



## Mindfulness: from Adults to Children

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### Editorial

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### Editorial

Mindfulness has been defined with various definitions by scholars [1]. Some scholars suggested that mindfulness is simply defined as a state of widened awareness regardless of whether individuals accept what they are aware of [2]. Alternatively, some proposed that mindfulness should be composed of awareness and acceptance [3-7]. Although other components have been suggested (e.g., self-regulation of attention [8,9], observing, and describing [10]), these two key components (i.e., awareness and acceptance) have prevalently been found in most of the literature [11]. That is, a mindful person can be aware of both internal and external experiences and can accept without placing judgments on such experiences [1,5,12-16]. As mindfulness skills can be learned and have therapeutic and desirable effects on a wide range of life outcomes [17], mindfulness-based practices have been encouragingly applied to various populations and in different contexts.

Most mindfulness research has been studied with adults [5]. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been developed for both healthy and clinical adults [18], and the research examining their effectiveness began with adults in medical settings [17]. The effects of undesirable internal states, such as negative emotions or automatic thoughts, can be lessened when ones learned and applied mindfulness skills in routine life [19]. Taken together, findings suggested that the MBIs are useful for adults with clinical conditions [17]. A bibliometric study was recently applied to exploring how the research trend of mindfulness and mindfulness-based interventions is, and will possibly be in the future. The key result showed that scholars have more commonly applied neuroscientific techniques to perusing various aspects of mindfulness. Due to technological society, online programs or mobile-based programs are more frequently used for practicing mindfulness. Moreover, keyword co-

occurrence analysis from the bibliometric study illustrated that several keywords including meditation, emotion regulation, attention, and validation were placed close to the keyword “mindfulness”, forming an outstanding cluster, thereby indicating prominent areas of inquiry. The smallest cluster consists of children and adolescents, however [20]. It means that the keywords “children” and “adolescents” were infrequently defined together with “mindfulness” in the literature.

While still limited in number, the research studies focusing on mindfulness in children are increasing continuously [21], including those adapting adults’ mindfulness scale for use with children (e.g., [22]) and those exploring the effects of the mindfulness-based programs (which were developed primarily for adults) on children [18]. It seems that mindfulness-based practices help enhance children’s well-being and positive development [4,10,12,23,24]. For example, a mindfulness-based program has been successful in decreasing the adverse effects of children’s daily stressors, such as test anxiety [3,7,18,24], and in promoting children’s resilience [18,25]. A meta-analysis study found that school-based mindfulness interventions can improve cognitive performance and resilience response to stress in children and youth [26]. The mindfulness enhancement program (MEP), which is a school-based program, can lessen depression levels in 8- to 11-year old Thai children [7]. Also, the mindfulness-based intervention can diminish depressive symptoms in children diagnosed with depression and anxiety [12].

Although increasing continuously, mindfulness research in children is still at an early stage, especially in studies conducted in school settings [5]. Recently, there are a lot fewer MBIs studies in children and adolescents compared with those in adults since the mindfulness research with

youth began approximately 25 years after the mindfulness research with adults [17]. If, as a skill, mindfulness can be enhanced during childhood, this skill may to a certain extent lead to strengthening other skills, such as social skills, communication skills, or coping skills. Therefore, the study of mindfulness in children is promising and valuable for professionals as well as practitioners who work with children. Two essential lines of research inquiry are the appropriateness of a mindfulness scale for use with children and a mindfulness program for children's development. That is, mindfulness is an abstract concept that may be too difficult for children to comprehend. Based on children's cognitive development, their cognitive abilities do not yet fully develop, and they may not completely understand an abstract concept. As a result, using the mindfulness scales and programs developed particularly for adults may not be appropriate for children provided that one's hope for maximizing their effective use.

For measuring mindfulness, a valid and reliable scale for children is a common limitation. The challenges of assessing mindfulness in children lie on scale development, validation methodology, concept, and culture. Most of the scales recently developed for children evaluate dispositional mindfulness. However, dispositional scores may provide inadequate information on how mindfulness skills, which are more state-like, change within weekly or monthly intervals. Moreover, due to their limited cognitive abilities, children may not be fully aware of their experiences [21], and they may not be able to report themselves precisely. The Behavioral observation from children's familiar informants, such as parents and teachers [27], in multiple contexts, may be able to supplement as well as to validate self-reported data.

In terms of mindfulness-based practices, the children-centred program is sorely needed. When using the practices developed for adults in children, the activities have to be adjusted to be more suitable for children's language and cognitive development. Consequently, the program applicable to children has to require a short attention span, comprise of a variety of activities that involve uses of different sense organs, use age-appropriate language, and provide a more concrete concept of mindfulness [18]. For example, children can effectively learn mindfulness skills by direct experience with sensory-experience activities [18,19], shortened meditation exercises [18], or a variety of game-based activities [28]. People around children, such as parents and teachers, are also significant agents for cultivating mindfulness skills in children. If these people gain more understanding of how mindfulness skills can be developed, they can offer age-appropriate activities to improve children's mindfulness skills. Moreover, being enjoyable, meaningful, and helpful for self-expression and learning are program

elements important to reinforcing children's engagement. By their very nature, the activities with creativity, fun, and play are significant for children to learn new skills and concepts, and mindfulness is no exception [18].

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