhs.uk. <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/mindfulness/>
- NHS Wales. (n.d.). *Mindfulness Exercises for Children*. In NHS Wales. <https://abuh.nhs.wales/files/mental-health/paediatric-psychology-managing-difficult-thoughts/mindfulness-exercises-for-children-pdf/>
- Odgers, K., Dargatzis, N., Creswell, C., Jones, M., & Hudson, J. (2020). The Limited Effect of Mindfulness-Based Interventions on Anxiety in Children and Adolescents: A Meta-Analysis. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-020-00319-z>
- Public Health Scotland. (2021). *Overview of ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) - Children - Population Groups - Public Health Scotland*. <https://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces>
- Schickedanz, A., Escarce, J. J., Hallon, N., Sastry, N., & Chang, P. J. (2021). Intergenerational Associations between Parents' and Children's Adverse Childhood Experience Scores. *Children*, 8(9), 747. <https://doi.org/10.3390/children8090747>
- Schreiner, I., & Malcolm, J. P. (2008). The benefits of mindfulness meditation: changes in emotional states of depression, anxiety, and stress. *Behaviour Change*, 25(3), 156–168. <https://doi.org/10.1375/bch.25.3.156>
- Thierry, K. L., Vincent, R. L., & Norris, K. (2022). A Mindfulness-Based curriculum improves young children's relationship skills and social awareness. *Mindfulness*, 13(3), 730–741. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-022-01830-w>
- Verplanken, B., & Fisher, N. R. (2013). Habitual worrying and benefits of mindfulness. *Mindfulness*, 5(5), 566–573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-013-0211-0>
- Whitaker, R. C., Dearth-Wesley, T., Gooze, R. A., Becker, B., Gallagher, K. C., & McEwen, B. S. (2014). Adverse childhood experiences, dispositional mindfulness, and adult health. *Preventive Medicine*, 67, 147–153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2014.07.029>
- Wigelsworth, M., & Quinn, A. (2020). Mindfulness in schools: an exploration of teachers' perceptions of mindfulness-based interventions. *Pastoral Care in Education*, 38(4), 293–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2020.1725908>
- Zelazo, P. D., & Lyons, K. E. (2012). The Potential Benefits of mindfulness training in Early Childhood: A Developmental Social Cognitive Neuroscience perspective. *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 154–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2012.00241.x>