

The Importance of a Common Understanding of Mindfulness

An important component of school-based mindfulness programs is **knowing the basic definition and purpose of mindfulness**, including a clear understanding of what mindfulness is, and what it is not.¹ Misconceptions about mindfulness can interfere with successful program implementation, often by creating unrealistic expectations or by introducing mindfulness in a way that seeks to control student behavior. The following chart addresses some of the common misunderstandings about mindfulness:

Mindfulness is being present here and now, paying attention to thoughts, bodily sensations, emotions, and the external environment with kindness, nonjudgment, and curiosity.	
Misconceptions About Mindfulness	What Mindfulness Is
<i>"Mindfulness is being calm, stress-free, and happy."</i>	While research strongly indicates mindfulness practice supports states of relaxation, reduced stress, improved self-regulation, and positive emotions, mindfulness itself is not being calm, relaxed, or happy. ²
<i>"Mindfulness is about trying to clear your mind or not think at all."</i>	Mindfulness is about bringing awareness to thoughts, judgments, stories, and biases as they arise.
<i>"To do mindfulness we must be completely still."</i>	Mindfulness is a quality of awareness that can be brought to any activity engaged in throughout the day.
<i>"Mindfulness means students will be still, quiet, and calm. It can be introduced as a form of discipline, behavior management, or a way to ensure compliance."</i>	Mindfulness teaches students to be aware of all experiences , including when they're loud, restless, or active. It is offered without expectations , as an invitation for self-awareness. Students are in choice about how, and if, they practice mindfulness.
<i>"Mindfulness involves ignoring or pushing away unpleasant experiences, or seeking to be happy or positive all the time."</i>	Mindfulness practice means we notice and allow whatever is present , including challenges or difficulties .
<i>"Mindfulness is religious. Mindfulness is based in a worldview that asserts metaphysical claims."</i>	Mindfulness is a secular practice grounded in contemporary scientific research and based on awareness and observation of actual experience in the present moment.
<i>"Mindfulness is a 'cure-all' solution to the problems in education today."</i>	Mindfulness is one of many practices that support mental and emotional well-being in schools by offering in-the-moment strategies for navigating difficulty.
<i>"Mindfulness encourages students and teachers to accept unacceptable conditions."</i>	Mindfulness practice resources us to take action to create effective change . It is not a replacement for systemic change.

¹ Broderick PC, Schussler DL. Exploring Fidelity in School-Based Mindfulness Programs. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*. 2021;10. doi:[10.1177/21649561211067996](https://doi.org/10.1177/21649561211067996)

² Broderick and Schussler (above) specifically caution against conflating what mindfulness *is* (a particular quality of attention) with the common *benefits associated with* mindfulness practice.