MEDITATION ACTIVITY

BRAIN BREAK FOR GRADES 6-8

Title: Meditation Break Activity
Setting: In Classroom or on Video Conference
Time Frame: 20 Minutes
Paired Dana Foundation Fact Sheets: 6th-8th Grade How Does the Brain Work?

ACTIVITY DETAILS

Teacher Background:

Meditation is the practice of focusing one's mind in order to sharpen attention and overall awareness. A plethora of studies suggest that one way to take care of your brain is to meditate. Specifically, experts agree that meditation can help lessen anxiety and depression, tamp down chronic pain, improve memory and attention, and reduce inflammation. So how does this activity do so much good for our brain?

Scientists have recently begun studying what happens in the brain during meditation. One group found that the brains of long-time meditators, such as Tibetan monks, showed decreases in activity in a network of areas associated with rest and mind-wandering, including the medial prefrontal cortex and the posterior cingulate cortex. Decreases in the activity of this network suggest the brains of long-term meditators can remain at rest in the immediate moment with less effort and less daydreaming.

Another group found increases in white matter after just a few weeks of meditation. White matter is made up of brain cell (neuron) projections, known as axons, wrapped in a substance called myelin sheath. The myelin sheath acts as insulation, increasing the speed of electrical signals between neurons. This increase in white matter could be due to more myelin around each axon or a higher density of myelinated axons. Researchers suggest that these increases help improve connectivity by facilitating faster and more efficient communication between different brain regions. Specifically, increased white matter was seen in connections from the anterior cingulate to other parts of the brain. The anterior cingulate is a part of the brain involved in managing attention. In particular, the connection of the anterior cingulate to the limbic system, an area associated with emotions, may help explain why meditation has been linked to improved mood, reduced anxiety, and an increased ability to control our emotions, thoughts, or behaviors.

Procedure:

1. Either have students read, or read aloud, paired Dana Foundation Fact Sheet: 6th-8th Grade How Does the Brain Work? Downloadable here: https://on.dana.org/factsheets-kids. (5 min)
2. Show the accompanying PowerPoint slide, and explain how meditation affects the brain. (5 min)
3. Have each student pick a comfortable, quiet spot to sit either in their chair or on the floor.
4. Play the following guided five-minute meditation either on Zoom or in-person: https://www.headspace.com/meditation/5-minute-meditation. (5 min)
5. Have students slowly stand and take a quick stretch. (1 min)
6. Do a quick verbal check-in and allow students to answer the open-ended question: What did you notice during the meditation? (5 min)