

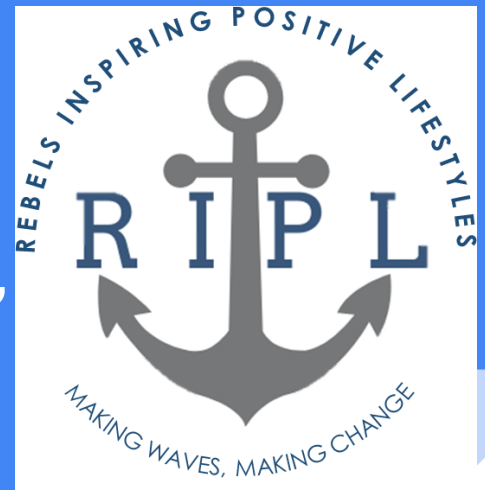
Wellness as Primary Prevention

The RIPL effect

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Stress and the Brain

- One of the primary reasons given for using and abusing substances in SKHS is **stress**
- Stress inhibits the brain's higher reasoning centers
- Increase risk for stress during transitions
- Impaired decision making due to stress response increases risk of substance use/abuse
- Increased coping skills for stress and focusing on wellness initiatives may decrease inclination for youth to turn to substances

What makes teens stressed?

- School as a competition
 - GPA and class rank
 - General tests and exams
- College
- Outlets for stress as competitions
 - Sports teams
- Relationships
- Social Media

With all of these stressors in the lives of teens, they often turn to substance use to attempt to feel better instead of finding effective stress relief methods

PREFRONTAL CORTEX

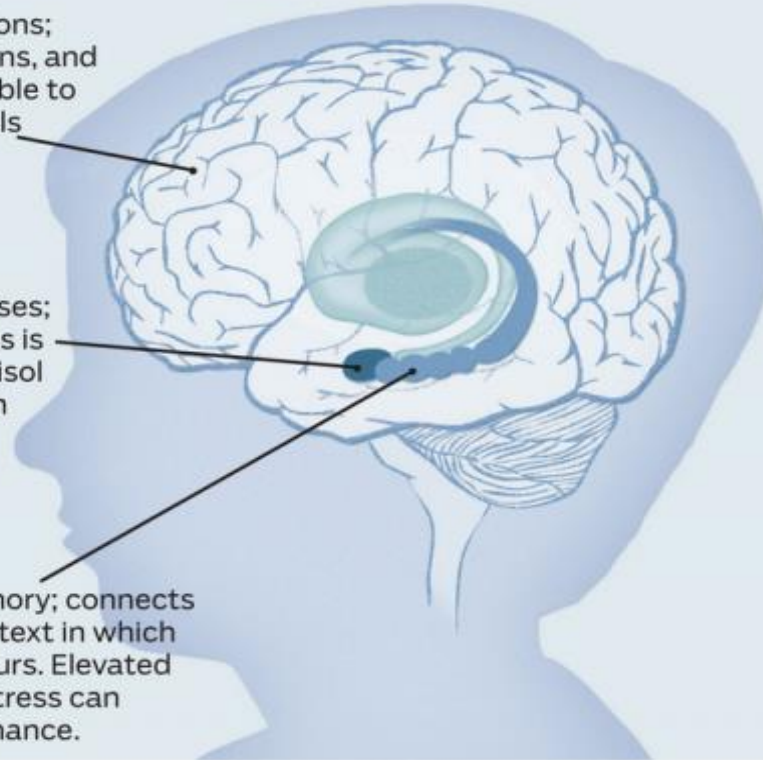
Center of executive functions; regulates thought, emotions, and actions. Especially vulnerable to elevation of brain chemicals caused by stress.

AMYGDALA

Triggers emotional responses; detects whether a stimulus is threatening. Elevated cortisol levels caused by stress can affect activity.

HIPPOCAMPUS

Center of short-term memory; connects emotion of fear to the context in which the threatening event occurs. Elevated cortisol levels caused by stress can affect growth and performance.



Autonomic Nervous System

SNS triggered as natural response to emergency/stress

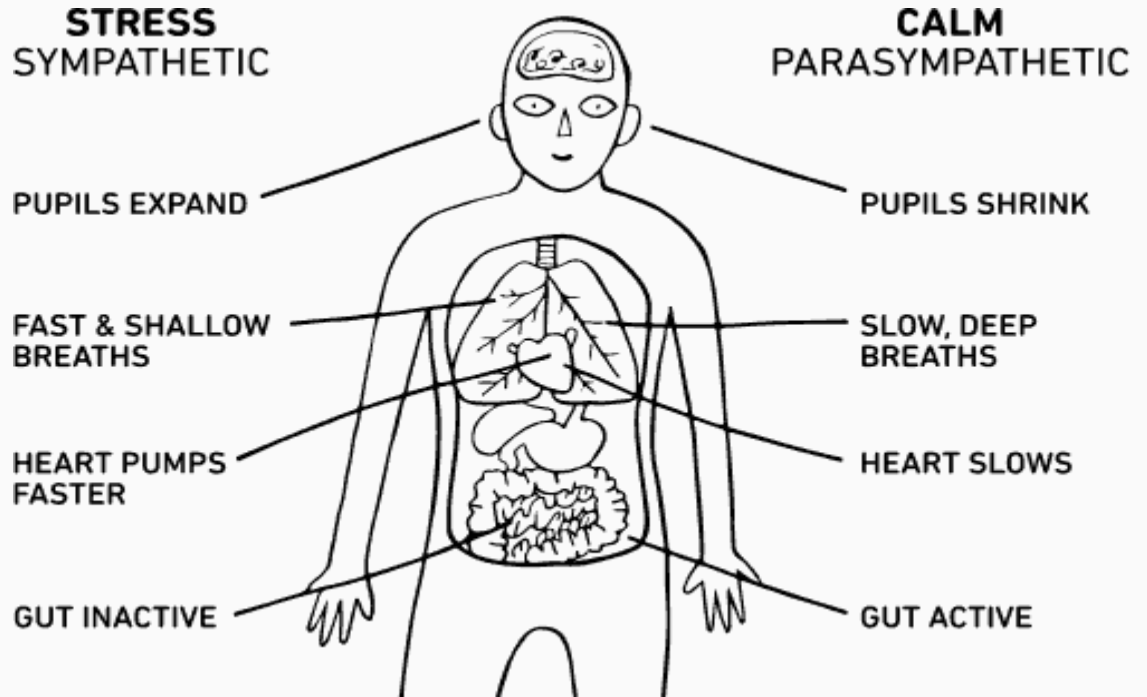
When triggered, adrenaline circulates throughout the body - “fight or flight”

The amygdala and limbic brain take over- PFC and PNS offline

Decision making, emotional regulation, higher level thinking become impaired

Mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing activate the PNS

We can teach how to activate this “rest and digest” system



"Fight or flight"
center



Associated with fear
and emotion



Involved in the initiation
of the body's response
to stress



As amygdala shrinks,
the pre-frontal cortex
becomes thicker



Pre-frontal cortex
associated with
awareness, concentration
and decision making



Connections to areas associated
with attention and concentration
get stronger; the stress response
weakens

MRI SCAN SHOWING A SHRINKING OF THE
AMYGDALA AFTER 8 WEEK COURSE OF
MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

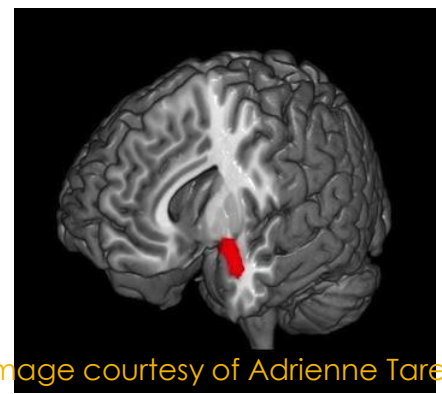


Image courtesy of Adrienne Taren

Taren, A. A., Creswell, J. D., & Gianaros, P. J. (2013). Dispositional Mindfulness Co-Varies with Smaller Amygdala and Caudate Volumes in Community Adults. PLoS ONE, e64574.

Benefits of Mindfulness

- Positive effects on the brains of people who practice mindfulness regularly.
- Improvements for health, physical well-being, such as medical symptoms, sensory pain, physical impairment, and functional quality-of-life estimate.
- Early findings from one ongoing Brown study linked mindfulness meditation with a 15-point drop in blood pressure for people with hypertension.
- May be practiced daily in a short period of time.
- Ability to respond to stress or unpleasant experiences/somatic complaints without turning on the fight or flight response.
- Increase the ability to make rational choices when stressed

Mindfulness Benefits for Students

- Boosts in mood and self esteem
- Improved concentration and sustained attention
- Improved executive function and memory
- Reduced test anxiety
- Improved creativity
- Empowerment to choose which technique works for individual
- Improved classroom behavior
- Reduced aggression
- Improved empathy and kindness
- Increased peer acceptance
- Resilience to stress
- Ability to perform anywhere without calling attention

What is Mindfulness?

- ▶ Being fully present (aware/noticing) in a non-judgmental way (acknowledging what is happening/what you are thinking in the moment)



BREATHING TO RELIEVE STRESS

It all starts with the breath.

- ▶ Remember the **4 R**'s during this activity (and all others)
- ▶ **Rest** awareness (the mind) on an anchor (breath, movement, ground, image, sound)
- ▶ **Recognize** when and where it wanders
- ▶ **Return** awareness gently to the anchor
- ▶ **Repeat**





Mindful Breathing Meditation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique

- ▶ Focus attention to the tensed muscle
- ▶ Instead of gradually releasing tension, release at once and focus on feeling once relaxed
- ▶ May be independently performed silently at a desk



Mindfulness vs. Traditional Prevention

We have found mindfulness works in high schools more than traditional “Don’t Do Drugs” Methods

Instead of targeting a perceived group of “drug users” or “bad kids”, mindfulness reaches out to all kids about something they all experience - *Stress*

Mindfulness is fun, easy, and important part of prevention



Implementing Wellness Initiative

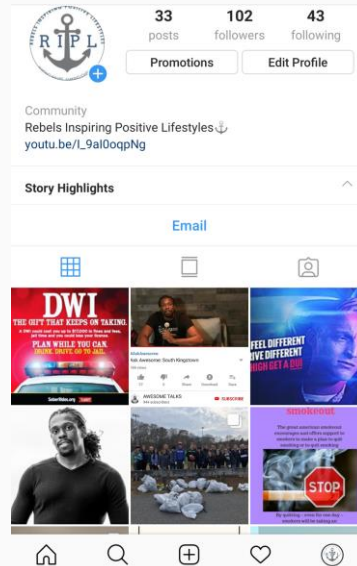
A Student-led Wellness Initiative workgroup is an established group within our youth coalition

Creating stress-relieving (and free!) events for students

Cookie competition and paint night

Sharing wellness tips on social media

Mental Health Awareness Week



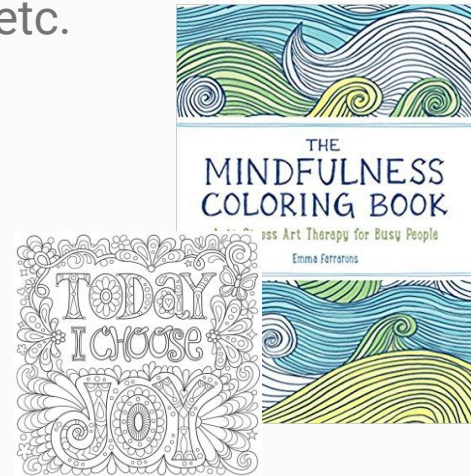
Creating Mindful Mondays/Stress Relief Corner

Mindful Mondays: weekly mindfulness group sessions on Monday mornings



Stress Relief Corner: area in library providing free stress-relieving resources for students

Glitter jars, stress balls, coloring books, etc.



Quotes from Mindful Monday attendees

“It makes me feel like I can conquer anything that comes up during the day and it makes me feel more confident and at peace.”

“Mindful Mondays has shown me the different ways to make every day less stressful, as well as reminding me that everyone can be mindful”

Wellness Baskets

Baskets for all district school teachers/staff to help them implement wellness practices in their classrooms

Wellness baskets also for school staff to utilize for their own wellness
Educators need to practice these initiatives to teach them

Filled with glitter jar, coloring books, stress balls, and mindfulness for kids

It's never too early to learn healthy coping skills!



Youth Leaders in Adult Coalitions

- Invite your youth to become active members in your coalitions
- Utilize your youth to help educate on perceptions, trends and effective prevention initiatives
- Capitalize on youth mentorship to teach positive coping skills to students
- Teach coping skills and target wellness interventions as early as possible to capitalize on plasticity of brains

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