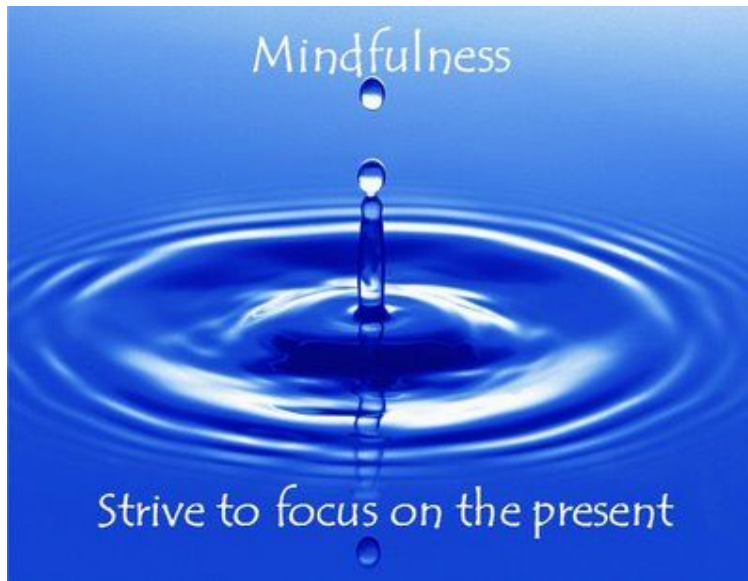


Children and Community that value arts and learning!



Mindfulness

Since 2003, Calgary Arts Academy has understood and utilized the benefits of current brain research to enhance learning and well-being. Calgary Arts Academy has used the **Brain Gym** educational model in the past. As the body of brain research grows, the best practices for helping students succeed evolves. Calgary Arts Academy is therefore transitioning to the application of **Mindfulness** to achieve enhanced brain functioning. Mindfulness is based on current research about the structure and function of the brain.



What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a secular practice that helps to reduce stress, increase emotional coping skills, improve sustained attention, focus and executive neuro-functioning and cultivate a deeper sense of empathy. Techniques such as meditation, awareness-based activities and learning about the functioning of the brain are some of the fundamental tools of mindful practice.

“Mindfulness meditation is a way to improve health, boost your sense of well being, reduce stress, solve problems and add meaning to your life.” Jon Kabat –Zinn

Brain imaging has shown that regular Mindfulness practices result in:

- Thicker neural connections in the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, contributing to greater attentional flexibility, increased working memory function and sensitivity to internal sensations
- Increased prefrontal functioning, thereby improving clarity of focus and ability to process information and lowering the amount of effort required for certain tasks
- Thicker neural connections on the brainstem that may account for increased immune function

Research in the medical field has shown that Mindfulness practices can:

- Decrease anxiety and depression related to medical health diagnoses
- Boost immune system and improve physical healing

The Brain Research



Imagine: joyful learning, academic success and a powerful sense of self and community.

Imagine: students who are able to engage in a focused, energetic way with another, with their teachers and with their learning.

Imagine: schools that are productive, harmonious centres of successful learning, where all students thrive because they recognize themselves as:

- Capable, creative learners
- Self-aware human beings
- Compassionate, responsible citizens

Our ability to use artistic expression to conjure up the imagination leads to the fruit of our knowing, awakening mindfulness and our engagement in life.

All Calgary Arts Academy staff began in-house Professional Development on Mindfulness in January 2014. Many of our staff members have also received specialized training from Mindful Schools. We have a Mindfulness leader on each teaching team and we are currently using the MindUp Curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 9. The simple practices and strategies at the core of MindUp help our students become resilient, focused and mindful learners.

Regular Mindfulness practices result in:

- Increased emotional regulation, through the ability to alter intensity of emotion and return to a calmer state, thereby reducing stress, anxiety and depression
- Increased clarity of awareness and increased short-term working memory
- Decreased rumination and negative emotional states
- Enhanced positive emotional states
- Improved interpersonal skills and ability to connect meaningfully with others
- Decreased struggle and conflict with others

Mindfulness, also referred to as awareness, is the simple act of noticing thoughts, sensations, and feelings. The use of the expressive arts can broaden our capacity to be mindful by adding insight to our inquiry, which then results in the surfacing of additional wisdom. When this happens it is as if we have exercised our unconscious.