**Name**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ **Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Homeroom**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***Mindfulness, Anger and the Brain***[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Directions:** Read the following article and answer the questions that follow.

Negative emotions can be difficult to deal with. Fear and anger can hit us unexpectedly and when we cannot step back enough from the moment to understand the different ways we might respond, we can be thrown off balance and react badly. Learning to anticipate our emotions and thinking in advance about how to react is called ‘mindfulness.’

Here’s what science has to say about it.

An impulsive reaction, triggered by emotions like fear or anger, rises up from the amygdala and hippocampus—the most ancient parts of our brain. These parts evolved to respond to ensure our survival in threatening situations. They shape our instincts, you might say, and instincts happen fast. They have to. Otherwise they could not help you survive.

The pre-frontal cortex (PFC) of the brain evolved more recently from a biological perspective. Only advanced species like humans have this part of their brain, and it has become more and more important as we have evolved as a species. For this reason the PFC is associated with maturity wisdom and adulthood. The pre-frontal cortex can respond with reflection and thoughtfulness. It is capable of showing judgment, over-over-ruling the instinct to lash out and fight for example, with the ability to take actions that are smarter in the long run. At least it can do these things if—and only if--we give it time to act.

Mindfulness diminishes the power of the amygdala’s instant reactions and replaces them with the wiser decisions of the PFC. But mindfulness is a skill and takes practice- you build your skill at taking a moment to understand your reactions and think about them.

…

A basic mindfulness exercise is to focus on breathing. Being able to control breathing can help you become less reactive when stressed. Focused breathing helps calm the body by slowing the heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and improving focus. Controlled breathing can override the fight, flight, or freeze response set off by the amygdala, and instead enable mindful behavior. Interestingly, athletes often use it before competition for just this reason.

***Mindfulness, Anger and the Brain* (Continued)**

When you feel overwhelmed, stop for a moment, take a few deep breaths and exhale slowly. Then try to name the emotion you are experiencing and what you should do about it. “I know I’m angry now. I should take my time and think slowly.” That’s simple but powerful. Just naming the emotion you are experiencing can help you respond more positively.

Focus on your breath for five breaths. See where you can feel your breath most easily—your stomach, your chest, or your nose.

Control your breathing for a short while. Do deep belly breathing for five breaths. Put your hands on your belly and feel how it expands as you breathe in.

Multiple short mindful moments per day trains your brain to become more mindful even when you don’t try to be mindful. In other words, the more you train, the easier it will be to be mindful and self-soothe when you’re actually in a stressful situation.

**SELF-TALK**

Self-talk is also part of mindfulness. Self-talk is using simple phrases to remind yourself of what to do. Here are some examples:

* “I don’t need to prove myself in this situation. I can stay calm.”
* “As long as I keep my cool, I’m in control of myself.”
* “No need to doubt myself; what other people say doesn’t matter. I’m the only person who can make me mad or keep me calm.”
* “My anger is a signal. It’s time to talk to myself and relax.”
* “I don’t need to feel threatened here.”
* “Nothing says I have to be competent and strong all the time. It’s okay to feel unsure or confused.”
* “It’s impossible to control other people and situations. The only thing I can control is myself and how I express my feelings.”
* “It’s okay to be uncertain or insecure sometimes. I don’t need to be in control of everything and everybody.”
* “If people criticize me, I can survive that. Nothing says I have to be perfect.”
* “It’s okay to make mistakes.”
* “People are going to act the way they want to, not the way I want them to.”
* “I feel angry. That must mean I have been hurt, scared or have some other threatening feeling underneath the anger.”

***Mindfulness, Anger and the Brain* Reflection Questions**

**Directions:** In your neatest handwriting and in complete sentences, answer the following questions:

Describe the role of the amygdala when we are in stressful situations?

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Describe the role of the pre-frontal cortex in stressful situations?

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1. What does “practicing mindfulness” help us do in stressful situations?

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Give an example of a mindfulness exercise from the article. Do you think it would work for you? Why or why not?

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1. [**http://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-and-the-brain-how-to-explain-it-to-children/**](http://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-and-the-brain-how-to-explain-it-to-children/) By [Chris Bergstrom](http://blissfulkids.com/author/chris/) accessed 3/15/18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)