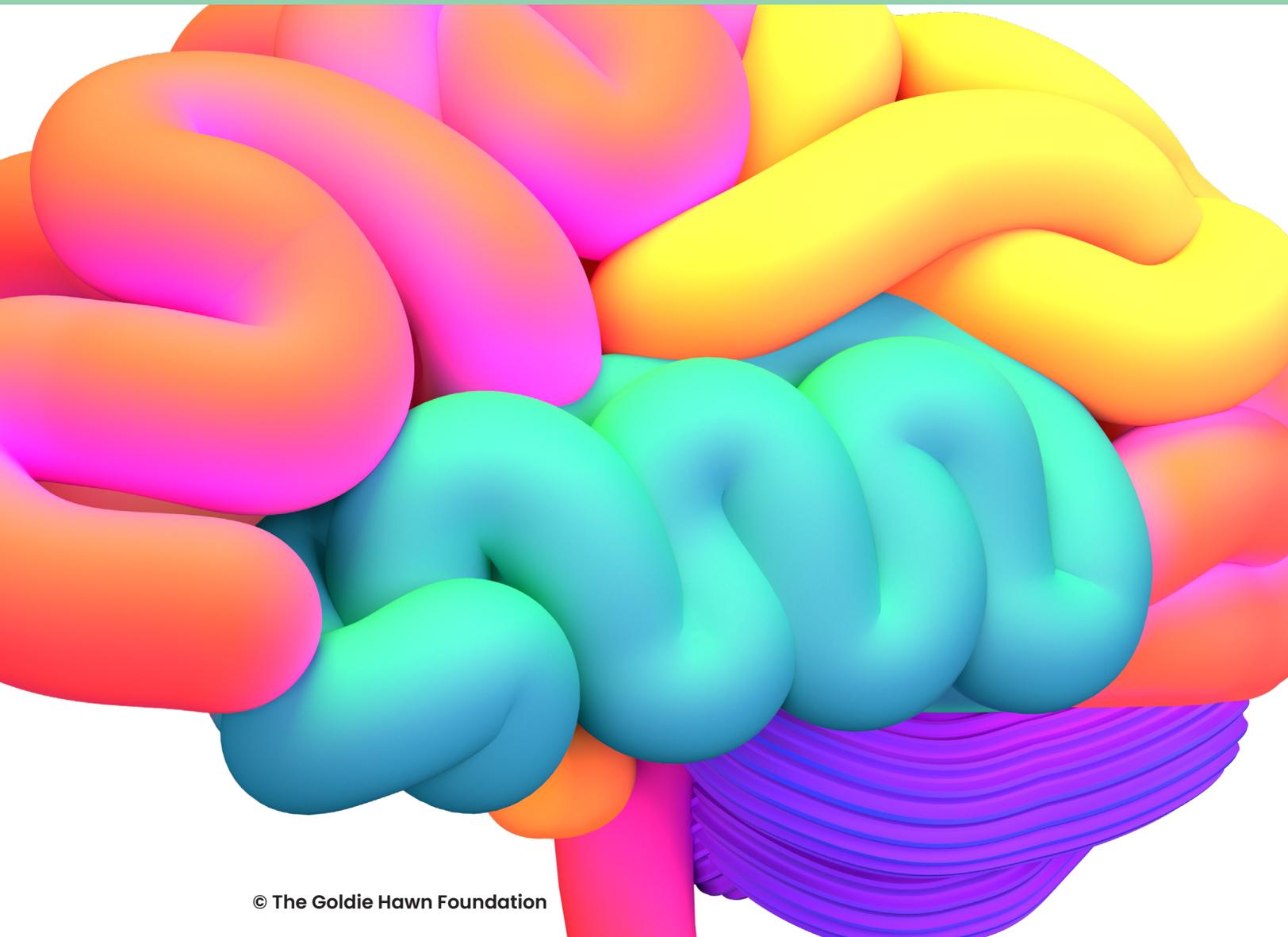




Unit 2: Mindful of Our Senses and Understanding the Adolescent Brain

Grades 6–8



Lesson 4: Mindful Awareness in Practice: Using Our Senses

Purpose

Students practice mindful awareness through sensory experiences involving touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste.

Concept

- Practicing mindful awareness through the senses strengthens my ability to focus and reduces stress and anxiety.

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Practice mindful awareness through sensory experiences.
- Consider ways to integrate mindful awareness of senses into their daily lives.

Social and Emotional Learning Links

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

Materials

- ✓ One raisin per student (or another small item of food, such as a slice of mandarin orange, a grape, etc.)
- ✓ MindUP Portfolio



Estimated Time:
30–40 minutes

Brain Link

The Prefrontal Cortex

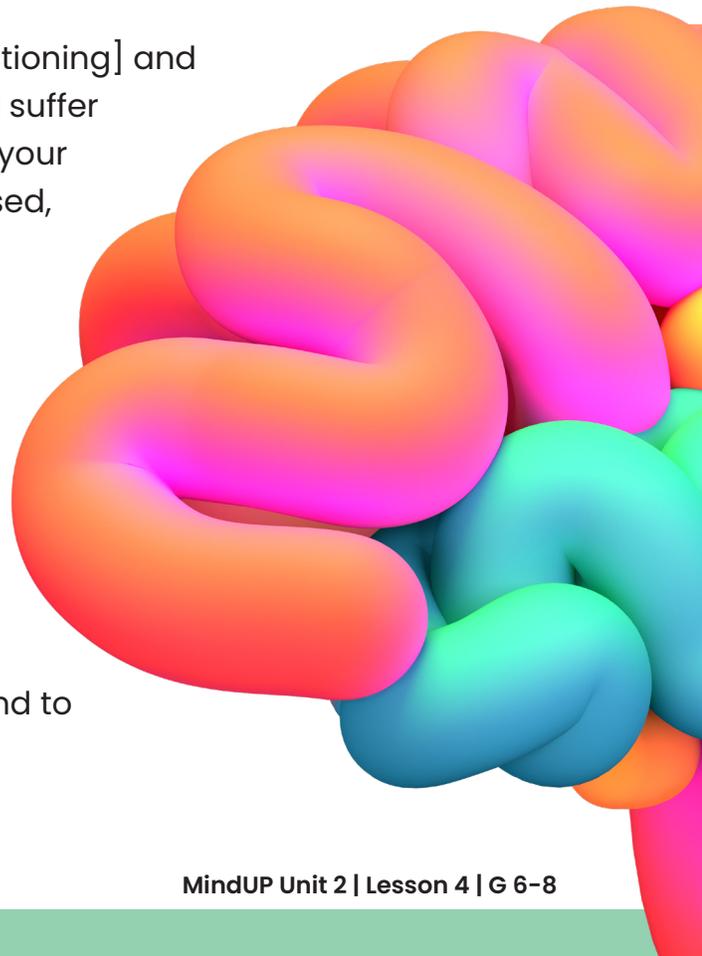
The prefrontal cortex (PFC), through its connections to virtually all other brain regions, serves to guide, direct, integrate, and monitor **goal-directed behavior**. It can be thought of as the “conductor” of a large, complex symphony orchestra.

The PFC is a major participant in the central executive network (CEN) that is involved with planning, flexible problem-solving, working memory, attention, prioritizing, and delayed gratification processing (inhibition)—but it is also the last part of the brain to mature. Children and many teenagers do not have fully developed delayed gratification skills during their school years. This is one reason students from kindergarten through high school need support and encouragement from their teachers to keep their efforts directed to long-term goal achievement.

Research has also found that “[executive functioning] and the prefrontal cortex are the first to suffer, and suffer disproportionately, if something is not right in your life. They suffer first, and most, if you are stressed, sad, lonely, sleep deprived, or not physically fit” (Diamond, 2013, p. 19). This highlights the importance of promoting healthy habits in children and youth.

Taking time to process new input from the senses (listening, savoring, describing) engages the PFC and helps the brain experience a **time interval between immediate reaction and conscious thinking**.

This delay increases students’ ability to respond to new sensory input more reflectively.



Getting Started with the Lesson

① Step 1: Review of the MindUP Learning Community Agreement

Remind the class about your agreed-upon ways of being together to create a **safe**, **kind**, and **focused** classroom.

② Step 2: Review Prior Learning

Spend a few minutes reviewing what students learned in the last lesson. You can ask them to share their experiences of being **mindful** and **unmindful**.

Mindful Awareness Activity: A Journey through the Senses

Invite students to sit comfortably in their chairs, as they did for the focused breathing practice. Provide each student with **one** raisin or other small item of food. Ask them to leave it in front of them until everyone is ready.



① Step 1: Mindful Awareness Practice

Use the following script to guide students through the practice. Note that you should pause for 5–10 seconds after each instruction. Speak in a matter-of-fact way, with a slow pace:

Imagine that you are a scientist and you are examining this object for the first time.

Please look at this object as if you have never seen it before.
(PAUSE)

See if you can be very curious about it. (PAUSE)

Hold it in the palm of your hand, and look at it carefully.
(PAUSE)

Turn it over with your fingers. (PAUSE)

Using your fingers, explore the texture of the object. (PAUSE)

As a scientist would, you may note whether it is smooth, rough, soft, or something else. (PAUSE)

If you notice your mind wandering, or you notice thoughts like “I don’t like raisins,” or “this is weird,” or “why are we doing this,” just notice those thoughts, and bring your attention back to the object the best you can. (PAUSE)

Hold the object up, and notice how the light shines onto it.
(PAUSE)

Bring the object next to one ear and gently roll it between your fingers. Does it make a sound? (PAUSE)

Now, bring the object to your nose. With each in-breath, notice the smell. (PAUSE)

Now, slowly bring the object to your mouth. Notice how you feel. Is your mouth watering? (PAUSE)

Now, place the object into your mouth, and hold it on your tongue. Notice how it feels. Notice the texture of the object in your mouth. (PAUSE)

When you feel ready, move the object to your back teeth, and hold it there. Bite down on the object, and notice the taste that is released. (PAUSE)

Slowly chew the object, paying particular attention to the taste and texture. (PAUSE)

When you feel ready, swallow the object. See if you can feel the sensations of the object as it travels to your stomach. (PAUSE)

Adapted from Kabat-Zinn, 1990

② Step 2: Reflect and Discuss

Ask students to turn to their neighbor and share one reaction to the raisin exercise.

Now ask the following guiding questions of the group:

- What did you notice?
- Did any particular thoughts come up?
- Did you notice any difference when you were focused on sight, or sound, or touch, or taste?
- Is this how we normally eat? How was it different?

Some typical reactions/comments may include usually not liking raisins, the taste seeming more flavorful, or surprise at how different the raisin tasted from how raisins usually taste. The key message is that the experience is not judged as “good” or “bad”; it is just an experience.

Making Connections

① Step 1: Summarize Key Points

Read the script::

- What we just practiced was mindful awareness!
- As we learned last time, mindful awareness simply means to pay attention, on purpose, to what is happening right now, without passing judgment.
- This means you are noticing what is happening in your mind, body, and environment without viewing things as negative or positive, only being curious about them.
- Practicing mindful awareness is all about focusing attention. As we learned last time, when we focus attention, we can strengthen certain pathways in the brain that help us develop focus and reduce stress and anxiety.
- Next time, we will practice another activity that promotes mindful awareness.

② Step 2: Application of New Knowledge to MindUP Learning Community Agreement

Read the script::

- How might our new knowledge help our learning community agreement?
- Where do you see connections?
- Is there anything we wish to add or change to reflect our new learning?

Following Up

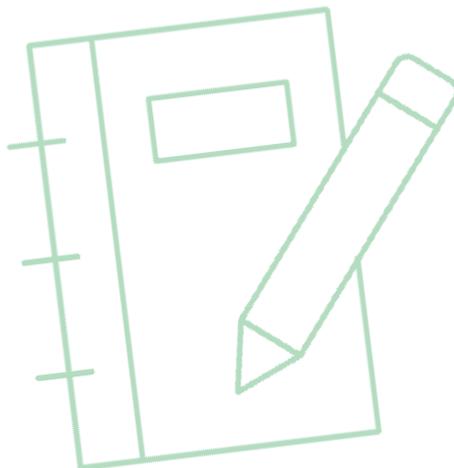
Over the next few days, reinforce the ideas learned in the lesson by implementing the following MindUP for Home and Life and MindUP Portfolio activities.

MindUP for Home and Life

- Practice a mindful meal at home, preferably with family—no TV, books, or other distractions. Spend 2 minutes in silence to be fully aware of the meal—taste, smell, texture, sound, sight. Then share and discuss with family.
- Try to bring mindful awareness to one new thing each day for a week—for example, a tree on your way home, the feel of your feet walking on the path, the smell of the soap in the shower, the taste of your favorite treat.

MindUP Portfolio

Students can create an entry about their reflections on the MindUP for Home and Life activities.



Integrating the Diverse Learner

① Lesson Simplification Ideas:

- Introduce mystery smells to students, encouraging them to guess what they are (smell).
- Lead a simple art activity encouraging students to really focus on one object and draw as many details as they can (sight).
- Encourage students to take a moment to observe the textures they feel on objects they have access to at their desks/tables (touch).
- Introduce mystery sounds, and encourage students to guess what they are (hearing).
- Play a piece of instrumental music, and discuss what instruments students can identify (sound).

② Lesson Challenger Ideas:

- Lead students through a mindful awareness activity using exotic/uncommon foods.
- Ask students to do a reflective writing activity about the experience of tasting exotic/uncommon foods, using adjectives to describe the foods.
- Bring in common packaged food and explore the labels of ingredients, paying attention to the order of ingredients and what is actually in the food. Discuss nutritional value, food sources, processed versus fresh food, etc.
- Go for a nature walk, and encourage students to focus on all of their senses and what they are experiencing. Record their observations.

MindUP Literature List

Mindful Listening

The Raven and Other Poems – Edgar Allan Poe

Song Shoots Out of My Mouth: A Celebration of Music – Jaime Adoff

Miss Spitfire: Reaching Helen Keller – Sarah Miller

Love That Dog – Sharon Creech (grades 4 – 9)

Pumpkin Head – Rainbow Rowell

Mindful Seeing

Chasing Vermeer – Blue Balliett

Unlikely Pairs: Fun with Famous Works of Art – Bob Raczka

Swing! – Rufus Butler Seder

The Eyes of Kid Midas – Neal Shusterman

Mindful Smelling

What's That Smell? The Science behind Adolescent Odors – Diane Ep,
Susan Hershberger, and Jerry Sarquis

Smelling and Tasting – Alvin Silverstein

Mindful Tasting

Granny Torrelli Makes Soup – Sharon Creech

Everything on a Waffle – Polly Horvath

A Consumer's Dictionary of Food Additives – Ruth Winter

**A Taste of the World: What People Eat and How They Celebrate
around the Globe** – Beth Walrond

Mindful Touch

Don't Touch My Hair – Sharee Miller (grades 4–6)

