



# MIND OVER MATTER

By Anjail Kenyatta

“Mind over matter” is a simple expression that describes our ability to use our minds to self-regulate in the moment when situations or events seem out of our control. Emotions are brain-based, subjective, and conscious states of being that are the combination of four key elements: subjective experience, appraisal of the subjective experience, physiological arousal, and behavioral expression of the emotion. (See “What’s the Commotion About Emotions,” pp. 4-10, for more on the four elements of emotions.)

The brain is a powerful emotion management tool. Under normal circumstances, people organize information and process experiences (also known as executive functioning) through the prefrontal cortex region of the brain, which is responsible for enabling us to have cognitive control of our behavior and for empowering us to select and successfully monitor behaviors that help us to achieve a chosen goal or a desired outcome.

When experiencing strong or uncomfortable emotions such as fear, apprehension, rage, or anger, the amygdala, a small almond-shaped area in the brain responsible for emotions, can interfere with our reasoning and executive functioning and cause us to go into fight, flight, freeze, or faint mode, which is known as the amygdala hijack (Goleman, 2011). Once this “hijacking” occurs, the path to rational decision-making abilities and the orientation for goal attainment can become obscured and self-control is greatly diminished.

Self-control is as much about learning intrapersonal skills as it is about learning interpersonal skills. Learning to manage our emotions is an intrapersonal skill. It includes learning about ourselves and how we affect the world around us. It also includes learning to be self-regulating so that what’s happening outside of us doesn’t derail us from being successful in the moment and

remaining successful after the event or situation has passed. These are skills that contribute to academic success. One important research-based strategy for developing intrapersonal skills and cultivating self-regulation is implementing mindfulness principles and practices into our daily lives.

### A Basic Ability to Be Present: We All Have It

Mindfulness is a powerful practice for learning to become aware of one's emotions and learning to manage those emotions that are uncomfortable and fearful—those that take us out of control. So, one could say mindfulness supports social and emotional learning by giving us all the strategies to “train our brain” to identify, name, and manage our emotions and our expressions of those emotions so that we can be in control of ourselves, and be successful in the moment and remain on a successful trajectory. Research supports mindfulness practices as a promising approach to reducing anxiety and stress in students and improving their academic and behavioral outcomes. Mindfulness practices also improve attention, and improved concentration means that students are more able to focus on learning. While we all have the basic ability to be present in the moment, it can be a bit of a stretch to teach students to practice mindfulness if we've never put any of its principles into practice in our own lives. Mindfulness principles are just attitudes or behaviors and expressions that we display about how we feel or what we think about someone or something. My mother used to say attitude is “what you're thinking show-

ing up in how you're behaving.” The seven attitudes or principles of mindfulness that help us to manage our behaviors and emotions are: In the Moment, Have Faith, Reality Check, Reset Experiences, Suspend Judgment, Put It in Neutral, Take It Slow.

### Mindfulness Teaching in Action

When a social dynamic takes over the classroom making it difficult for students to focus on lessons being taught, teachers can pause the curriculum to address the elephant in the room. Creating role-playing scenarios and using envisioning and reflection strategies can draw students into a whole or small group discussion. These exercises give students a chance to engage in active and interactive activities, and to show the students how they would handle a similar situation.

CRS is developing a Mindfulness component for the Fly Five™ Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum. This Mindfulness component consists of twenty mindfulness lessons per grade level. Each lesson is theme-based and aligns with the five competencies needed for students to be successful in learning, play, work, life, and relationships: cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control. The Fly Five™ Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum's Mindfulness component was designed using seven vital mindfulness principles as a framework for managing emotions. To stay informed about the curriculum, [CLICK HERE.](#)

The amygdala is one of the primary structures in the limbic system, the network of nerves in the brain that is traditionally linked to emotions and memory. The amygdala has been historically responsible for emotions and the hippocampus for memory.

## THE 7 MINDFULNESS PRINCIPLES

In the Moment



Reality Check



Have Faith



Reset Experiences

Suspend Judgment



Put It in Neutral

Take It Slow



Download a “Mindfulness Journal”

Download our mindfulness journal to begin putting the seven principles into practice in your own life. You can also share it with friends, family, and parents. As we practice these mindfulness attitudes, they will become more natural and comfortable for us, and we will find that we are more empowered to teach our students the skills they need to name and manage their emotions.











## REFERENCES

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### Mind Over Matter

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