



What is **.b**?



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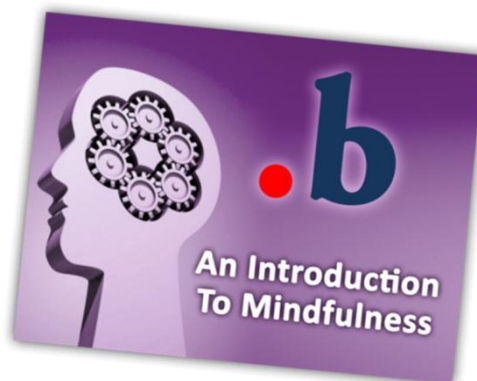
.b stands for “**Stop, Breathe and Be!**” This simple act of mindfulness provides the kernel of the **nine session .b mindfulness course for schools**. Written by three experienced classroom teachers and mindfulness practitioners, Richard Burnett, Chris Cullen and Chris O’Neil, **.b** is carefully crafted to engage everyone, including the most cynical of student audiences. **It is taught with striking visuals, film clips and activities that bring mindfulness to life without losing the precision, expertise and integrity of classic mindfulness teaching.**

What are the aims of **.b**?

At the most simple level **.b** is **an awareness-raising exercise** to give all students a taste of mindfulness so that they know about it and can return to it later in life if they choose to do so. However, for many pupils the course can lead to **immediate and striking results**: they feel happier, calmer and more fulfilled; they can concentrate better; they have a toolkit to deal with stress and anxiety. Objectives and outcomes are discussed in more detail below.

Who is **.b** for?

.b can be taught to **timetabled school classes** (the **.b** team refer to them fondly as ‘conscripts’!), or to groups of students who **volunteer** or are specially selected, perhaps to address a problem such as stress, depression or anxiety. The course has been designed to be flexible enough to use in a **range of contexts**, and is now being used across a **wide age range**, in state and private schools, in the UK and across the world. At present the materials are most suited to secondary schools and beyond, but a version of **.b** suitable for primary schools is being prepared and trialled.



What is the evidence that mindfulness works?

Mindfulness is proving to be effective for adults in helping to address a wide range of physical and mental conditions, and improve wellbeing and the ability to think clearly. The **evidence for its effectiveness with young people is showing similar results**, and although this evidence base is as yet smaller having only been developed recently, it is very promising and growing rapidly. **.b itself has been the subject of two small controlled evaluations with generally positive results** and is currently undergoing a third larger-scale evaluation by the Universities of Exeter and Cambridge. For details of all this and more see our paper ‘*The evidence for the impact of mindfulness on children and young people*’.

•b MINDFULNESS

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness involves **learning to direct our attention to our experience as it is unfolding, moment by moment, with open-minded curiosity and acceptance.** Rather than worrying about what *has* happened or *might* happen, mindfulness trains us to respond skilfully to whatever *is* happening right now, be that good or bad. This includes paying close attention to inner states such as thoughts, emotions and physical sensations, as well as to what is happening in the outside world. Mindfulness also involves meta-cognitive awareness: doing, feeling and thinking things and knowing that we're doing so.

Have I ever been mindful?

Almost certainly! **Most of us have had a taste of what mindfulness can be like when we are really focused and 'into' something,** such as an absorbing piece of work or a hobby, a riveting conversation or feeling at one with nature. We know how valuable such an experience can be: calming, revitalising, helping us feel whole, relaxed and at peace with ourselves and the world. However, for **most of us, mindfulness is a fleeting and ephemeral state,** uncommon in our everyday experience and seeming totally out of reach during times of stress. Mindfulness training involves learning how to make such awareness a more accessible and sustainable experience.



So what am I being when I am not being mindful?

Understanding what mindfulness is may be easier if we explore its opposite, mindlessness. **For much of the time, most of us tend to live in a preoccupied state in which the here and now is hardly experienced.** Our heads are full of chatter, often anxiously ruminating on the past or compulsively planning for the future. In so far as we are thinking about what is happening right now, we tend to **view our present experience through a filter of self-centred judgements and labels** - such as whether what is happening is pleasant or unpleasant, interesting or boring, useful or pointless and so on. **Our mind is also often disconnected from our body,** and so we are unaware of the potentially valuable information that the body can give us, such as stress warning signs, or clues about the emotions that are driving our behaviour.

Mindfulness training and regular practice can give greater access to a state of calm, concentrated focus in the here and now - more reliably, more often and more at will than most of us normally experience.

What happens on a mindfulness training course?

Mindfulness is learned in a highly practical way, through experience rather than talk. It can be taught in many different ways and at different levels. Most who are new to it will

experience it through a short course, and eight session weekly adult courses to reduce stress (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: 'MBSR') or to help with recurrent depression (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: 'MBCT') are becoming commonplace, while short courses in schools, such as .b, are starting to develop.

On such courses **participants will be led by the teacher in simple exercises designed to increase their awareness of the present moment.** They will discuss in the group the immediate experiences that arise and explore how these relate to their everyday life. Mindfulness practices typically include becoming more aware of, and giving close attention to sensations as they happen in the body, such as the sensations of breathing, the feeling of contact between our body and the chair, the feeling of our feet on the floor, and all the fluctuating sensations that arise from different parts of the body. Practices also include sensitising to feelings and sensations that are provoked by everyday actions such as standing, walking, eating and hearing. **'Home Practice' usually involves guided mindfulness exercises** to continue the training at home, and invitations **to pay full attention for short periods to the minute-by-minute sensations that arise during the normal routines of everyday life**, such as eating a meal, washing up or showering. In class, students will be invited to explore how the home practice went and what they made of it.

What is the point of mindfulness training?

Mindfulness practice, over time, **helps people to learn how to return their mind to the present moment and what is happening now.** This is by no means easy to do in practice, and participants invariably find that their minds wander easily, although with time more sustained concentration becomes possible.

Participants gradually learn to sustain and focus their attention, accepting their experience in an open minded and curious rather than a judgemental way. They also learn how to use their felt physical sensations of breathing and of the body as "anchors" to return to when their minds wander and ruminating thoughts take over.



A key insight that invariably emerges in the course of this practice is that **thoughts are mental events rather than facts** and can be allowed to arise and then be released rather than turning into distractions that preoccupy the attention. This realisation is fundamental to the impact of mindfulness on the mind. It **helps loosen the grip of habitual, mindless activity ('automatic pilot')** and enables the learner to be less impulsive and reactive, and to examine their thoughts more kindly and rationally, gradually modifying the habitual mental and behavioural patterns which create and maintain negative mental states, such as rumination, stress, anxiety and depression.

Over time **mindfulness practice reduces the common tendency to categorise all experience instantly as good and bad**, and instead encourages those who practise it to experience and accept things as they actually are – not ruminating, over thinking, or compulsively wanting themselves or the world to change or to be different before they can be content. This can greatly **increase a sense of calm, and the ability to relate more open-mindedly and empathically to others.**

What do pupils think .b is?

After a recent .b course the pupils were asked to define mindfulness. Some typical answers included:

- *Getting calm within yourself. Being aware of your surroundings. Not letting things wind you up.*
- *Using the mind to explore the body.*
- *Knowing more about how the mind reacts to external changes and how to deal with the reactions. It's also about being aware of the present moment and pulling your mind back from straying thoughts.*
- *The coming to your senses, noticing more things around you, but also what can affect you. Observing, but then also accepting it.*

Does mindfulness training do any good, objectively speaking?

(What follows here is a summary of a more extensive paper we have prepared 'Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People' which provides more detail and full references.)

Mindfulness is said to have originated in Buddhist thinking and meditation practice over two and a half thousand years ago. Its original purpose was to address and relieve self-induced suffering caused by the dysfunctional ways people habitually tend to respond to their experience.

Over the last 30 years, mindfulness has become secularised and simplified to suit a Western context. In the 1970s anecdotal and research findings about the ability of meditation to reduce unhealthy psychological symptoms triggered interest in mindfulness as a healthcare intervention. **Jon Kabat-Zinn** at the Medical Centre at the University of Massachusetts introduced the first eight week structured mindfulness skills training programme which gave considerable psychological, and some physical, relief, to patients experiencing intractable severe pain and distress from a wide range of chronic physical health conditions.



Since then mindfulness interventions and research have proliferated across the world, and **the emerging evidence base suggests that mindfulness has a wide range of potential applications.**

What is the impact of mindfulness on adults?

Research on the impact of mindfulness on adults demonstrates with reasonable certainty that **adults who learn and practise mindfulness can experience improvements in a wide range of psychological and physiological health conditions.**

As well its impact on specific problems, **mindfulness has been shown to have effects on very useful underlying emotional and social skills and qualities in adults.** These include the ability to feel in control, to make meaningful relationships, to accept experience without denying the facts, to manage difficult feelings, and to be calm, resilient, compassionate and empathic. Mindfulness has been shown to have **positive effects on intellectual skills, improving sustained attention, visual-spatial memory, working memory, and concentration.**

Mindfulness training can have sustained benefits - in some follow-ups of mindfulness interventions the immediate effects on stress and well-being were still apparent after three years, and the majority of subjects continued their formal mindfulness practice over this period. **The time spent learning mindfulness does not have to be extensive to show benefits.** Five days of twenty minute meditations have been shown to reduce anxiety, depression, anger and fatigue, improve immune-reactivity and decrease cortisol (a stress hormone), and four days of mindfulness training was sufficient to improve mindfulness, visual-spatial memory, working memory and sustained attention.

What about the evidence from neuroscience?

Neuroscience is demonstrating that these changes are not all in the imagination. Brain-imaging studies show that **mindfulness meditation can reliably and profoundly alter the**



structure and function of the brain and produce, for example, greater blood-flow to and a thickening of the cerebral cortex in areas associated with **attention and emotional integration.** The changes are most dramatic in long-term meditators, but participants on eight week courses have been shown to have increased grey-matter density in the **areas of the brain associated with learning, memory, self-awareness, compassion, introspection, and reduced density in**

areas associated with anxiety and stress. Although studies have not yet been done on children's brains there is no reason to suppose the changes would not be broadly similar.

Why should children and young people learn about mindfulness?

Research on the effects of mindfulness and young people is not yet as extensive as work with adults but research is now growing rapidly. The results of the work that has taken place are very promising, and suggest that the young people who take part in mindfulness courses not only enjoy and appreciate them but often benefit too - the **effects of mindfulness on the young may prove to be very similar to those on adults.**

Mindfulness improves mental health and wellbeing. Well conducted mindfulness interventions have been shown to help address the problems of the young people who take part and reduce their worries, anxiety, distress, reactivity and bad behaviour, improve sleep, self-esteem, and bring about greater calmness, relaxation, and self-awareness.

Mindfulness has also been shown to be capable of **contributing directly to the development of cognitive and performance skills in the young.** It would appear that when children and young people learn to be more 'present', they can pay attention better and improve the quality of their performance in the classroom, on the sports field, and in the performing arts, for example. They can become more focused, more able to approach situations from a novel perspective, more able to draw more effectively on previously-learned material, have less anxiety and greater ability to pay attention.

What about the teachers?

.b, as with all the main mindfulness programmes, is expected to be **taught only by those who regularly practise mindfulness themselves.** In order to teach .b, teachers are required to come on a four day training course, and to have done at least one eight week training programme such as MBCT/MBSR.

They also need to practise mindfulness themselves on a regular basis. Research shows clearly that mindfulness is more effective when taught by those who embody the particular qualities it develops, such as open minded curiosity, kindness, acceptance, trust, patience, and non-striving, and who have skills of focusing, and paying and switching attention. **Teachers need to be able to model** what they are teaching, and **to understand and relate directly and empathically to somewhat unusual experiences their students will be having** from a solid base in their own life. (Similarly, you would not expect a teacher who had never been in water to teach swimming effectively!)



Practising mindfulness is not an onerous requirement, as it is **likely to bring clear benefits for the teachers themselves, both for their own wellbeing and their ability to teach effectively.** There are some promising early studies of the impact of mindfulness training on the wellbeing of school staff. Impacts shown so far again include in many cases the reduction of stress and recurrent negative thoughts and ruminations, anxiety, and sleep difficulties, and increases in reflection, emotional self-awareness and compassion.

Teachers who practise mindfulness themselves appear to be more able to create positive changes both in and out of the classroom; are able to focus more clearly on key ideas; are better able to prioritise and prepare class material; are more able to focus on implementing what they intend to do without distractions; create calm and orderly climates and induce better behaviour in their pupils.

Is there any specific evidence for the impact of the .b course?



Yes, and it is growing. An early study by Professor Felicia Huppert and Daniel Johnson based at the University of Cambridge reported the outcomes of the first four lesson version of the .b course with 14 to 15 year-old boys in two English independent schools. There were small and non-significant effects on mindfulness, ego-resilience and well-being overall, perhaps not surprising in such a brief course, but more **significant changes among those who carried out**

quite small amounts of home practice. Since then the course has been considerably developed and a recent study by Sarah Hennelly, a research student at Oxford Brookes University, had clearly positive results. Sixty eight adolescent students from typical, mixed-gender secondary schools followed the full .b eight week course. There were **significant differences between participant and control groups' mindfulness, resilience and well-being**, and longer term effects were even greater than immediate effects. Students, teachers and parents also reported **subjective improvements in students' motivation and confidence, competence and effectiveness.** (You can see some of their quotations further down this introduction.)

A larger scale evaluation of the .b curriculum as taught by eleven teachers in a mix of state, independent and international schools, matched with controls from similar schools, is currently being led by three professors from the Universities of Exeter and Cambridge.

.b THE .b CURRICULUM

What happens in a .b lesson?

The .b curriculum is a **set of nine lessons, each teaching a distinct mindfulness skill**, and designed to do so in a way which engages young minds. The lessons typically include a brief presentation by the teacher with the help of **lively, pupil-friendly visuals, film and sound images, and practical exercises and demonstrations** to make the ideas vivid and relevant to their lives. Putting mindfulness in a relevant context motivates pupils to become still and allows the teacher to lead them in some short practices - for example learning to sit still and watch the breath, be aware of different parts of the body, walk mindfully or become more aware of how the body feels under stress. It will typically end with an invitation to do some brief practices at home during the week. The whole course is supported by a student handbook.



The aim

At the most basic level .b aims simply to be an **awareness raising exercise** to give all students a taste of mindfulness, so they know about it, and can return to it later in life and

find out more about then if they think they might find it useful. So the most fundamental aims are:

- For all pupils to know about mindfulness
- For most to have enjoyed it
- For many to use it now and again
- And some to practice daily
- For as many as possible to remember it

However many pupils really get into mindfulness in their own lives in the here and now, finding that it **helps them to achieve more effectively goals they have right now** - such as focus in class, achieve in sport, enjoy a leisure activity, or get on with others. **For pupils with problems it can become a lifeline** to help them deal with present difficulties.

What are the intended outcomes of .b?

.b has wider aims too. It intends to **help the young people who experience it to overcome difficulties, thrive and flourish** - and the research that has taken place into its effectiveness suggests it is indeed meeting these more ambitious goals.

.b aims to help young people:

- To experience **greater wellbeing** e.g. feel happier, calmer, more fulfilled
- To **fulfil their potential and pursue their own goals** e.g. be more creative, more relaxed, academically, personally
- To **improve their concentration and focus**, in classes, in exams and tests, on the sports field, when playing games, when paying attention and listening to others
- To work with **difficult mental states** such as depressive, ruminative and anxious thoughts and low moods
- To cope with the **everyday stresses and strains of adolescent life** such as exams, relationships, sleep problems, family issues



Mindfulness sounds great. Can our school use it to improve behaviour?

Well **yes and no**. An **increased sense of calm and more sociable, empathic and less impulsive behaviour are often side effects** of mindfulness training and teachers and parents are often appreciative of these kind of changes, as some of the quotations at the end of this section will show. However **these effects cannot and should not be relied on** in a simple cause and effect way, as mindfulness takes different people in different ways and at different times, and **are not the primary point of the exercise, which is simply to put the learner more in touch with what is happening right now, whatever it is**. If mindfulness exercises are used simply as behaviour management devices to quieten pupils and impose silence, then pupils will see them as teacher centred disciplinary methods whose purpose is to coerce or manipulate them into 'good behaviour', and will almost certainly turn off as a

result. **Mindfulness needs to be learned for the benefit of the person themselves**, in their own way and in their own time, for its own intrinsic sake, and the many positive effects that are likely to result in terms of the learner's improved attitudes and behaviour appreciated, but **not demanded or expected**, by the people around them.

What .b is not

You may well meet with misconceptions about what .b is, or even have some yourself. Here is some clarity on what .b is not that can guide your responses.

- **Soft, fluffy, hippy dippy.** There is a solid evidence base for teaching mindfulness which comes from careful evaluations of interventions, including some randomised control trials, and clear support from the evidence from brain imaging and the developing findings of neuroscience. It is summarised in the paper we have produced '*Evidence for the Impact of Mindfulness on Children and Young People*'.
- **A disciplinary technique.** Many people experience mindfulness as calming and over time many pupils do behave better, but that is not the main point, and if pursued for its own sake is likely to backfire with some resentful pupils. Mindfulness has to be for the learner themselves to help experience what is going on for them right now (including agitation, anger, the urge to fidget etc).
- **Buddhism by the back door.** Mindfulness has been developed from a Buddhist base but it is totally secular and can be engaged in by anyone of any faith, or none.
- **Relaxation.** A sense of calm and relaxation of tension in mind and body is another frequently experienced and welcome side effect of all various types of meditation, including mindfulness, but again this is not the prime goal of mindfulness, which is to be with whatever is happening, including if necessary tension and anxiety.
- **Visualisation.** Mindfulness is about getting in touch with what is actually happening in the mind and body, not taking yourself to another place or trying to create an alternative state of mind.
- **Therapy.** .b is education rather than therapy, and is not designed to address serious mental health problems, although it can certainly help with some difficult emotional states. It can however provide a universal entitlement for all that provides a useful backdrop and creates a climate and ethos that supports more targeted approaches for those with more severe problems.
- **Adult mindfulness.** The course is shorter, the messages punchier and more direct and the practices and discussions briefer. The goals are more modest, and include simply making all pupils aware of the existence of mindfulness in case they wish to explore it later.



What do the pupils think of .b ?

Research shows clearly that mindfulness interventions are **generally enjoyed and appreciated** by the young people who take part in them, who report a wide range of positive experiences and changes. Evaluations of .b classes, including the controlled research studies carried out by the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, have shown that pupil reactions to .b classes are on the whole positive. The following typical quotations show the range of impacts mindfulness can have on children and young people. They are from a range of evaluations of the .b course in state schools and independent schools, and from boys and girls, with some from their parents and teachers.

Increased awareness and acceptance

- *Mindfulness helped me to accept things instead of pushing them away*
- *I don't really criticise people as much.... some people are the same and some people are different, so after mindfulness I understand why people are different, and you have to accept that you can't change that.*

More rational thinking

- *It just helps me to gather up my thoughts, and sort of restart.... I can keep my mind focused, just getting work done, and find the answer to the problems I face.*
- *I've started to think positively more...*
- *I've known how to make choices better, and I make better choices - better for me, for now and for my future.*

More calm and relaxation and less stress

- *Very useful...I use it when stressed, overworked.*
- *When I think about calming down, I've actually had some lessons on how to do it, so I can do it.*
- *It was the only time in the week where I could relax and clear my mind.*
- *It enabled me to be able to focus on the present moment, without worrying about exams, results, homework and so on.*

Less reactivity and impulsiveness – greater self-control

- *Less teasing because I'm not reacting to it anymore - they do call me names, it's just I choose to ignore it.*
- *It's helped me to stop doing all that stupid stuff I do... and I like it*
- *Once my brother was annoying me so much, I hit him, and I got told to go to my room, so I did FOFBOC a 7-11 in there, and after about five minutes I calmed down.*

Better behaviour in class

- *Our class actually got quite a lot more well-behaved as a result of it.*
- *It helps a lot - other people aren't being distracting, and it helps you not distract other people if everyone's doing what they're meant to be doing.*

Improved attention and focus

- *I didn't pay attention that much, but now I get focused on what the person's telling me*

- *There have been times when I wanted to be distracted, but I've controlled myself to carry on doing what I've been doing.*

Improved academic attitudes, skills and achievements

- *Now I try to do like the best I can, achieve the most that I possibly can*
- *It made revision a lot easier if I just took the time to focus*
- *I have already found it useful in sporting situations. I now ".b" quite often before a football match just to relax and think about what I want to do in the game.*

Feelings of confidence and competence

- *I feel now I can reach my goals of what I want to do in the future, whereas before I was "Oh I don't know if I can do that"... now, I feel like I can.*
- *It's helped me be calmer in class and less anxious, so being more confident and speak out... the teacher will explain it - if you get it wrong, you find out how to do it right.*

Goal setting

- *Before I didn't really care, but now I do care what I do in the future.*
- *I used to not want to try anything new, but now I'm more open to the future, or not as closed-minded*

Relationships with others

- *I used to argue with my Mum a lot. Since I've done the mindfulness, we haven't had an argument.*
- *I've realised that you can trust other people. I had fear of certain people; now I know that everyone is the same.*

Health

- *I used to have pretty bad insomnia; I didn't used to be able to sleep much at all, but I'm not too bad now.... the "Beditation" practice, that's the thing that helps me; it's part of my routine now.*
- *I feel healthier..... I think that it's healthy mind, healthy body. I'm probably in better shape than I've been ever in my life, which is pretty good. My skin cleared up immediately, just whilst doing the mindfulness lessons; I'm sure it was connected, and I've just been more willing to look after myself.*

Happiness and enjoyment

- *I really think I am happy..... I'm really enjoying my life at the moment in a way I haven't done previously*
- *I've noticed I've been calmer, and more playful, and yeah, more happy.*

How do I find out more?

Contact info@mindfulnessinschools.org

Or go on the website: www.mindfulnessinschools.org