



LISTENING TO MUSIC MINDFULLY

"The only truth is music."

—Jack Kerouac

OVERVIEW

Students practice mindful listening with their whole bodies—noticing their thoughts, feelings, and movements as they experience a piece of music.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily, for at least one week or longer
- At the start of a school day, during a transition between classes, to close a class
- When you would like your students to practice the skills of focused attention and/or observation
- When students may be experiencing a moment of intensity—intense thoughts, feelings, or circumstances

TIME REQUIRED

- 10-15 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- An audio player or computer to play music

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice listening to a piece of music while observing their thoughts, feelings, and physical responses

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Spend a few minutes at home or during a break in the school day to focus all of your attention on a favorite piece of music.
- What do you notice when you take the time to really listen rather than just “hear” the music?
- What do you notice in yourself as you practice listening?
- How do you feel now?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

- Students can practice listening mindfully to music at home, or you can adapt this practice for your classroom.
 - For example, choose a piece of music for everyone to listen to together.
 - Alternatively, ask student volunteers to share favorite songs or pieces of music throughout the school year. Have them introduce the music they share, explain why they like it, and what it makes them think and feel as they listen.

THE PRACTICE

- *Today we're going to do a short, simple mindfulness exercise to attune your mind and your body.*

- *Put on some music and crank up the volume. You might play your favorite song: hip hop, pop, rock, blues, jazz, classical, country—it doesn't matter. You could even put on a song that you hate. Whatever you choose, play the music and really listen.*
- *Listen with your whole body, not just your ears. If you feel like it, let the music move you. Feel the beat, give yourself over to the rhythm, and bring your full attention to the music and the movement. Don't worry about getting it right: you can sit still, tap your toes, or dance wildly. Hear the music with your whole body.*
- *Notice any thoughts of embarrassment or shyness, or thoughts like, "This is ridiculous."*
- *Notice any feelings that are released: anger, joy, sadness...*
- *Feel your body; feel its aliveness.*
- *Listen to the music and notice the thoughts and emotions moving through you.*
- *And when the song comes to an end, notice the effects of really listening to music with your whole body.*

CLOSURE

- Facilitate a short discussion after this mindful listening practice, and consider asking the following questions:
 - How did you feel when you listened to the music? Did you notice your emotions shifting or changing? When?
 - What sorts of thoughts did you have as you listened?
 - How did your body respond to the sounds and rhythms of this piece? Did you feel like dancing or moving your body to the music? What thoughts does the mind have about why or why not?
 - What's the difference between hearing music and listening to music with your whole self (thoughts, feelings, body)?
 - How do you feel now?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Where might you try it again? When might it be most well-received?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

While research on the effects of mindfulness on children and teens is still in the early stages, a [2014 meta-analysis](#) of 24 studies of K-12 students demonstrated changes in students' attention and resilience to stress, including positive emotions, self-esteem, and self-concept. Further, a [2019](#) targeted review of mindfulness interventions with young adolescents indicated multiple benefits to teens' well-being. Apart from affecting student well-being, some research studies suggest that mindfulness practices can also foster [curiosity and learning](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many mindfulness practices involve turning inward to observe thoughts, breath patterns, and body sensations. However, mindful listening also prompts students to turn outward and engage with their world.

Teens may benefit from mindful listening because they are practicing paying attention—a skill that may ultimately improve their [attention and executive functions](#) (e.g., self-control, planning, decision-making, etc.) as well as their [school functioning](#).

SOURCE

Amy Salzman, MD., italicized excerpt from [A Still Quiet Place for Teens: A Mindful Workbook to Ease Stress and Difficult Emotions](#)