

## Lessons from Seven Years of Teaching Mindfulness to Children Living in a Context of Vulnerability

**Authors :** Annie Devault

**Abstract :** Mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) can be beneficial for the well-being of children. MBIs offered for children in contexts of vulnerability (poverty, neglect) report positive results in terms of emotion regulation and cognitive flexibility. Anxiety is a common issue for children living in a vulnerable context. It has a negative impact on children's attention span, emotional regulation and self-esteem. The MBI (12 weeks) associated with this research has been developed for a total of 30 children suffering from anxiety (7 to 9 years old) and receiving services from a community center over the last seven years. The first objective is to describe in details the content of the mindfulness-based intervention. The second purpose is to document what helps and what hinders the practice of mindfulness for children living in a context of vulnerability. A special attention will be given to the importance of the way that the intervention is offered and the principles that are followed by the practitioners. Perceived effects of the intervention on children were collected through an individual semi-structured interview with each child at the end of the program. Parents were also interviewed to have their point of view on the effect of their children's participation in the group. Anxiety was measure with the Beck youth pre-post and at follow up (2 months). Qualitative analysis of the interviews with children showed that most of them mentioned that the program helped them become calmer, more confident, less scared and more able to deal with difficult emotions. Almost all of them reported having used the material provided to them to practice at home. This result has been confirmed by parents. They reported that their child had gained confidence and were better at verbalizing emotions. Children also grew calmer, even though all anxiety was not gone. They would have liked more material to practice at home. The quantitative instrument used to measure anxiety did not corroborate the qualitative interviews about anxiety. Discussion will question the use of this questionnaire for children who have important cognitive limitations. Discussion will also report the importance of the personalized contact with children, along with other consideration, to enhance the adherence of children and parents. The MBI seems to have benefited children in different ways, which is corroborated by most parents. Since the sample was limited, we will need to continue documenting its effects with more children and parents. The major strength of this research is to have reported the subjective perspectives of children on their experience of mindfulness.

**Keywords :** anxiety, mindfulness, children, best practices

**Conference Title :** ICMTRP 2023 : International Conference on Mindfulness Theory, Research and Practice

**Conference Location :** Sydney, Australia

**Conference Dates :** May 11-12, 2023