

Attention Please!

Why is it so hard to focus and what can we do about it?

JUTTA DOTTERWEICH, ACT FOR YOUTH

PYD NETWORK WEBINAR

3/21/2018



PYD Network: History & Background



NYS Partnership:
1998 - 2012

New PYD
Curriculum 2015

New PYD Online
Courses 2016-17



http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/



Resources

How does attention work?

Strategies to strengthen attention

Why talk about attention?

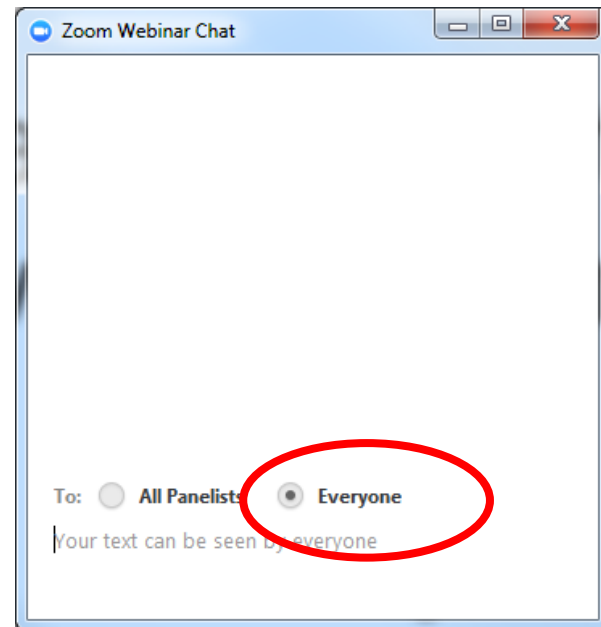
Our Roadmap for Today

Housekeeping



Experiencing delays?

Try closing out the other programs running on your computer



Questions?

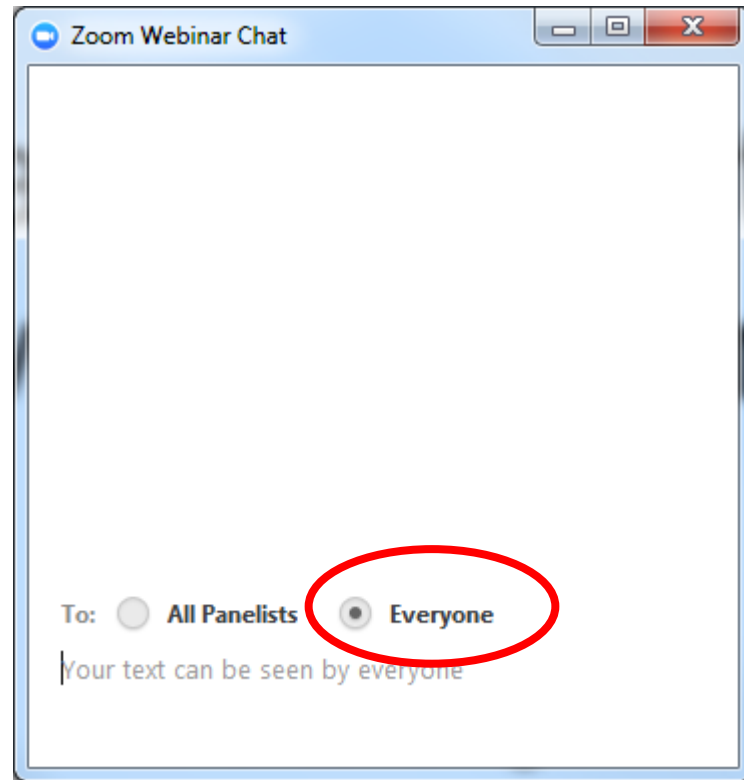
Use chat function. Post to Everyone.



Why talk about Attention?

Why is this topic important to you?

Please chat in



Attention

Attention connects us to the world, shaping and defining our experience. Attention enables us to be aware of

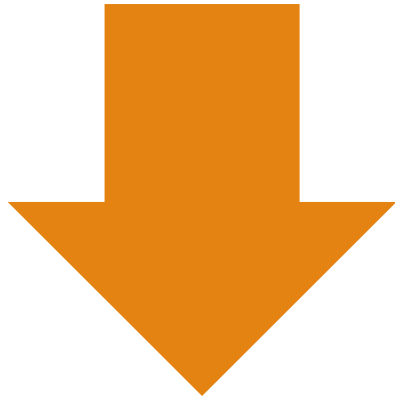
- Self
- Others around us
- World around us

Focused attention is the gateway to all thinking including perception, memory, language, reasoning, problem solving, and decision making.

Functions

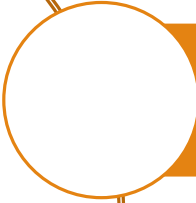



Focus on an
object



Inhibit
distractions

Types of Distractions

-  Sensory
-  Emotional



Distraction is the New Normal



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6PpRTWxKLo&index=3&list=PL10g2YT_In2gmPbtzIWIPXKsNR2_-BrWn

Impact

- Internet addictions
- Less social contact and interaction → less social skills
- Loneliness and isolation
- Comprehension, reflecting on meaning
- Problems sustaining attention → performance enhancers (self -medicating)



How does Attention Work?



Every brain is built like a community

Cells (neurons) are the building blocks of different structures within the brain (gray matter)

Nerve fibers/tracts form the highways between them

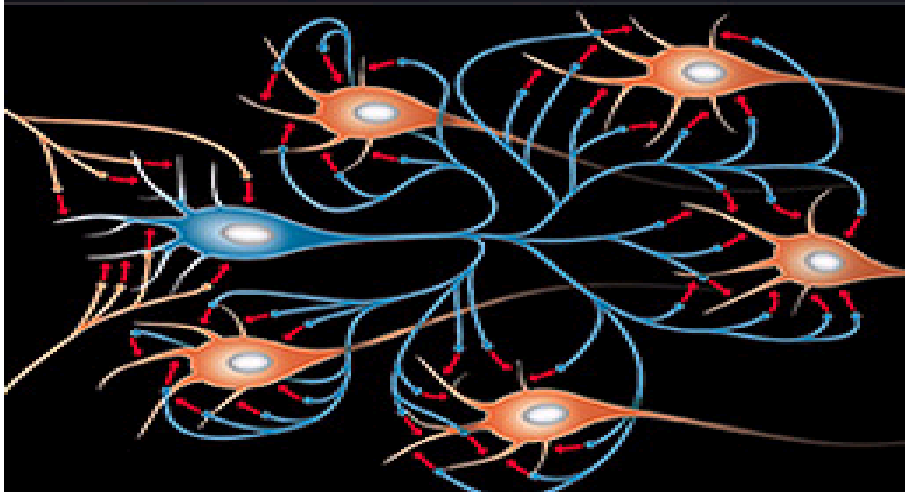
Major critical regions are built first, then joined together, then specialized

Stimulation and activity molds how strongly each pathway works

The Developing Brain: Implications for Youth Program. 2014

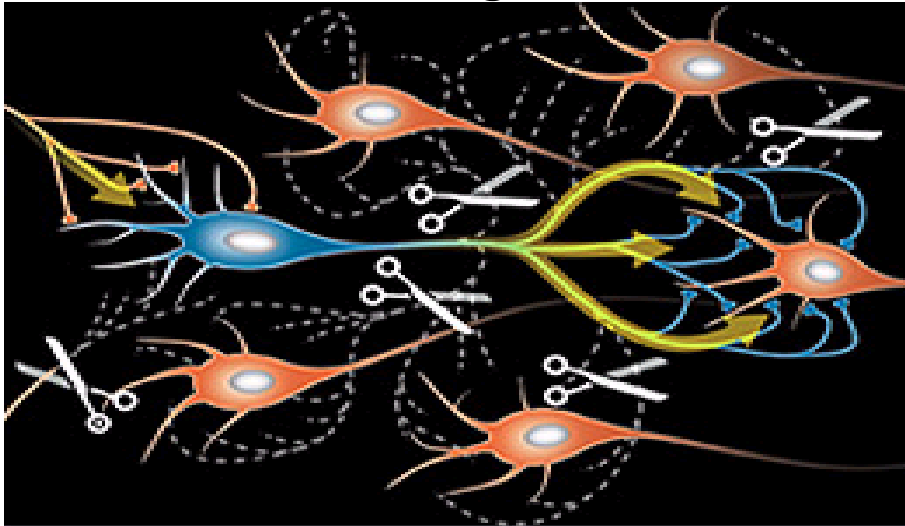
<http://www.childtrends.org/our-research/the-kristin-anderson-moore-lecture-series/>

Nerve Proliferation



Tree growing
branches and
shoots

Nerve Pruning

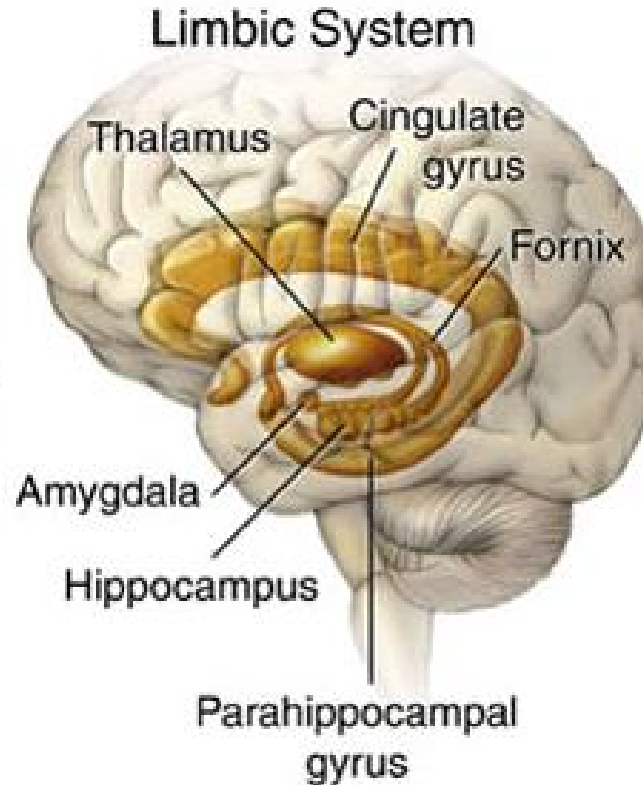
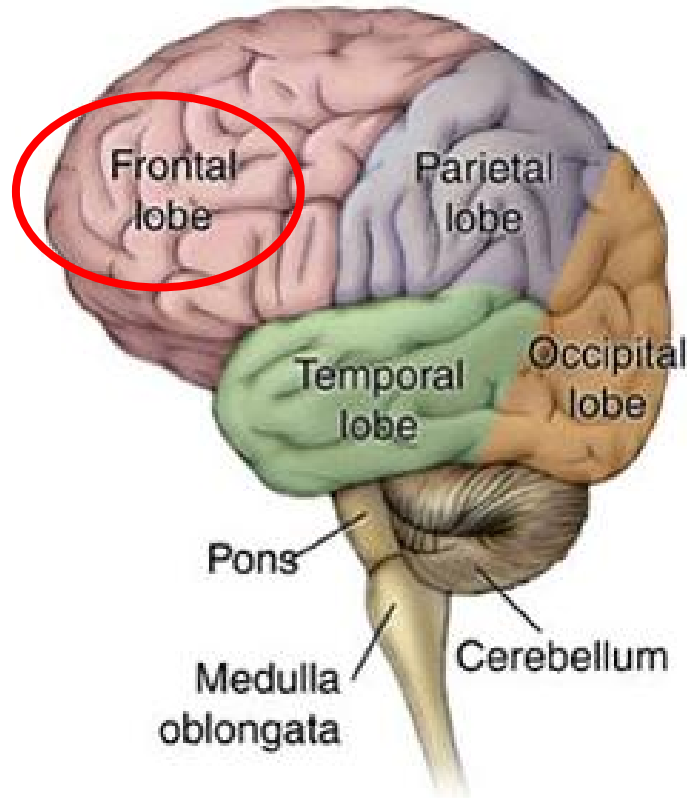


Nerves that
fire together



Get wired
together!!!

Centers Working Together



Semi-Independent Mental Systems

BOTTOM UP CIRCUITRY

- Faster
- Involuntary & automatic
- Intuitive, operating through network of association
- Impulsive, driven by emotion
- Executor of our habitual routines and guide for our actions
- Manager of our mental models of the world

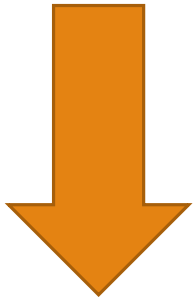
TOP DOWN CIRCUITRY

- Slower
- Voluntary
- Effortful
- Seat of self-control
- Able to learn new models, make new plans and take charge of our automatic repertoire

Goleman. 2013

General Principle

Brain uses energy/resources economically



Attention given to a new task (top down)

→ Practice will make it a habit, it becomes automatic (bottom up)

Automatic Attention

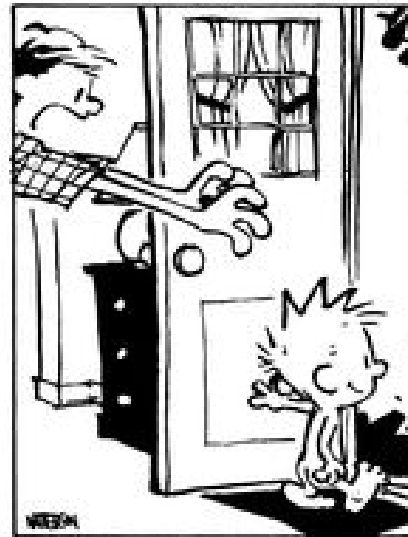
Gets us through the day

Weakness: It is biased or hijacked by emotions

It can be controlled by top down circuit



... BUT NOT TODAY!



EVERYBODY'S A SLAVE TO ROUTINE.



Selective Attention

Focusing on a particular object for a certain period of time



Driver for learning

Limited in capacity and duration

Information overload →
top down circuit shuts
down (mental fatigue)

Cognitive Load

BrainFacts.org

Log in

Search

commonly held brain-based learning myths.



<http://www.brainfacts.org/For-Educators/Teaching-Techniques/2016/The-Truth-Behind-Brain-Based-Learning-051916>

Multitasking – A Myth

Multitasking is really our ability to switching to single-task across a variety of tasks

→ superficial

→ uses up energy

↓ concentration,
comprehension

↑ stress level



Mind Wandering



Default mode of the brain (less effort)

50% of our thoughts are day dreams

Creative thinking/leaps

Side note: Adults with ADD have higher levels of original creative thinking



Most common when involved in routine/habitual tasks → more mistakes

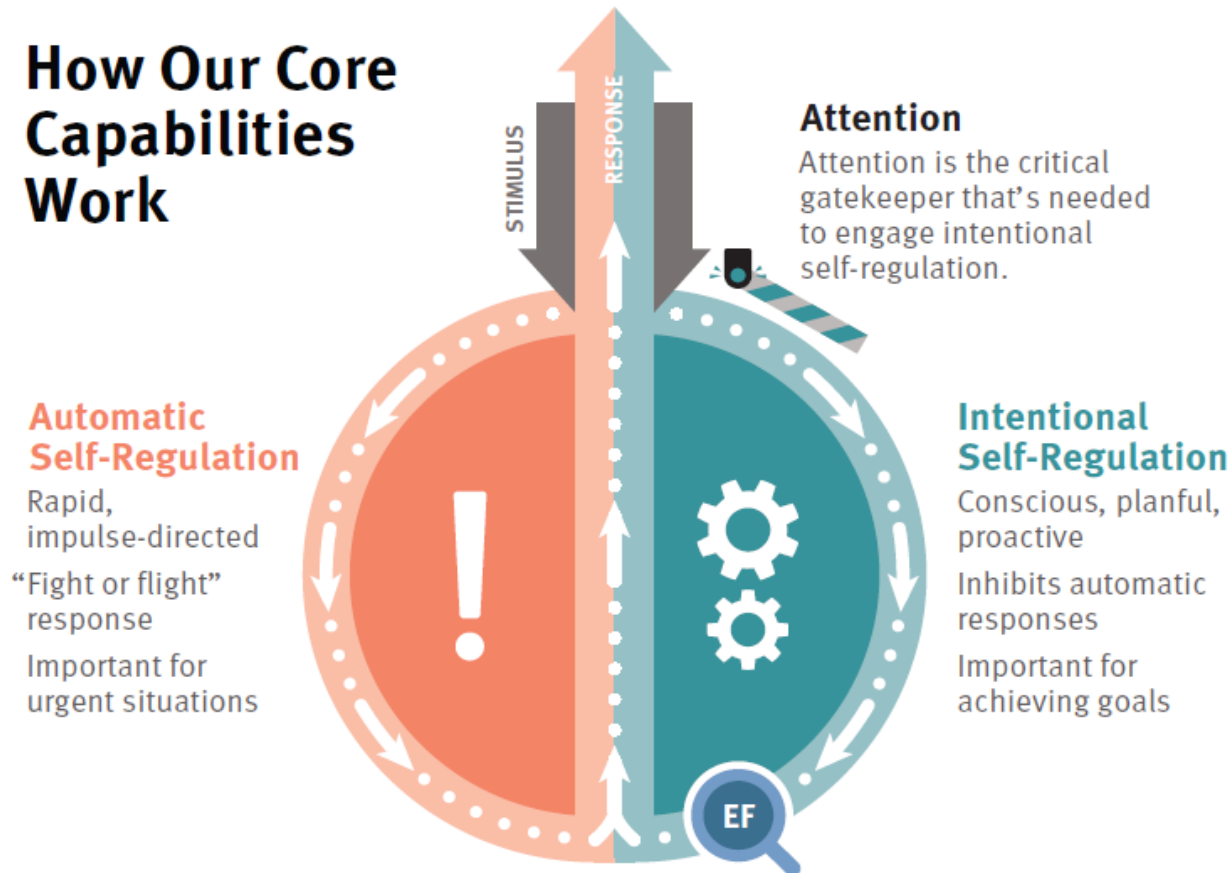
Wandering mostly focused on “me”

People’s moods skewed to the unpleasant; negative emotional tone

**Top down circuit can take control:
Promising practice: mindfulness*

(Focus on the here and now)

How Our Core Capabilities Work



Automatic Self-Regulation

Rapid, impulse-directed
“Fight or flight” response
Important for urgent situations

Attention

Attention is the critical gatekeeper that’s needed to engage intentional self-regulation.

Intentional Self-Regulation

Conscious, planful, proactive
Inhibits automatic responses
Important for achieving goals

Essential capabilities such as planning, focus, and self-control are all orchestrated by the balance of two kinds of self-regulation mechanisms: **automatic** and **intentional**. The proper balance ensures appropriately responsive and productive actions.

REQUIRES

Executive Function

- 1 Inhibitory Control
- 2 Working Memory
- 3 Mental Flexibility

<http://developingchild.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Building-Core-Capabilities-for-Life.pdf>

What are
your
Takeaways?



Chat them in...



Cultivating Focus

Subscribe to Edutopia on YouTube

ATTENTION IS LIKE A MUSCLE

DANIEL GOLEMAN

0:03 / 1:15

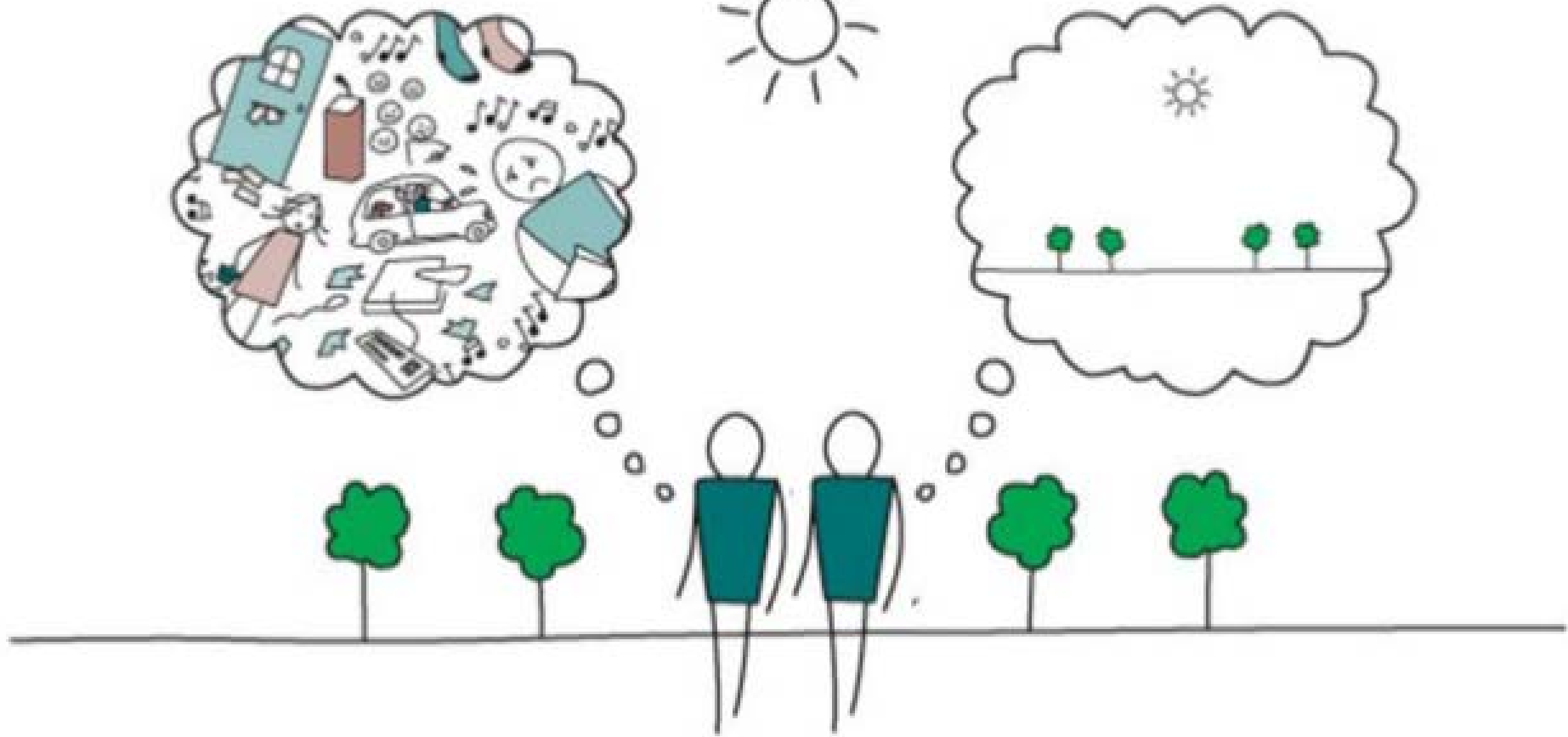


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quS2kK27U_4&list=PL10g2YT_In2gmPbtzIWIPXKsNR2_-BrWn&index=5

General Strategies

- ✓ Create an inclusive and safe program environment
- ✓ Schedule time to unplug
- ✓ Programming
 - ✓ Model and structure programming to do one task at a time
 - ✓ Build on strengths/passions
 - ✓ Build in mental exercises
 - ✓ Build in physical exercise
 - ✓ Build in relaxation





Mind Full. or Mindful?

Integrate Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.

Jon Kabat-Zinn. 1994

- Heightened awareness of internal and external experiences (thoughts, smells, feelings, body and sights)
- Nonjudgmental observation of these experiences
- Compassion toward self
- Development of openness and curiosity toward internal and external experiences
- Ability to return to the present as thoughts arise

Mindfulness Impacts

Stress
reduction

Attention

Emotional
control

Positive
self-concept

Positive
Interactions

Mindfulness Tips

Practice mindfulness yourself

- Integrate a mindfulness activity into your own day
- Use it to get ready for a program session

Build it into your youth program

- Make an activity part of the program routine
- Encourage youth to practice on their own (at home, etc)

Watch LeBron <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCR7OfRuQd4>



Thank you!

Questions & Comments?

Resources

Daniel Goleman. 2013. *Focus*. The Hidden Driver of Excellence, NY: Harper Collins Publishers

Edutopia: Daniel Goleman on Cultivating Focus Playlist

<https://www.edutopia.org/video/daniel-goleman-importance-cultivating-focus-video-playlist>

Harvard Graduate School of Education: Usable Knowledge

<https://www.gse.harvard.edu/uk>

- Fun and (Brain) Games <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/08/fun-and-brain-games>
- Understanding Core Skills <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/12/understanding-core-skills>

Brain Facts – www.brainfacts.org

- The truth behind “brain-based” learning <http://www.brainfacts.org/For-Educators/Teaching-Techniques/2016/The-Truth-Behind-Brain-Based-Learning-051916>

Resources

Verywellmind. How does attention work? <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-does-attention-work-2795015>

CASEL: <https://casel.org/>

National Youth Council of Ireland. Mindfulness activities
<http://www.youthdeved.ie/sites/youthdeved.ie/files/Mindfulness%20Exercises.pdf>

Greater Good: Mindfulness <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/mindfulness>

AnxietyBC. For youth: Mindfulness exercises
<http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises>

AnxietyBC: Progressive Muscle Relaxation
<https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/MuscleRelaxation.pdf>

ACT Resources

ACT for Youth: Youth Work Professionals

http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professionals/

ACT for Youth: Social and Emotional Learning Toolkit

http://www.actforyouth.net/youth_development/professiona/sel/



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