

Process of mindfulness may help children focus in the classroom

August 7 2013, by Beth Bohn

(Medical Xpress)—A Kansas State University child/adolescent counselor says a process used to help adults with anxiety disorders may also have a place in the classroom, helping children keep their focus on the subject at hand.

Karrie Swan, assistant professor of special education, counseling and student affairs at the university's College of Education, says a growing trend in [mental health](#) practice and research today is mindfulness. Swan says the mindfulness process is one that is showing promise with children.

"Mindfulness is a present-centered process where one observes and focuses on the [present moment](#)," she said. "The goal of mindfulness is to become aware of your thoughts and feelings and to stop the flow of habitual thoughts, [inattention](#) and unconsciousness."

Researchers have traditionally been interested in using mindfulness practices with adult clients who have [anxiety disorders](#), but there is a growing interest in examining effects of mindfulness for children and adolescents, Swan said.

"Mindfulness has been shown to be effective for all students, but those with anxiety, depression, [attention problems](#) and externalizing problems seem to benefit best from this form of treatment," she said.

Swan used the mindfulness process in private practice when she worked

as a mental health clinician. A registered play therapist, she has presented on the topic at state and regional conferences, and has written article about mindfulness practices in conducting dream therapy for children that was published in the July issue of the *International Journal for Play Therapy*.

"Currently, there are a few schools in California that are using mindfulness and collecting data," Swan said.

Studies to date have shown mindfulness-based practices seem to reduce stress, anxiety and emotional reactivity among youth, and that mindfulness-based [stress reduction](#) practices improve adjustment among chronically stressed adolescents. A study also found mindfulness was beneficial to teachers as well, linking the practice to a reduction in teacher reported stress, depression and anxiety.

"Overall, research indicates that mindfulness enhances health, improves attention problems and impulse control, increases self-awareness, decreases stress, and increases empathic responses and conflict resolution skills," Swan said.

Swan added that current brain research shows that mindfulness practices engage the right hemisphere of the brain that enables one to have greater feelings, experiences and creativity.

"Because many child and adolescent mental health scholars believe that growth and learning in therapy occur through the process of expression rather than logical analysis, [mindfulness](#) may prove to be a modality that integrates the right and left hemispheres, thereby improving therapeutic outcomes," she said.

More information: psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=b...uy&id=2013-25631-001

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