

The Effect of Mindfulness on Eating Enjoyment and Behavior in Preschool and Elementary Children: A Field Experiment across Four Schools

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Abstract : Sixty-five children across four school research sites participated in the present experiment, which was designed to examine whether mindfulness promotes eating enjoyment and diverse eating behaviors in preschool- and early elementary-age children. Children, ages 3-9 years old, were randomly assigned to a 4-week mindfulness intervention condition or a 4-week exposure, control condition. Each week for four days, children received one of four different foods (celery, cauliflower, kidney beans, or garbanzo beans). Children either received instructions to mindfully engage with the food or were given the food and allowed to eat without mindfulness prompts from the researchers. Following the eating exercise, they recorded the amount eaten and rated their enjoyment level. Across all sessions, researchers modeled eating behaviors for the children by eating all the offered food. Results suggested that a brief mindfulness intervention promoted more diverse eating behaviors and more overall food consumption of typically not preferred and unfamiliar foods (celery, cauliflower, and garbanzo beans), compared with an exposure, control condition in preschool children and elementary-age children. However, food enjoyment ratings did not significantly differ between the two conditions for any of the foods. Implications of the finding for addressing eating behavior of young children are considered.

Keywords : children, control trial, eating behavior, eating enjoyment, mindfulness, schools

Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development

Conference Location : Chicago, United States

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020