



MINDFUL MOVEMENT FOR TEENS

"When I dance, I dance; when I sleep, I sleep; yes, and when I walk alone in a beautiful orchard, if my thoughts drift to far-off matters for some part of the time for some other part I lead them back again to the walk, the orchard, to the sweetness of this solitude, to myself."

—Michel de Montaigne

OVERVIEW

Lead students through a sequence of movements and stretches while prompting them to breathe deeply and relax parts of their bodies.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily, for at least one week or longer
- At the start of a school day, at the beginning or end of class, before doing a sitting practice or a loving-kindness meditation
- When you or your students are experiencing tension, anger, or anxiety

TIME REQUIRED

- < 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Bell or chime (if you share the script yourself, rather than playing the recording for students)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice noticing their body sensations and breath as they practice a sequence of seven different movements

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

- Take a quiet moment at home or during a break in the school day to practice the gentle movements and stretches below (featured in many mindfulness programs). They are designed to help you develop a mindful awareness of your bodily sensations, and to relieve tension wherever it is found.
- How does your body feel after you practice these sequence of movements? Do you have a yoga or exercise program where you engage in similar movements?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

- Begin by asking students whether they feel tension in their bodies? If so, where?
- Tell the students that mindful movement is a bit like yoga or tai chi, but your posture doesn't matter too much, and aren't really "exercising" your body. You're also not competing with anyone near you. What you do with your body doesn't matter as much as simply noticing your body, your movements, and your breath.
- Then, share this mindful movement script with them. Invite them to listen to your directions.
- Note: As you prepare to lead this practice, you don't need to read verbatim from a script, but rather to learn the practice yourself. Use the script as an example of the steps as well as the spirit of the practice. But in leading a practice, guide students using your own words, from your own moment-to-moment experience.

[Mindful Movement audio [link here.](#)]

THE PRACTICE

Introduction: Welcome to mindful movement. This is a practice of moving your body slowly, intentionally, and with great care and attention to what is happening in the present moment. As you go through each movement, pay curious and compassionate attention to the messages and sensations that arise in your body. Any time you notice stress or tension, bring special attention to that part of the body. Breathe deeply in and out through that part of your body--just noticing whether that allows your body to release any of that stress. If you have any health issues or injuries, or if any particular movement causes pain, do not force yourself to do it. Instead modify the movement so that it works for your body, or skip it entirely and just practice mindful sitting or standing instead. Remember, what's most important is staying present with your body--not trying to get any certain kind of stretch or workout.

Stand like a mountain. We'll begin with standing like a mountain. Standing tall, feeling your feet firmly rooted on the ground, your head reaching towards the sky—stable, solid, dignified. We'll hear one sound of the bell, breathing in and out deeply and mindfully, allowing the breath to fill the entire body. Breathing in—I know that I am breathing in. Breathing out—I know that I am breathing out. In. Out.

Ring the bell or chime [pause]

Roll your shoulders. With the next breath in, rolling your shoulders forward and up. As you breath out, bring your shoulders backwards and down. Breathing in, rolling your shoulders up. Breathing out, rolling your shoulders down. Continuing at your own pace and just noticing the sensations in your shoulders--if there's any stress or tension, or if it feels light, loose, and relaxed. Continuing to breathe mindfully, reversing directions, rolling your shoulders forward as you breathe. Rolling my shoulders—I am aware that I am rolling my shoulders. [Pause.] Then allowing your shoulders to relax, coming back to neutral.

Roll your neck. Breathing in, breathing out. Rolling your neck forward and down, looking toward the floor. Breathing in, rolling to the right, so your right ear is close to your right shoulder. Breathing out, rolling forward and down. Breathing in, rolling to the left. Breathing out, continuing to roll your neck. Breathing out, continuing to roll your neck. Gently noticing any sensations in your neck. [Pause.] Coming back to neutral, relaxing, and checking in with your body. Maybe shaking it out a bit—just loosening it up.

Stretch your arms. With the next breath in, bringing your arms to the side and up over your head, so your hands are above your head, fingers pointing up. Breathing out, bringing your palms down in front of you, palms facing down, so your arms are by your side again. Breathing in, arms coming around and up over your head in a big circle. Breathing out, gathering the breath through the middle of your body, hands coming down. Continuing to breathe, moving your hands and arms in circles, gathering your breath at your own pace. As best you can, staying with the breath, staying with the body. Noticing when your mind wanders, noticing where your mind has wandered, and bringing it back to the breath and to the body. [Pause.] Now coming back to neutral. Relaxing your arms by your side.

Hang like a rag doll. Breathing in, breathing out, and bending forward at the waist, bending your knees slightly—allowing your arms to hang and your head to hang like a rag doll. Giving your arms a little shake. Shaking your head no, nodding your head yes. As best you can, bending forward at the waist instead of in the back. Perhaps finding a little bit of extra length in your spine. Now just breathing, noticing the sensations in your body as you are bending forward [Pause]. With the next breath in, coming back slowly to standing, straightening the waist, slowly and gently. There's no need to rush. Standing and just noticing how your body feels right now.

Sit and bend forward. Now taking a seat, either on the floor or on a chair. If you're sitting on the floor, have your feet out in front of you with your knees bent slightly. Breathing in, breathing out, bending forward at the waist, reaching towards your feet with your hands. As best you can, bending at the waist instead of in the back. Finding a little bit of extra length in the spine. Breathing in. Breathing out. Noticing the sensations in your legs, in your hips, in your spine, and in your body. [Pause.] Breathing in, bringing your body back upright to a neutral sitting position.

Twist. Our last movement will be a twist. We'll first twist to the left. So putting your right hand on your left hip. Moving your left hand behind your back, and looking over your left shoulder. Breathing in, finding a little bit more length in your spine breathing out, just noticing the sensations in your body as you twist. And breathing in and out three times. [Pause.] With the next breath in, coming back to neutral. With the next breath out, switching directions and twisting to the right. Putting your left hand at your right hip; your right hand behind your back, and looking over your right shoulder. Finding length in the spine and breathing. Just noticing what sensations are present in your hips, spine, and shoulders. Breathing in—I know that I am twisting. Breathing out—I smile. [Pause.] With the next breath in, coming back to a neutral position and facing forward.

Checking in with the body. And now just checking in with your entire body. How does your whole body feel now? Taking a moment to scan through your entire body from head to toe, noticing if there are any areas of tension and stress. Noticing if your body feels any different, or if it feels the same. Breathing in—I am aware of my body. Breathing out—I smile to my body with awareness and compassion. [Pause.] Now taking a moment to thank yourself for practicing mindful movement—an act of self-compassion for your body and your mind. We'll end this meditation with one sound of the bell. [Ring bell or chime.]

CLOSURE

- Ask students: *What is it like to notice your body and how it feels? What did you notice while you were relaxing your body?*

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

Mindful movement is a foundational component of [Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction](#) for adults and many adapted mindfulness programs for youth. A [2014 meta-analysis](#) that focuses on 24 mindfulness studies with 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.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Teens face numerous daily stressors that can negatively affect their learning and development. Teaching students about a practice that directly addresses these stressors in their bodies may ultimately bolster their personal well-

being—and even improve their [attention and executive functions](#) (e.g., self-control, planning, decision-making, etc.) as well as their [school functioning](#).

SOURCE

Dzung X. Vo, MD, [Mindfulness for Teens](#)