



Dear Teachers,

Welcome to The New Jersey Healthy Kids Initiative's *Yoga and Mindfulness* program. Our mission at NJHKI is to improve child health by conducting evidenced-based research, education, and practices. My name is Ali Radetich and I am a special education kindergarten teacher in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Prior to my life changing and moving to New Jersey, I received my Master's degree in Health Education. I teach yoga as a side job and love to sneak in mindful movement whenever I can.

The events of the past year and a half have really turned our world upside down. According to the CDC's report on teachers' mental health, 37% of teachers reported symptoms consistent with generalized anxiety and 53% have considered leaving the profession since the pandemic began. The practices in this program are designed to de-stress and help our students' social and emotional learning. But even more importantly, they can help you! We need to help each other so that we can help our students. That is where the *Yoga and Mindfulness* program comes in.

The videos here can be used in two different ways. First, you can watch them, practice the practices, and then lead the practices with your students. Do not feel like you have to do exactly as they are; get creative by moving and breathing in ways that you feel are supportive. When adult social and emotional learning is nurtured, we are better able to guide our students. A second way you can use these videos is to simply show them to your class and have them follow along with the practices.! They offer a nice brain break and can be used anytime of the day.

Brain breaks are great, as we know, but they also align with standards and core competencies. You can feel guilt-free as you take time out of your day to work on these practices. Integrating social and emotional learning strategies into academics is a highly effective practice, so weave these moments into your learning times. Some specific core competencies addressed with this program are as follows:

- Resiliency and coping practices influence an individual's ability to respond positively to everyday challenges and difficult situations.(5th grade)
- Individuals will benefit from an awareness of coping strategies that can be used when facing difficult situations.(5th grade)
- Self-management skills impact an individual's ability to cope with different types of mental, psychological, and emotional situations. (8th grade)

Some of the standards addressed are here:

- 2.1.8.EH.1: Compare and contrast stress management strategies that are used to address various types of stress-induced situations (e.g., academics, family, personal relationships, finances, celebrations, violence).
- 2.1.5.EH.4: Identify behaviors that help to deal with difficult situations that can occur at home, in school, and/or in the community and where to go for assistance
- 2.1.2.PGD.3: Explain what being “well” means and identify self-care practices that support wellness.
- 2.1.2.EH.5: Explain healthy ways of coping with stressful situations.
- 2.1.2.EH.4: Demonstrate strategies for managing one's own emotions, thoughts and behaviors

We know it is challenging to navigate all that needs to be done throughout the school year. As a teacher of 17 years, I have witnessed and experienced stress, burnout, anger, and myriad other negative emotions in my classrooms and schools. However, integrating these practices into my classrooms has helped manage those moments. Here are some tips to make mindfulness practice stick:

- Practice at the same time each day: all you need is a few minutes
- Practice alongside of your students; even if you show a brain break video, please do it **with** your students rather than trying to get other things done
- Encourage your students to practice at home! Assign them “homework” to teach mindfulness strategy to someone at home
- Encourage your administration to create a culture of mindfulness at the all-school level (Mindful Mondays can become a whole school event!)
- Keep it simple: try one kind of practice for a couple of weeks before adding in a new one
- Be patient: these practices take time. Do not expect miracles after a week, but do expect the kids to buy in and want to engage in the practices after just a short period of time.
- Create a safe space for kids to feel comfortable: never force anyone to close their eyes or move their bodies in ways that are uncomfortable for them. Simply model and encourage.

I hope these ideas and videos help you and your students. I feel like teaching has become progressively more stressful and I know these practices have worked for me. Some of my resources are listed below:

<https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/destress-monday/research/mindfulness>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/>

<https://casel.org/>

<https://www.mindful.org/>

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

Also please feel free to reach out to me at ali.rad@rutgers.edu with any questions or for more support. I am here for you!

Best wishes,
Ali