

2020

A 4-H Mindfulness Curriculum  
for Adolescents and Adults

# MINDFUL MECHANICS



PEER REVIEWED

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# MINDFUL MECHANICS: A 4-H MINDFULNESS CURRICULUM FOR ADOLESCENTS AND ADULTS

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Thank you for all your contributions!

Anne, Kendra, and Katherine



**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**  
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# INTRODUCTION



The University of California 4-H Healthy Living Initiative is focused on providing learning opportunities that address health in the holistic sense: physical, social and emotional. Mindful practices connect each of these domains of health. This curriculum introduces teens, ages 13-18, and adult leaders to some basic concepts in mindfulness that include mindful eating, affirmations (emotional support or encouragement), identification and management of emotions, being present in the current moment, and yoga.

The 4-H Mindfulness program aims to promote healthy families and communities through fostering mindfulness that lead to improvements in managing one's own goals, developing a sense of self, time management, stress management, emotional regulation, and mindful eating practices. Specific outcomes from participation in the curriculum include short-term (skill development), mid-term (increased stress management, mindful eating, etc.), and long-term (improved physical, emotional, and social health) benefits.

Current research has demonstrated the importance of mindfulness training in promoting these healthy behaviors for youth (Broderick & Frank, 2014; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). The *4-H Mindful Mechanics* curriculum was developed using the experiential learning cycle (Jones & Pfeiffer, 1973; Kolb, 1984), providing teens with hands-on learning experiences, reflection opportunities, and connecting lessons to real-life applications to address social-emotional health challenges. Characteristics of effective health education curricula as outlined by The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have been incorporated into this curriculum to provide an interdisciplinary approach to health, well-being, and leadership. The *4-H Mindful Mechanics* curriculum meets the developmental needs of teens and the 4-H program as outlined in research and in the National 4-H Healthy Living Professional and Volunteer Development Needs Assessment (Donaldson, Franck & Toman, 2014). *4-H Mindful Mechanics* incorporates the Essential Elements of Youth Development: Belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Through *4-H Mindful Mechanics*, teens are encouraged to build positive relationships through expressing care, concern and gratitude for others (belonging), build beliefs in oneself (mastery), practice self-discipline, self-control, and self-reflection (independence), and serve others (generosity) (Martz, Minicemoyer, & McNeely, 2009).

This curriculum is designed to be delivered in the 4-H Club setting, as well as out-of-school-time programs or camp settings. In the *4-H Mindful Mechanics* curriculum, there are ten experiential learning activities which are designed to be delivered weekly by 4-H volunteers. Upon completion of the *4-H Mindful Mechanics* project, teens may lead a mindfulness project for younger youth, utilizing the *4-H Mindful Me* curriculum.

Dear Caregiver(s),

The *4-H Mindful Mechanics* curriculum has been designed to help facilitate teen's social-emotional development. Mindfulness is not a religion. Being mindful means you are focused in the present moment. Research in mindful practices (e.g. mindful eating, affirmations, identification and management of emotions, and self-awareness) has shown that increased mindfulness enhances neurological structures for improved cognitive function, which aid in self-regulation and decision making (Monshat et al., 2013; Beauchemin, Hutchins, & Patterson, 2008; Biegel, Brown, Shapiro, & Schubert, 2009; Bluth, et al., 2015; Sibunga, et al., 2013). Providing youth with training in mindfulness supports individual efficacy in altering habits, equipping youth with the skills needed to sustain long-term healthy behaviors.

The overall program aims to promote mindful practices that lead to improvements in managing one's own goals, developing a sense of self, time management, stress management, emotional regulation, and mindful eating practices. *4-H Mindful Mechanics* can also serve as a training for teens that would like to lead lessons from the companion curriculum, *4-H Mindful Me*, through a 'teens as teachers' (TAT) approach. The *4-H Mindful Me* curriculum uses children's literature and best practices in the field of positive youth development to deliver programming to 5-8-year olds. The TAT approach provides teens with the opportunity for individual growth and meaningful contribution.
















*4-H Mindful Mechanics* incorporates the Essential Elements of youth development: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. Through *4-H Mindful Mechanics*, teens are encouraged to build positive relationships through expressing care, concern and gratitude for others (belonging), build beliefs in oneself (mastery), practice self-discipline, self-control, and self-reflection (independence), and serve others.

Thank you for your participation!



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>6</b>
	What is mindfulness?	
	Why is mindfulness important?	
	What are the benefits of mindful practice?	
	Facilitator Tips	
	<b>01 YOGA</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>02 MINDFUL EATING</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>03 POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>04 THE PURPOSE OF PRESENCE</b>	<b>18</b>
	<b>05 NAMING FEELINGS</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>06 STRESS MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>07 QUIET LISTENING</b>	<b>28</b>
	Activity A: Awareness Walk	
	Activity B: Emotion Jar	
	<b>08 BLUEPRINT FOR A MINDFUL MOMENT</b>	<b>33</b>
	<b>09 THE LABYRINTH</b>	<b>36</b>
	<b>10 THEN AND NOW</b>	<b>38</b>
	<b>MATERIAL LIST</b>	<b>41</b>
	<b>RESOURCES (APPENDICES)</b>	<b>43</b>
	<b>SUGGESTED READINGS BY CHAPTER</b>	<b>47</b>
	<b>EVALUATION</b>	<b>87</b>
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>89</b>
	<b>RETREAT RESOURCES</b>	<b>91</b>

# WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” –Jon kabat zinn (2003)

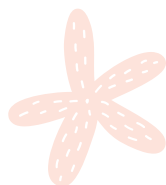
Kung Fu Panda explains mindfulness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Csga4tg5Pq0>

## MINDFULNESS IS:

1. **NOTICING/AWARENESS** –being aware of yourself and what is around you. Exploring the world with all your senses.
2. **OPENNESS/CURIOSITY** –being open to new experiences.
3. **NON-JUDGMENT** –experiencing life without thinking about it being good or bad.
4. **ACCEPTANCE** –being content with the present moment.

## EXAMPLES OF MINDFULNESS:

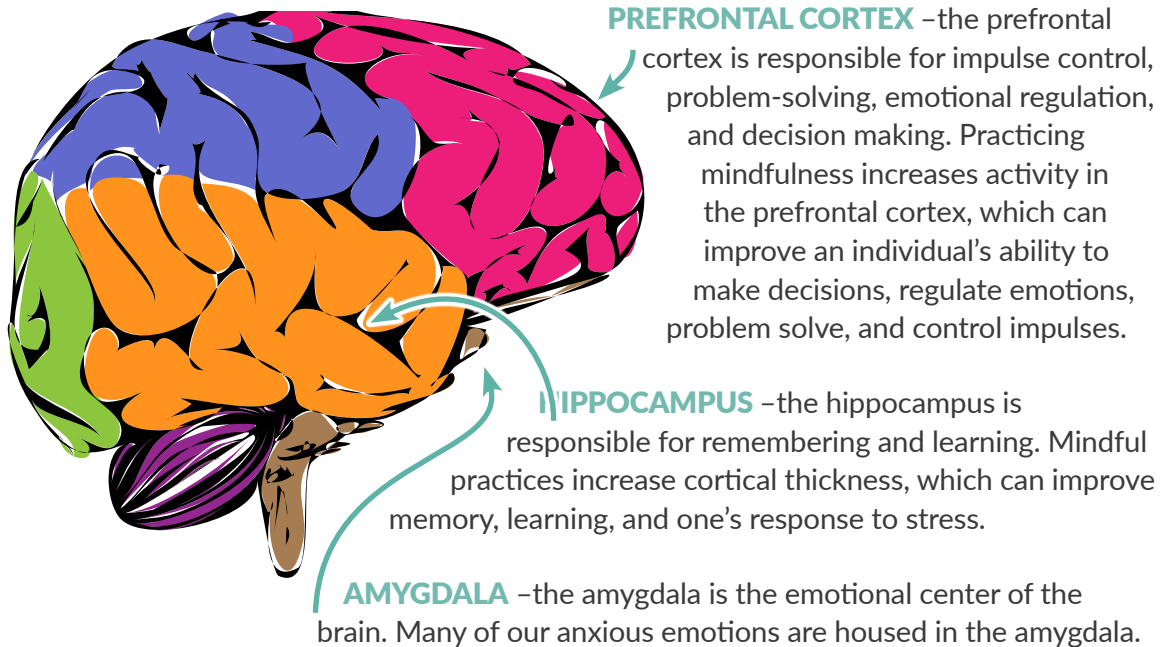
- **BODY SCANS** – paying attention to each part of your body and how it feels. First focusing on your head, noticing how it feels. Then, shoulders, knees, toes, and so on.
- **BREATHING EXERCISES** –monitoring breathing to focus and connect the mind and body. Imagine the lungs are a balloon, for each breath in pretend you are blowing up a balloon and then releasing it with each breath out.
- **WALKING MEDITATION** –taking slow, thoughtful steps to focus on connecting your movement and breath, as well as to the environment around you.





## WHY IS MINDFULNESS IMPORTANT?

Neuroscience and mindfulness –mindful practices have been shown to assist in brain function, particularly in three regions of the brain: prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and amygdala.



The intense feeling one has when presented with a high stress situation is due to activity in the amygdala. Some call this the “fight or flight” response. Mindful practices can help restructure the connections in the brain by weakening the connection between the prefrontal cortex and the amygdala, therefore, allowing for stronger connections to be made to strengthen concentration and focus. Mindfulness actually reduces the size of the amygdala, which results in less reactivity to stress.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MINDFUL PRACTICE?

- Mindfulness helps reduce stress and anxiety, and provides tools to cope with the stress and anxiety youth experience (Garey 2017; Taren et al. 2015).
- Mindfulness helps youth feel more connected and express compassion and gratitude to others (Broderick & Frank 2014; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor 2010).
- Mindful youth are better able to focus and concentrate, make decisions and, therefore, show improvements in academic performance (Kuo & Taylor 2004; Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014).

## FACILITATOR TIPS

These lessons have been designed using the Experiential Learning Model (<http://4h.ucanr.edu/About/Framework/EL/>). Each lesson has a “do” component (an engaging activity), an opportunity to “reflect” (open-ended questions), an “application” activity to connect new knowledge to everyday life, and suggestions for how to “contribute” to family, friends, and the community.

### Tips for facilitating the curriculum:

- As with any 4-H project, begin with establishing group norms for the duration of the project. These norms should be developed by the teen participants, agreed upon, committed to, and reviewed at each meeting.
- Always begin a new lesson by reviewing what you covered in the last lesson. Be sure to discuss the application section in each lesson and how the teens may be doing the application piece on their own.
- Encourage participation, but also allow time and space for each individual to process.
- Model patience, active listening, and openness.
- As the facilitator, consider thinking critically about what motivates you and what distracts you, this will help in guiding teens through their own processing of being in the present moment.
- When doing yoga, make sure you describe each pose in detail as you demonstrate it. Also, watch out for individuals that may not be doing the pose safely and help guide them. For example, making sure all joints are stacked on top of each other. If a pose hurts, you shouldn't do it.
- Each lesson begins with an “active listening” practice; listening is an important mindful skill. These sessions also give the teens the opportunity to connect with one another, and share what they are currently experiencing. Connection and emotional awareness and management are also mindful skills.
- For additional reading and resources please visit: <http://4h.ucanr.edu/Projects/HealthyLiving/Mindfulness/>



After completing *4-H Mindful Mechanics* we encourage teens to consider leading a mindfulness project for younger youth. *4-H Mindful Me* is a 4-H curriculum that has been designed to be led by teens for youth 5-8 years old. *4-H Mindful Me* is available here: <https://shop4-h.org/collections/mindful-me-collection>

Teen teachers who lead *4-H Mindful Me* should commit for at least one year and should participate in both an initial training and on-going training. Teen teachers will participate in the *4-H Mindful Mechanics* curriculum, then lead the *4-H Mindful Me* curriculum over the course of one year. The teen teacher is responsible for working with an adult mentor on delivering all lessons to youth ages 5-8. Ideally, a team of 3-4 teens will work together to lead these activities throughout the year. Teens facilitate learning through not only delivery of this curriculum, but also through modeling healthy habits to youth.



## CHAPTER 1:

# YOGA

### INTRODUCTION

Yoga is a great way to practice mindfulness because it requires the engagement of our bodies and our minds. These movements and body positions can have many improvements to the physical body (balance, flexibility, strength) and the mind (improved listening and stress reduction). Yin yoga is a slower-paced sequence, where poses are held for longer periods of time. This lesson leads teens in a yin yoga session, a guided meditation, and then provides an opportunity for students to write a guided meditation that they will share in future meetings.

### OBJECTIVES

- Move your body with your breath.
- Improve balance, lung function, flexibility and strength.
- Reduce stress.
- Improve attention and listening skills.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Relaxing music (instrumental music is a good option)
- Yoga mats or a soft surface
- Paper or journals
- Pens
- Photos of yoga poses (see Appendix A)
- Sample guided meditations (see Appendix B)
- Suggestions for imagery and metaphors (see Appendix C)

### PREPARATION

Preparation time: **30 minutes**

Activity time: **75 minutes**

Be sure to read through the entire lesson beforehand to make sure you are prepared. Gather all the supplies and ensure there are enough for each participant. Be sure to read the guided meditation a few times. You will want to run through the poses and make sure you know how to do each one correctly. If a pose is too challenging for you, feel free to skip it or find an adaptation that works for you. While this activity can be done anywhere, you will want to make sure you have a space free from obstructions so that each participant will have room to move around. Yin yoga is enhanced by dim lighting and soft music. Please remind teens to wear comfortable clothing.

**DIRECTIONS:** *Always begin each lesson by welcoming the teens and thanking them for being there. Since this is the first lesson you will want to allow time for the group to introduce themselves and get to know each other. One way to do this is through a simple pair & share. Pair up the students and ask them to share their name and one thing they hope to learn from their time in the mindfulness project. Then, instruct each pair to introduce their partner to the whole group. Remember to introduce yourself and again welcome the group.*

## CHECK-IN

Pair the group off and ask them to share how they are feeling emotionally and physically. Have them select who will be the “talker” first and who will be the “listener.” You will want to give each person 2 minutes to share and 1 minute for the listener to repeat what the talker shared. Remind the listener to pay careful attention to what the “talker” is saying and not to respond until instructed. Once the 2 minutes are up, have the “listener” respond to the “talker.” An example of this might be: “I heard you say that you are feeling tired today and that you are nervous about an upcoming test. I hope this session will help you feel more energized and less nervous.” Have the group switch roles and repeat the process so that each person has an opportunity to be in both roles.

## ACTIVITY (DO)

1. Instruct everyone to find a comfortable place on the floor. Before the group begins the yin yoga session you will need to introduce each pose. Make sure you are visible to the entire group, while you describe and demonstrate each pose. Have the students practice the poses with you. Images of each pose are in Appendix A.
  - **Flower:** sit on the ground and put the soles of your feet together. Rest your hands on your legs.
  - **Butterfly:** sit on the ground and put the soles of your feet together. Rest your hands on your legs and lower your forehead to the ground.
  - **Downward Dog:** starting from all fours (like a table), straighten your legs and lift your hips up. Press your heels and palms into the ground.
  - **Extended Puppy:** starting from all fours, straighten your arms forward and pull your hips back. Drop your forehead to the ground and elongate your spine.
  - **Cat/Cow:** starting on all fours, as you exhale, curve your spine, pulling your navel in (cat). Drop your spine and lift your head on your inhale (cow).
  - **Child's Pose:** sit on your heels with your big toes touching, drop your forehead to the ground, knees spread to the side.
  - **Floor Twist:** while lying on your back lift one knee into your chest and then drop it across your body to the opposite side. Keep your arms on either side of you and drop your head in the opposite direction of the knee. Be sure to rotate to each side.
  - **Relaxation:** lie on your back with your legs straight in front of you and your arms at your side and your palms facing up.
2. Dim the lights and play soft music. In a quiet and calm voice, request that everyone take a seated position on the floor.
3. **Say:** “Sitting up tall and comfortably on the ground place the bottom of your feet together and let your knees fall to the ground into flower pose. Drop your shoulders down and back and rest your arms at your sides. Take a deep breath in



Flower/Butterfly



Downward Dog



Extended Puppy



Cat/Cow



Child's Pose



Floor Twist



Relaxation

(BREATH) and release it (LOUDLY PUSH YOUR BREATH OUT). Shut down your eyes and settle into your butterfly pose. Breathe in deeply and out again.”

**After 10 breaths in and out say:** “Come to all fours and step both feet back as you lift the hips up and back, stretching your arms forward into downward dog.”

**Take 10 breaths and say:** “Lower your knees to the ground and drop your forehead to the floor, stretching your arms forward.” Rest in extended puppy pose for 30 seconds.

**Say:** “Come up to all fours and a flat back like a table . As you exhale your next breath pull the spine up into cat pose as you inhale, drop the spine and lift the head into cow pose. Using your breath as your guide, repeat these movements five times. On your next exhale sit back onto your heels and drop your forehead to the ground. Rest in child’s pose.”

**Allow one minute in child’s pose and then say:** “Lie down on your back with your legs stretched in front of you and your arms resting

at your sides. Face your palms up to the sky. Bring your right knee to your chest and let it drop to the left side of your body, twist your head to the right and rest here for 10 breaths. After the 10 breaths release your right leg to the ground and pull your left knee in. Repeat the twist on your left side. After 10 breaths release your left leg down to the ground and lie comfortable with your arms at your sides.”

- 4. Keep the group in the relaxation pose and read the following guided meditation:

*Lay in a comfortable position and begin to pay attention to your breathing. As you breathe in, feel your lungs fill and as you breathe out, feel the air leave your body. Feel the rhythm of breathing in and out. Squeeze your fists tightly, hold and release, continue to make fists with each breath in and release with each breath out (pause for 10 seconds). Clear your mind and focus on a large green meadow. Imagine yourself walking through the meadow, you feel the warm sun on your back and a slight breeze in your hair. The air feels*

warm and smells of springtime (pause). You feel calm and peaceful (pause). In the far distance you see a glimmer of light sparkling between the tall forests of pine trees in front of you. You are intrigued and start running towards the forest. As you run, you notice the weight of a backpack on your shoulders. It feels heavy and is making your journey to the forest difficult. The backpack is full of your worries and anxious feelings (pause). You take another look at that beautiful light dancing in the pines and, with a deep breath in, you remove the backpack one shoulder at a time. You immediately feel lighter and begin sprinting to the pines. You smile as you reach the edge of the forest and see a small clear stone that is catching the light. You touch the stone and it feels warm from the sun. As you look up you see a small pond with a beautiful waterfall. You breathe in and out. Smile and feel your shoulders drop in relaxation. You feel the sun covering you like a warm hug from a friend. You are loved. You are special. You are you. Take a deep breath in and loudly release it. Wiggle your toes, wiggle your fingers and begin to open your eyes.

5. Have the group begin to start moving their fingers and toes and slowly pull themselves to a seated position.
6. Turn off the music and turn up the lights.

## REFLECTION

1. How did doing yin yoga make you feel?
2. What was enjoyable about the guided meditation? What was challenging about the guided meditation?

## APPLICATION

Identify when and where you can do yoga at home. Try to find time each day to practice a few poses.

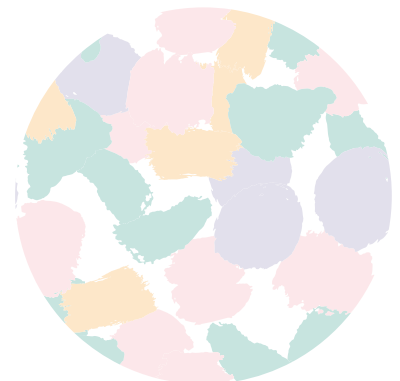
## CONTRIBUTION

Guided meditations can help you feel more relaxed and can be a tool for managing stress. Usually guided meditations have a period of calming, an arch of labeling stresses and then a release of that stress or worry. Provide each student with pens, paper, sample guided meditations (Appendix B), the imagery and metaphor suggestion (Appendix C), and give them the opportunity to write their own guided meditation. Let them know that in the upcoming sessions, each person or team of individuals will have a chance to lead the group in their guided meditation at a future lesson if they choose.

As the facilitator it is recommended that you also prepare a guided meditation to lead the group (or just reuse the one above) in case the students do not feel comfortable leading just yet.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

- “Get Moving” (page 25) from *Fighting invisible tigers: Stress management for teens* (Hipp, 2008).
- Several stories from *Pressure: True stories by teens about stress* (Desetta, 2012) show how physical activity can be used as a way to relieve stress and other feelings.
  - “Yoga Relaxes Me” (page 30)
  - “Running My Problems Away” (page 55)
  - “My Favorite Escape” (page 84)
  - “I Leave My Anger at the Rink” (page 102)
- 4-H Yoga for Kids







## CHAPTER 2:

# MINDFUL EATING

### INTRODUCTION

Mindful eating is all about paying more attention to what you are eating – what it looks like, smells like, feels like, and – of course – what it tastes like. By practicing mindful eating we slow down our food consumption, notice what we are eating more and how it makes us feel.

### OBJECTIVES

- Identify ways to explore food with all senses.
- Describe the importance of taking time to eat.
- Identify ways to help promote healthy eating for family and friends.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Apples (enough for each participant to have one)



### PREPARATION

Preparation time: **30 minutes**

Activity time: **60 minutes**

Be sure to read through the entire lesson beforehand to make sure you are prepared. Gather all the supplies and ensure there are enough for each participant.

**DIRECTIONS:** *Always begin each lesson by welcoming the youth, thanking them for being there, and asking them what they remembered from last week. Each lesson will begin with a check-in and guided meditation. These activities promote positive communication, active listening, reflection and contribution.*

### CHECK-IN

Pair the group off and ask them to share how they are feeling emotionally and physically. Have them select who will be the “talker” first and who will be the “listener.” You will want to give each person 2 minutes to share and 1 minute for the listener to repeat what the talker shared. Remind the listener to pay careful attention to what the “talker” is saying and not to respond until instructed. Once the 2 minutes are up, have the “listener” respond to the “talker.” An example of this might be: “I heard you say that you are feeling tired today and that you are nervous about an upcoming test. I hope this session will help you feel more energized and less nervous.” Have the group switch roles and repeat the process so that each person has an opportunity to be in both roles.



## GUIDED MEDITATION

Set up the room for the participant led guided meditation. Have a predetermined volunteer lead the group in a guided meditation. You will want to encourage the led to use the guided meditation they authored, but you may have some others available for the volunteer to choose from.

## ACTIVITY (DO)

- Pass out an apple to each participant.
- Ask them each of the following questions, allowing for a pause and elaboration between each response.
  - a. What color is the apple?
  - b. What does the apple feel like?
  - c. What does the apple smell like?
  - d. What does the apple sound like?
- After thoroughly describing the apple, instruct the teens to taste it slowly and not swallow right away.
- Ask them what they taste and how the apple feels in their mouth.
- Then, instruct them to swallow the apple and describe how it feels traveling to their stomachs.

*This activity can be done with a wide variety of foods. Consider adapting it slightly and offering trail mix. Instruct blind-folded teens to see if they can identify all the ingredients present in the trail mix. Be sure to check for allergies prior to delivering this activity.*

## REFLECTION

1. What did you notice as you explored the apple?
2. What sensations did you experience in the processes of eating this apple?
3. How might you practice mindful eating in the future?
4. How can mindful eating help us be healthy?
5. How can you help others around you be healthy?

## APPLICATION

Create a healthy dish, carefully considering each ingredient. As you design the recipe, provide a description of why each ingredient was chosen, where the ingredients originated from, and how the ingredients can help fuel the body.

## CONTRIBUTION

Share your recipe description with family and friends. Consider posting it to a blog or social media platform.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

“Fight Stress with Food” (page 33) from *Fighting invisible tigers: Stress management for teens* (Hipp, 2008).



## CHAPTER 3:

# POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS — AFFIRMATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Practicing mindfulness includes how we choose to interact with ourselves and others. It's important to understand that how we choose to treat people impacts us too. In this session we will explore ways to apply mindfulness in our daily lives. Activities will guide teens through practicing kindness and gratitude towards the self and others. Affirmations are kind words that we say to someone, like "you are loved" or "you are funny." Affirmations are meant to make people feel happy and good about themselves.

## OBJECTIVES

- Increase understanding of emotions.
- Increase understanding of emotional choice.
- Practice in self-kindness.
- Practice in gratitude.

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Index cards
- A variety of colored pens
- Cardstock
- Scrapbooking Paper
- Stamps and ink
- Envelopes (size A2 fits 4x6 cards)
- Double-sided tape
- Pre-printed materials from Appendix D: "Practicing kindness" and "Practicing meanness" and Appendix E: "Kind Selfies"

## PREPARATION

Preparation time: **30 minutes**

Activity time: **75 minutes**

Be sure to read through the entire lesson beforehand to make sure you are prepared. Gather all the supplies and ensure there are enough for each participant.

**DIRECTIONS:** *Always begin each lesson by welcoming the teens, thanking them for being there, and asking them what they remembered from last week. Each lesson will begin with a check-in and guided meditation. These activities promote positive communication, active listening, reflection and contribution.*

## CHECK-IN

Pair the group off and ask them to share how they are feeling emotionally and physically. Have them select who will be the "talker" first and who will be the "listener." You will want to give each person 2 minutes to share and 1 minute for the listener to repeat what the talker shared. Remind the listener to pay careful attention to what the "talker" is saying and not to respond until instructed. Once the 2 minutes are up, have the "listener" respond to the "talker." An example of this might be: "I heard you say that you are feeling tired today and that you are nervous about an upcoming test. I