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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being Through Meditation, Mindfulness, and Movement*, by Christine Mason, Jeffrey Donald, Krishna Kaur Khalsa, Michele M. Rivers Murphy and Valerie Brown.

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# Foreword

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Mindfulness and self-care publications saturate shelves and online listings these days. There's mindful walking, mindful eating, mindful gardening, mindfulness for business, and even mindful quantum physics. With all the options, why should you take the time to read this particular book? Our experience in Montgomery County Public Schools tells the story. The practices that Jeff Donald and others in this book have recommended have truly uplifted students and faculty in so many of our schools.

Although several books describe the benefits and the importance of mindfulness for well-being and the efficacy of this science in schools, very few actually show you how to do it with a step-by-step game plan. This marvelous book answers not only the fundamentals of “what” and “why,” but also the “how.” You'll find, too, that stories from educators around the country add to our understanding of this work of heart; each story expands your motivation and courage moving forward in so many profound ways—on so many levels.

We have all heard the standard definition of mindfulness as a particular way of paying attention in a purposeful manner, staying in the present moment. Yes, this definition is true, but that is only half of the story. What is missing is a fully integrative reason for why we do it in the first place! Mindfulness practices can be better described as follows:

Mindfulness is a science of self-development and self-awareness through the alignment of body, breath, and mind—a science of personal union. Mindfulness teaches us how to steady the mind and emotions while awakening the awareness of intuitive and peaceful qualities of the heart. Mindfulness is a universal approach to inner peacefulness, clarity, and courage. Compatible with all cultural traditions and religious faiths, mindfulness provides tools to experience inner balance and purpose.

Not only does mindfulness, through its focus on self-knowledge, create a deeper understanding of our inner selves; it also expands our interpersonal connection with others as we become more compassionate, empathetic, and aware.

As our understanding of self and others leads to multiple positive outcomes, we can easily draw the throughline to how cultivating this science in school settings benefits all participants in the learning process and ensures academic success. You would not be surprised to discover that researchers exploring the impact of mindfulness training on children and adolescents (as well as adults) have revealed a wide range of positive results including improvements in executive functioning, attention span, emotional and behavioral regulation, and immune function. Studies also

show this science substantially reduces burnout and the negative effects of vicarious trauma. Not bad for a practice that essentially costs nothing but gives you everything from health enhancement to more satisfaction and purpose!

What's the catch? you may ask. This practice is called a "practice" for a reason. Like anything else in life, we get better at what we rehearse. Mindfulness requires motivation, intention, and action to cultivate this state in our lives. It is not a magic pill.

If you're anything like me, you most likely will feel more comfortable getting the motivation, intention, and action in place if you see the science and research beforehand, which is why the first chapters of this book systematically produce the scientific validation required to both understand and accept these practices as valuable and worthy of teaching our students and ourselves.

This book is a much-needed road map for educators who instinctively know that they must teach more than academics. It provides a wealth of self-help tools for teachers, students, families, and others. Most importantly, it engages us as educators to implement these practices ourselves, to meet the changing needs of modern education, even as we realize that all of us deserve a chance to learn more about ourselves and to experience the mind-body harmony that these practices support. This is all a part of the "joy factor," to shine—to feel the internal glow of being in sync with our breath, moment by moment, day by day, year after year, for a lifetime.

—Ruschelle S. Reuben  
Chief of Teaching, Learning, and Schools  
Montgomery County Public Schools

# Preface

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*Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being Through Meditation, Mindfulness, and Movement* is intended as a practical guide to help educators use mindfulness, yoga, and meditation with virtual, hybrid, and in-person classrooms. This book builds on the authors' collective experience in teaching yoga, mindfulness, and meditation, including Krishna Kaur's remarkable journey delivering Y.O.G.A. for Youth™ around the world; Christine Mason's 20 years of teaching yoga, and connecting to education through Heart Centered Learning®; Jeff Donald's experience designing and coordinating a districtwide mindfulness yoga program; Michele Rivers Murphy's use of mindfulness and Heart Centered Learning in schools throughout the United States; and Valerie Brown's experience in facilitating mindfulness leadership and coaching mindful leaders.

In *Visioning Onward* (2020), Christine Mason and coauthors Paul Liabenow and Melissa Patschke explain that “building a shared vision begins by seeing clearly and creatively. It involves painting an inspiring and clear picture of what you see and seek to create. . . . Engagement, sustained effort, and improvement are hallmarks of achieving an established goal through visioning” (p. 144). Creating a vision for a compassionate school takes time, energy, and effort. Staff, students, and families must be involved.

In 2019, in a blog on the Center for Educational Improvement (CEI) website, Meghan Wenzel said:

By incorporating opportunities for students to develop emotional intelligence, resilience, and self-love, you are teaching them invaluable life skills that will serve them well inside and outside the classroom. When students feel understood and valued, they become more confident in their abilities and perform better. When they feel more comfortable in their own skin, they are more content—they are able to form deeper relationships and connections, which is crucial for healthy development. Fostering an open, welcoming, and accepting environment will lend itself to happy and healthy students who are ready and eager to learn. (Wenzel, 2019a)

Wenzel's article is one of many that CEI staff and interns have written describing how to create compassionate school communities. This work began in 2009, when CEI was first incorporated, and has continued with annual meetings of principals and other leaders, research projects, and

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**This book began as a vision for using tools to uplift students, promote and encourage self-care, and help students refocus to improve their ability to concentrate, engage in critical thinking, and make better decisions.**  
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activities to further substantiate both the need and the process for developing compassionate schools. When Mason, Liabenow, and Patschke addressed visioning in 2020, they referenced compassionate schools, using the term *Heart Centered Learning*<sup>®</sup>, and referred to a “conscious effort to refocus our schools and school cultures so that students become immersed in environments that consider social-emotional well-being and the needs of self and others” (p. 1). Mason, Rivers Murphy, and Jackson (2020), in their book *Mindful School Communities*, described a heart centered school community as “a compassionate school community that balances well-being and learning” (p. 2). We see mindful breath, yoga movements, and meditation as integral components in building heart centered communities, communities engaged in Heart Centered Learning<sup>®</sup>.

*Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* is a book that has been waiting in the wings for an audience. We knew we couldn’t introduce it too soon, fearing perhaps school leaders would dismiss it as not related enough to education and learning. We also realized that, as with any new adventure, success usually doesn’t happen overnight. In our earlier books we cautioned readers to practice first before sharing our strategies with others. The success we seek from mindfulness practice often begins with small gains—a student who is a tad more attentive, youth who smile as they reflect on *their* community, teachers whose worlds open up almost into a new dimension with longer breaths and greater connectedness between their heads and their hearts.

In 2020, the need for mindful breath work, yoga movements, and meditation was great. As so much of the world faced the gloom and doom of COVID-19, as so many educators truly wondered if their district’s plan was really so wise, and as so many families struggled in their makeshift home schools, we realized the time for *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* was right. We knew that this book needed to transcend boundaries. It shouldn’t be another yoga manual or another book on mindful classrooms. Instead, there was a serious need for a book that had (a) background research providing evidence of the importance of mind–body connections, yoga, and meditation; (b) practical suggestions that educators could pick up and follow to guide students through yoga and meditation activities; and (c) evidence demonstrating that schools can do this—that schools are beginning to implement what we are recommending.

## RESILIENCE AND HEALING IN THE MOMENT: MINDFULNESS

With the disruption and tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic, we all are experiencing much change, loss, and suffering. Educators are challenged to connect with students, facilitate academic learning, and give students

meaningful educational experiences, even as we adapt to changing criteria for physical distancing.

Even in the best of times, reaching the diverse needs of many students requires skilled and talented educators. During 2020, however, the difficulties we encountered were multiplied tenfold. Schools had to find adequate online programs to teach academics, get equipment and virtual access to students, consider scheduling, and figure out what students could do independently. Many educators worked extra hours bringing food to families and seeking ways to help those most in need. Yet, with all the difficulties, we have uncovered an opportunity to help students and families heal and build resilience.

When under extreme or prolonged stress, individuals often become anxious, hypervigilant, distrustful, and uneasy. Children and adults alike who are impacted by trauma may experience nightmares, have difficulty sleeping, or become depressed or withdrawn (Lieberman & Knorr, 2007). Around the world today, we are seeing multiple examples of both acute trauma and posttraumatic stress disorders. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 wildfires raged out of control, floods and hurricanes left hundreds homeless, and lives were lost not only to the coronavirus but to police brutality, racially motivated violence, violence occurring at peaceful protests, and accidental drug overdoses among those addicted to opioids as well. Stress and trauma surround us, not only in our own communities but also on our screens and in the media, day in and day out—without respite.

Educators and families can use the tools presented in *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* to maintain a healthy balance in the midst of the current chaos, uncertainty, and anxiety. During times of turmoil, educators are able to help students and families heal in the moment, assisting their transition from unhealthy or dysfunctional to healthy or functional coping and resilience (Figley & McCubbin, 2016; Vaughn-Coaxum et al., 2018). Whether we face a catastrophic pandemic or smaller and more localized tragedies, educators have an opportunity to foster the protective factors, and even to *be* the protective factors, that students and families need to become more resilient (Mason et al., 2021).

Both 2020 and 2021 have been challenging for all of us, and the impact on students has to be profound. They have had to adjust to receiving instruction in virtual settings. For those who have been able to return to face-to-face learning, the school setting and day look very different from the past.

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**Educators play a crucial role in promoting mental health and well-being. At the very heart of students' resilience is often an educator who plays a consistent, protective, and supportive role in their lives.**  
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## TEACHERS PROVIDING CALM LEADS TO STUDENTS EAGER TO LEARN

*Linda Cleary, a teacher for students with special needs at Fairfax County Public Schools, describes how she has used yoga and movement during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

I teach in a public elementary school to a class of students with special needs in a designation called noncategorical. Along with two instructional assistants, I provide special education services to students with a wide variety of needs. We teach students with autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, and learning as well as physical disabilities.

During these challenging times, I felt it was important to provide a sense of calm and grounding for our students. Many of these students have a familiarity with yoga, so allowing for time within the instructional day provided a much-needed respite and restoration, which is important to learning.

I use yoga and movement each day when teaching in my classes. We use yoga not only to stretch our bodies but also to stretch our minds. Yoga helps us describe concepts like large and small, near and far, and up and down. It helps us learn and retain common sight words like *fly*, *go*, *see*, *and*, *stop*, and many more, by getting the movement into our muscle memory. We use our bodies to show letters, numbers, and shapes and to communicate feelings. Yoga is a fun way to assist students who are on the autism spectrum and those who have intellectual disabilities with imitation of movement and using visuals, providing a concrete guide to follow. Movement and hand signals are useful methods of expression for young students who become overstimulated with excessive use of words and language.

Many of these students have an aptitude for skills in the physical arena. They are eager to try new yogic positions, especially when paired with a vivid picture of the positions and movements. They are especially popular and inspiring when they align with animal stances and activity!

### HOW TO USE CULTIVATING HAPPINESS, RESILIENCE, AND WELL-BEING

Teachers, therapists, and others can use *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* in their classrooms and schools in any number of ways. This book connects yoga, meditation, and mindfulness to the academic curriculum

and serves as a tool to enhance student alertness, focus, and learning. The activities can easily be adapted or used for before- or after-school programs or in physical education classes. However, the activities also can be woven throughout the academic school day, with various yogic practices, breath work, meditation, and mindfulness skills inserted during key transition points, such as five fingers that point to key parts of the day: (1) transitioning into school for the day (virtual/in-person), (2) before morning academics, (3) after lunch, (4) before afternoon academics, and (5) before transitioning home/end of school day. *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* can also be used districtwide, as Jeff Donald suggests, as a resource for teachers to learn to implement the techniques we recommend.

In 2014, when the CEI published *Heart Beaming*, leaders at the CEI began talking with educators around the country about the possibility for brief “brain breaks,” where students are given opportunities to get up and stretch, do some breath work, and/or engage in a brief meditation (Mason & Banks, 2014). We noticed that when schools implemented these and related practices, often students were less disruptive, more focused, and more engaged with their learning. So not only were students able to stay tuned in to teachers for longer periods of time, but they also participated to a greater degree, asking questions and sometimes even learning at a deeper level.

When we look at the neurobiology that supports techniques such as these brain breaks, this makes sense.

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 The activities also can be woven throughout the academic school day, with various yogic practices, breath work, meditation, and mindfulness skills inserted during key transition points.  
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## GLOSSARY

The following Glossary (Figure 0.1) was designed to help you understand some terms we will be using throughout this book.

Figure 0.1 • Glossary

**Breath work:** Breath work includes a variety of specific breathing techniques that are practiced to gain control over one’s breath to help regulate emotions, increase lung capacity, and calm oneself.

**Energy fields:** Yoga-mindfulness-meditation impacts our awareness of energy both within our bodies and surrounding our bodies.

**Equanimity:** Equanimity refers to a balanced mental attitude or quality of mind, with neutral, unbiased reactions to things. With equanimity, an individual experiences all events with a calm and stable attitude and a sense of inner peace (Desbordes et al., 2015; Juneau et al., 2020; Wallace, 2010).

**Executive functioning:** From a neurological perspective, executive functioning is the aspect of brain function that involves the conscious control of thought, action, and emotion. The three main categories of executive functioning are working memory, cognitive flexibility, and inhibitory control. Often referred to as the “management system of the brain,” executive functioning controls many of our everyday skills such as paying attention, starting and organizing tasks, and understanding another person’s point of view. Executive functions are controlled by the frontal lobes of the brain, particularly in the prefrontal cortex (Zelazo et al., 2018).

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**Kriya:** A kriya is a yoga set and includes a sequence of yoga postures with breath work and meditations incorporated into the set.

**Meditation:** Meditation is “a set of techniques that are intended to encourage a heightened state of awareness and focused attention. Meditation is also a consciousness-changing technique that has been shown to have a wide number of benefits on psychological well-being” (Cherry, 2020). With meditation, the mind is stilled, and a sense of relaxation and calmness occurs.

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is “the process by which we go about deepening our attention and awareness, refining them, and putting them to a greater practical use in our lives” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Mindfulness centers on the fundamental principle of being “awake” fully, with all senses attuned to one’s surroundings and present state of mind. Mindfulness expert Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) discusses the practice of mindfulness as “examining who we are . . . questioning our view of the world and our place in it . . . cultivating some appreciation for the fullness of each moment we are alive. Most of all, it has to do with being in touch.” This practice involves a deep commitment to attention and awareness, requiring us to look inward to help us see more clearly.

**Self-care:** Self-care involves “providing adequate attention to one’s own physical and psychological wellness” (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). Self-care looks different for everyone—while one person might wind down by taking a yoga class, another might enjoy a spa day or simply a cup of tea and an early bedtime. While it may seem like a luxury to practice self-care, it is truly essential to one’s well-being. When we are too wrapped up in work, family responsibilities, financial stressors, or anything else weighing on our minds, we tend to put our own needs last. This can cause more than just exhaustion. Neglecting our needs can have long-term mental and physical health complications. Establishing a solid self-care routine is not only good for one’s health, but it might actually improve productivity in other areas of one’s life.

**Self-regulation:** Self-regulation is the process of controlling one’s behavior by self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement (American Psychological Association, 2020a). Self-monitoring involves keeping a record of one’s behavior, while self-evaluation consists of analyzing that information and assessing its value. Through self-reinforcement, an individual might reward oneself for appropriate behavior or for attaining a goal. Self-regulation is an essential skill in the social world, as it informs us how we relate to ourselves and others, and whether or not we are internalizing social norms (Berger, 2011).

**Yoga movements:** Krishna Kaur (2006) describes yoga as “a science of self-development and self-awareness through the alignment of body, mind, and sound—a science of personal union, balancing the body, mind, and spirit” (p. 1). Yoga is a holistic system of mind-body practices for mental and physical health. The practice of yoga includes eight limbs: (1) ethical standards and sense of integrity, including nonviolence and truthfulness; (2) self-discipline and meditation; (3) the physical postures; (4) breath and breath work; (5) inner growth, withdrawing from a reliance on the physical world; (6) focusing attention on a single point; (7) uninterrupted flow of consciousness with meditation; and (8) operating at our highest frequency and potential. Specific yoga classes or programs may focus on one or more of these limbs.

Many yoga programs for children share a common goal of teaching four basic elements of yoga: (1) physical postures, (2) breathing exercises, (3) relaxation techniques, and (4) mindfulness and meditation practices. The programs also teach a variety of additional educational, social-emotional, and didactic techniques to enhance students’ mental and physical health and improve their behavior.

**CULTIVATING HAPPINESS, RESILIENCE, AND WELL-BEING: THE BOOK**

*Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* is designed for teachers, therapists, and yoga teachers who are collaborating with schools and district-level mindfulness coordinators. It will also be useful to behavioral health therapists, community health and mental health providers, and other members of educational support teams.

As you start to read through *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being*, remember it is one thing to *read* about yoga-mindfulness-meditation and another thing to actually *do* the recommended practices.

It may take several months to work your way through the chapters, implementing practices as your comfort level grows.

*Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* is organized into three major sections: the Introduction, the Five Cs, and Leadership. The Introduction (Chapters 1–4) includes, in addition to an introductory overview, a few basic recommendations to get you started, information on teacher stress and teacher practice, and strategies to organize space, materials, and instruction. In the introduction to the Five Cs (Chapter 5) and each of the Five Cs chapters (Chapters 6–10)—focused on consciousness, compassion, confidence, courage, and community—we describe yoga, meditation, and mindfulness activities that support the individual components. In the Leadership chapters (Chapters 11 and 12), we bring you ideas for leadership, mindfulness coaching, and collaboration, whether you are leading from within a school or a district or through regional, national, or international involvement.

Each chapter refers to related activities for academic learning for the Five Cs and Heart Centered Learning, with references to in-classroom, virtual, and hybrid learning. High-quality photos and graphics are included throughout the book, and/or readers are provided online access to these.

Incorporated into *Cultivating Happiness, Resilience, and Well-Being* are each of the following:

- Teacher notes, suggested yoga sets, breath work, mantras, meditations, and home practices, as well as explanations around the connection to the Five Cs and Heart Centered Learning.
- Recommendations to help teachers guide student exercises, including how to help students improve postures and common accommodations that can increase student buy-in and engagement, keeping advanced students interested while helping students who may struggle with an exercise.

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**Give yourself time to read, reflect, practice, and gain a sense of comfort with the exercises and activities.**  
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- Suggested resources and apps that support our recommendations.
- Activities (yoga sets, meditations, and breath work), with a discussion of appropriateness for various age levels (pre-K to high school) and circumstances.
- A suggested “curricular context” and suggestions for integrating yoga-meditation-mindfulness into the school day.
- Examples of how the authors and others have applied these practices in their lives and in their instruction.
- A description of options for teachers, teacher preparation, or coordination with local yoga and meditation teachers.
- Suggested references for online apps and videos that can complement activities in each chapter.
- Data on implementation in Maryland and elsewhere, including information on number of teachers trained, impact on students, student and teacher opinions of effectiveness, and practical hints for infusing aspects of the program throughout the school day.

To guide your reading, look for the following features:

1. Key Principles
2. Story Boxes
3. Info Boxes
4. My Practice Boxes
5. Online Resources

Additionally, within each chapter is a graphic organizer that gives users ideas to guide lessons in that chapter and recommended adaptations, as well as a space to record any notes the user may wish to consider when implementing the suggested activities. The Curriculum Integration Planner, available online with a sample shown as follows in Figure 0.2, includes blank rows so you can insert your own material.

Figure 0.2 • Sample Curriculum Integration Planner

LESSON	GRADE LEVEL	SUBJECT/ CONTEXT	ADAPTATION/NOTES
SAMPLE			<i>Place a stuffed animal on each child's belly.</i>
<i>Compassion/ Posture and Movement</i>	<i>Pre-K</i>	<i>Story time</i>	<i>The child gives the animal a “ride” so that the stuffed animal moves like a roller coaster as the child inhales and exhales.  A useful activity before nap time; a good calming activity.</i>





## KEY PRINCIPLES

**Chapter 1:** Teaching and practicing mindful breath work, yoga movements, and meditations in schools can strengthen self- and community care. Their efficacy in schools is supported by substantial neuroscientific research, an understanding of anatomy and physiology, and a growing body of knowledge demonstrating their value in alleviating stress, enhancing executive functioning, and advancing happiness and well-being for children and adults.

**Chapter 2:** Metacognition, focus, learning, and healing will be accelerated when mindful breath work, meditation, and yoga are infused throughout the day.

**Chapter 3:** Teacher stress can be alleviated through mindfulness, yoga, and meditation.

**Chapter 4:** Yoga and meditation can bring a sense of peace and calmness to your classroom. A few strategic considerations will enhance the yoga-mindfulness-meditation experience for you and your students.

**Part II:** The Five Cs: consciousness, compassion, confidence, courage, and community are foundational to cultivating happiness and well-being.

**Chapter 5:** To build consciousness, compassion, confidence, courage, and community takes intentionality, perseverance, and collaboration.

**Chapter 6:** Conscious awareness is the basis for understanding self, others, and our world.

**Chapter 7:** An open heart can bring healing and compassion to ourselves, each other, our communities, and our world.

**Chapter 8:** Confidence is the key to sustainable success.

**Chapter 9:** True courage comes from grit that is integrated into our psyches in a healthy way. It is found in a willingness to embrace challenges and face our vulnerabilities and in accepting the vulnerabilities of others.

**Chapter 10:** We are a part of many communities: our school community, neighborhood, nation, and global community. Individual and collective self-care is essential for our well-being, sense of purpose, and sustainable future.

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**Chapter 11:** Mindfulness supports development of the “inner faculty” of leadership. Leadership is more about emotional intelligence skills of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, such as fostering trustworthiness, and less about positional authority. As leaders face growing complexity, mindfulness supports greater calm, stability, and responsive decision making.

**Chapter 12:** To effectively grow a mindfulness program, schools or districts must invest in mindful leadership.



## ONLINE RESOURCES

Visit <https://resources.corwin.com/CultivatingHappiness>

**Online Resource 0.1** Curriculum Integration Planner Blank Form