

Multi-Level Integration of Mindfulness Teaching, Research, and Service in Training School-based Counselors and Educators

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Background and Objectives:

The sustained and intentional practice of mindfulness can enhance compassion, reduce depression, build resilience, and decrease bullying and anxiety among school children (Greenberg, 2011). The connections between mindfulness and the core competencies of Social and Emotional Learning further illustrate the potential for mindfulness practice to enhance the work of school-based professionals, as well as other helping professionals working with children and adolescents. Such interventions are particularly relevant with student populations who have encountered adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as poverty or exposure to abuse, that have the potential to cause enduring, negative responses throughout the lifespan (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013; Jimenez, et al. 2016).

Methods:

Training professionals to integrate mindfulness interventions into their work with youth, therefore seems warranted. Those who facilitate the introduction and use of mindfulness practices in such settings should themselves use similar approaches for personal wellness. In response, the researchers relied on findings from their own action-based research, as well as existing evidence-based models to develop curricula, in the form of a University course, for training youth-oriented mental health providers and educators.

Results:

The resulting curriculum we created for University students in training to be helping professionals includes mindfulness intervention techniques; training in conceptualizing the needs of youth and the systems in which they learn; and professional “burnout” prevention. University students completed personal mindfulness practices, as well as graded course assignments to engage with both theory and practice. Follow-up surveys indicated positive experiences with the course as well as ideas for future studies and collaborative endeavors.

Discussion:

Our session objectives are to provide an overview of these training curricula, demonstrate techniques and practices relevant for youth-oriented settings, and illustrate the use of mindfulness practice in educating future helping professionals in a variety of youth-oriented professions (i.e. teachers, counselors, health professionals).

Conclusion:

We will share, in succinct form, the University curriculum we developed to help prepare future helping professionals to integrate mindfulness practices with themselves and in their future work. Teaching helping professionals to be mindful practitioners will ultimately enhance their practice as well as the youth with whom they work.