

Helping Children Cultivate Resilience During Stressful Times

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Objectives



Consider different types of stress and how they affect children



Think about resilience



Describe how a mindfulness-informed, social and emotional learning approach boosts resilience



Highlight specific research-based strategies for promoting resilience during this unusual time

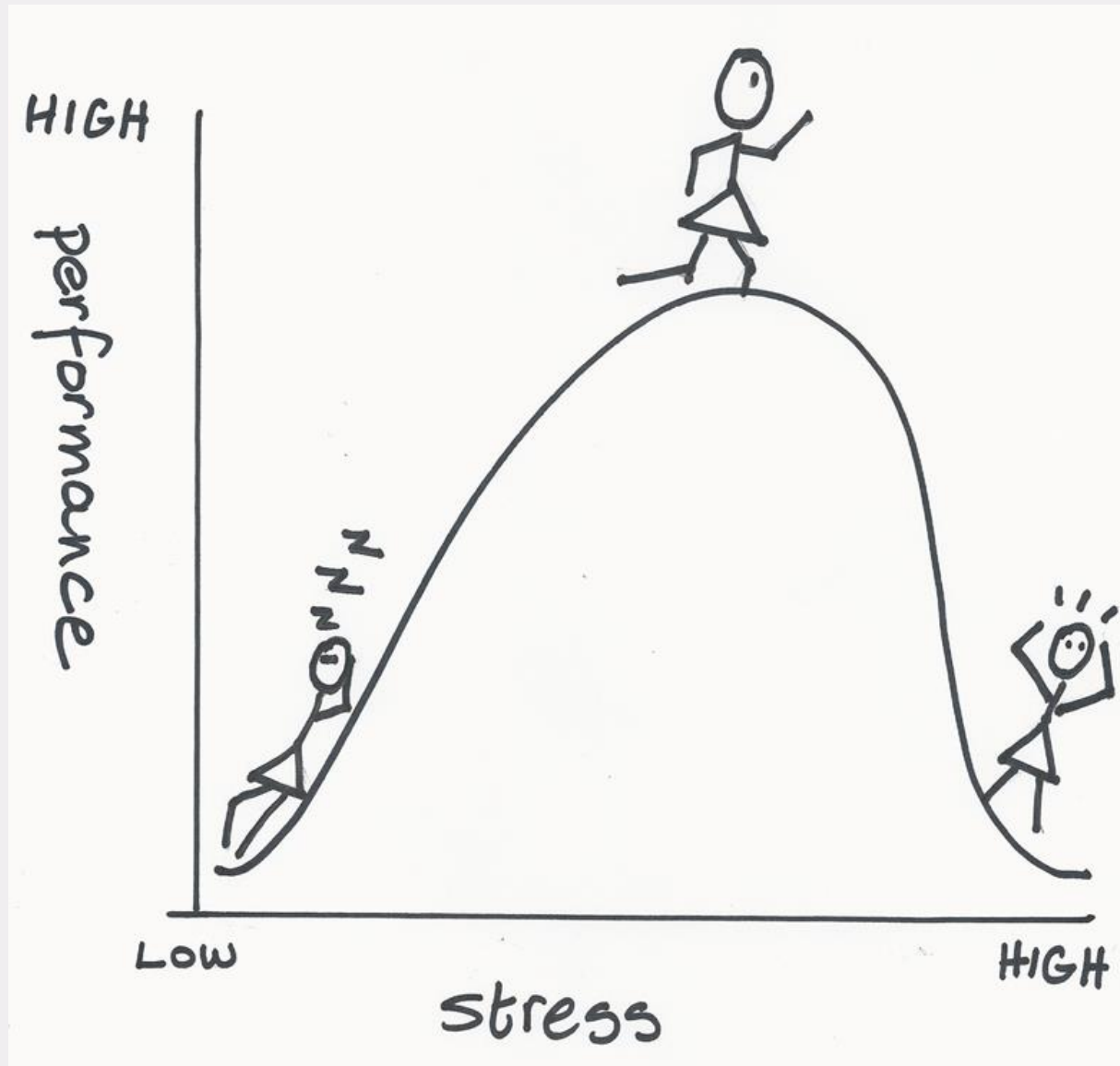
Is stress a bad thing?



How Brains Develop

- Sequential, predictable development
- Develop from the bottom up
- Early experience affects architecture (through epigenetic processes)
- Use it or lose it process





Positive Stress, Tolerable Stress and Toxic Stress/Traumatic Stress



POSITIVE: When young child is protected by supportive relationships with adults, they learn to cope with everyday challenges and stress

TOLERABLE: When there are more serious difficulties - loss of a loved one, natural disaster, frightening injury - buffered by caring adult helping child to adapt - damaging effects are mitigated

TOXIC/TRAUMATIC: Strong, frequent, prolonged adverse experiences such as extreme poverty, repeated abuse, without adult support



RESILIENCE



How resilient will children be in the context of the current pandemic?

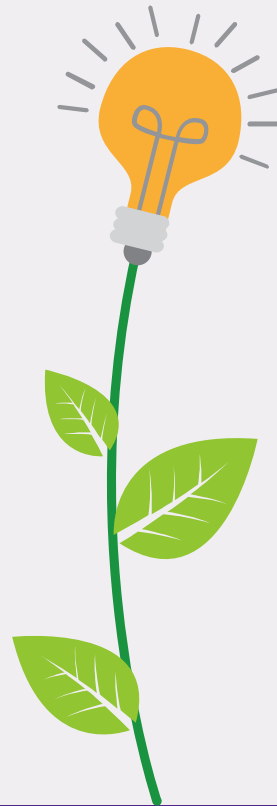


How can we promote resilience and self-regulation right now?

Have to recognize impact of current circumstances on us as adults



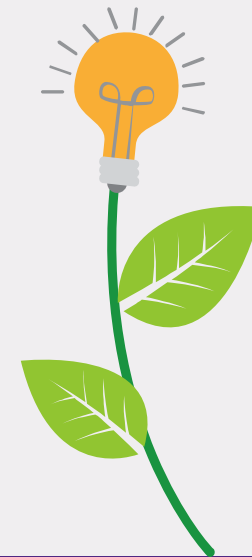
Time for compassion



NOT the time to revolutionize your parenting and routines



Can look at incorporating some research-based strategies



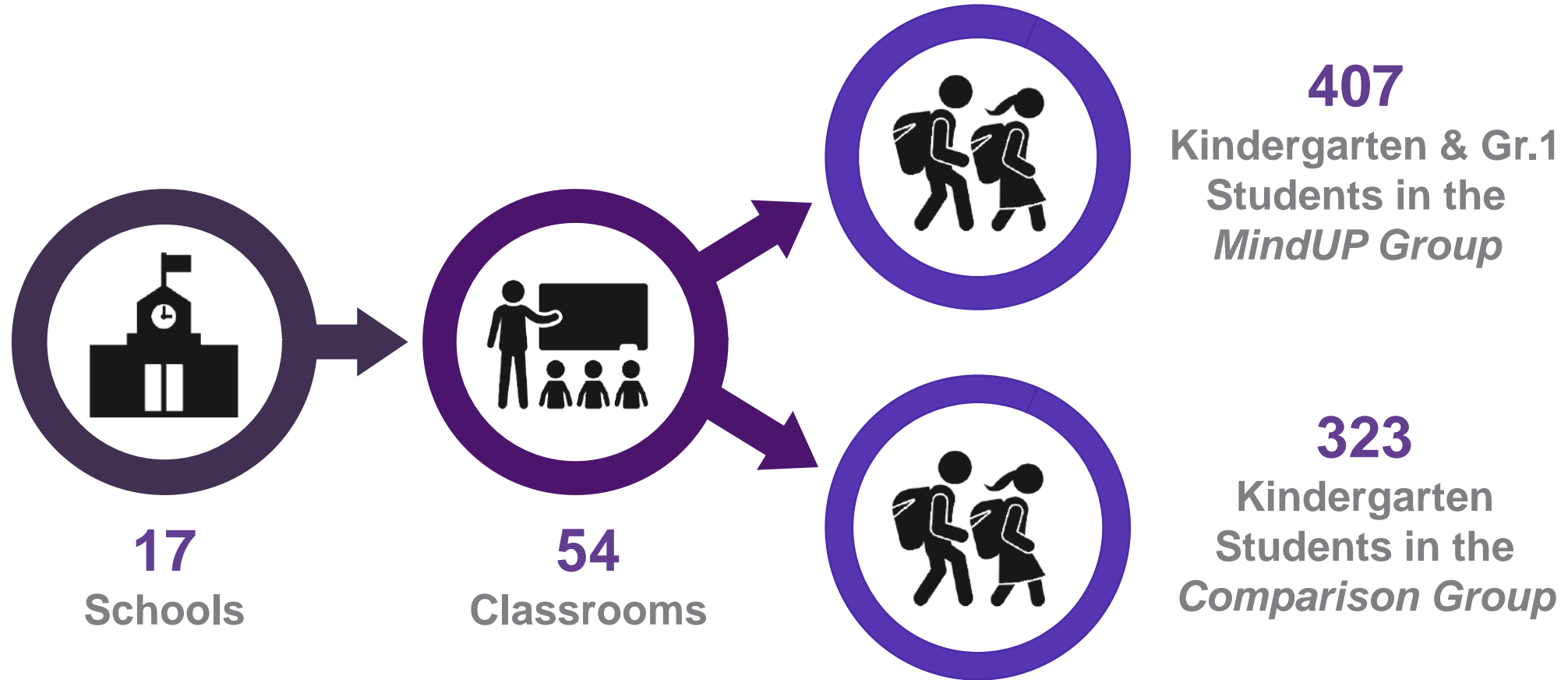
What is **MINDUP**TM

- Social emotional learning program
- 15 lessons
- Integration into daily teaching practice
- Importance of brain breaks





MindUP Research



Strategy 1: Understanding how our brains work

“Kids love learning about their brain and how it works. I even got some feedback from a parent that said their child has been discussing his amygdala with them.”



Understanding our brains: Resources

Young children:

- Cosmic kids (e.g., the Owl and the Guard Dog)
 - <https://youtu.be/so8QN9an3t8>
- GoNoodle

Teens:

- Many good articles online
- <https://www.heysigmund.com/the-adolescent-brain-what-they-need-to-know/>

Parents:

- <https://www.multiplyingconnections.org/become-trauma-informed/amazing-teen-brain>



Strategy 2: Breathing / Mindful Awareness



Mindfulness-based interventions

- Relatively recent field of research
- Couple of meta-analyses have looked across studies and domains
- Improvements in
 - Behaviour
 - Executive functioning
 - Working memory
 - Mental health



Mindful awareness: Incorporating into daily routines

- Breathing breaks
- Animal breathing
- Online apps (e.g., Headspace, Calm)
- www.mindfulnessforteens.com



Strategy 3: Practicing Gratitude



How complicated are gratitude interventions?

Gratitude
condition

Hassles
condition

Control

Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(2), 213-233.



How complicated are gratitude interventions?

Gratitude condition

“There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful about. Think back over the past day and write down on the lines below up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.”

Hassles condition

“Hassles are irritants — things that annoy or bother you. They occur in various areas of life, including our family, friendships, school, health, and so on. Think back over the past day and, on the lines below, list up to five hassles that occurred in your life.”

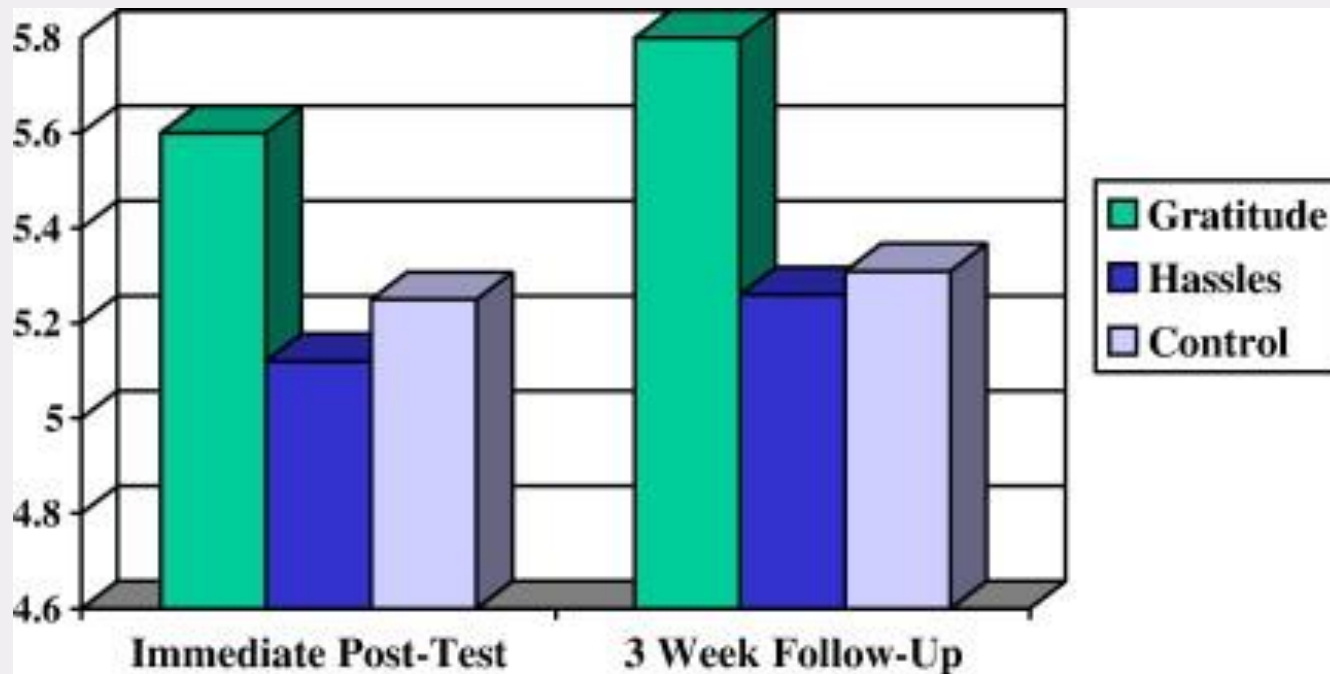
Control

Completed measures only

Froh, J. J., Sefick, W. J., & Emmons, R. A. (2008). Counting blessings in early adolescents: An experimental study of gratitude and subjective well-being. *Journal of School Psychology, 46*(2), 213-233.



Impact of gratitude intervention



Gratitude: Incorporating into daily routines

- Sharing gratitude at the meal table
- Gratitude journal
- Gratitude letter
- Identifying specific things that you are grateful for
- Nice bedtime routine



Summary



Current pandemic is not the time to try to introduce huge changes to routines



Small daily practices can help foster resilience

We can support children's wellbeing by



- Learning how stress affects our bodies and how our brains work
- Supporting breathing practice
- Encouraging gratitude behaviours



All of these help us too!





For more information

- <https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/>
- For more information about our projects or to access the slides

- Contact: Claire Crooks ccrooks@uwo.ca

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