

Mindfulness in Schools Project (MiSP)

This summary is part of a series produced to support the implementation of the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-being. They are intended to help schools make informed decisions when choosing interventions and approaches to improve and promote mental well-being. The interventions and approaches reviewed are not endorsed by Welsh Government or Public Health Wales.

Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh

Key messages:

- **Learners:** The research suggests MiSP does not improve emotional or mental well-being for all learners but further research is needed.
- **Staff:** From the research we do not know if MiSP influences emotional or mental well-being for staff because the research was not conducted well.
- Our findings do not support the use of MiSP as a universal intervention. MiSP could be considered where a specific need is identified for individual learners who are older (mid-late teens), not at high risk of poor mental health, and with an interest in trying the technique and continuing practice at home.
- To deliver MiSP schools need teachers who are prepared to practice mindfulness regularly to deliver one of the age-appropriate programmes.
- A broader review on Mindfulness-based interventions can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

What is MiSP?

MiSP is an organisation that has a range of age-appropriate school-based interventions designed to promote mindfulness practice and develop emotional skills important to well-being. Mindfulness is a technique that involves taking notice of the present moment without judgement. Anyone can practice mindfulness and there are various mindfulness tools and programmes available for general use. The MiSP programme is specifically tailored for school-based delivery. The aim is to support learners to understand and regulate emotions.

There are 5 programmes designed to meet the needs of learners of primary and secondary settings as well as staff. The programme developers state it is a requirement for teachers delivering MiSP to have established their own mindfulness practice before delivering the programme to learners.

MiSP was developed by schoolteachers and mindfulness practitioners Richard Burnett and Chris Cullen in 2009. Further information about the programme is available from the [MiSP website](#).

What aspect(s) of well-being does MiSP intend to support?

MiSP encourages individuals to understand and manage their own emotions which is important to protect mental well-being. It also supports the development of relationships.

More information about mental well-being and the things that influence mental well-being can be found on the [Public Health Wales webpage](#).

How does MiSP influence a change in well-being?

The programme aims to develop several skills which support emotional and mental well-being. These include emotional awareness, which means knowing our own emotions and being able to manage them, as well as the ability to understand and empathise with others, and manage relationships. Through developing a sense of understanding in any given situation and the skills to manage in different circumstances, the intervention aims to support psychological well-being.

Theoretical models describe how a change in outcome might take place. MiSP is underpinned by the theory of self-related processing. The theory suggests that through taking notice of the present moment without judgement there is a change in sense of self. For example, this could be self-esteem or self-compassion.

What are the implications for schools?

Although MiSP is designed as a programme for all learners and staff, our findings do not support the use of MiSP as a universal intervention. The review found evidence that suggests the MiSP Dot B programme for secondary aged learners may be beneficial to some and harmful to others.

Schools should consider what needs they have in their school community, for example improving emotional awareness, and where targeted approaches may best meet individual needs. These may be identified within existing processes such as reviewing Schools Health Research Network (SHRN) data, whole school approach to emotional and mental well-being self-evaluation, knowledge of learner needs or in the school development plans. When considering what intervention or approaches may help, it is important to recognise that any one stand-alone programme may not fully meet the school's identified needs.

To embed MiSP schools would need to identify teachers who have an existing mindfulness practice or are motivated to develop an independent practice prior to participating in MiSP training. Schools should consider the number of staff required to deliver MiSP as there are programmes available for various age groups 3-6 years; 7-11 years; 9-14 years; 11-18 years and 18 years and over.

If already using MiSP, or planning to, schools should think about how they can monitor and evaluate the impact of MiSP against identified emotional and mental well-being priorities of the school community.

What do I need to know if I'm thinking of using MiSP?

Intended recipients	Designed as a universal programme which means it is aimed at everyone in school. This includes learners and staff.
Age range	3 years to adult There are five programmes available each with age specific activities and resources: Dots (3-6 years), Paws (7-11 years), Dot Breathe (9-14 years), Dot b (11-18 years), Dot begin (18 years and over).
Delivery method	It is usually delivered to a whole class or group of learners in specific age groups or stages of development.
Resource requirement	<p>Teachers: To deliver a MiSP programme teachers must have completed relevant prior learning or completed Dot begin with 2-3 months of individual mindfulness practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course detail: Dot begin, 8 x 90 minute online sessions. • Course cost: £225 per delegate. Supported places on Dot begin are automatically offered to those working or volunteering regularly in a state-funded school in the UK, the cost is £175 per person. • Further courses are available for experienced MiSP teachers. <p>3-6 years – Dots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Course: Teach Dots live online, over 4 days or 8 x 2 hour sessions. • Course Cost: £620 per delegate. • Intervention delivery: 3 sets of 10 x 10-20 minute sessions. <p>7-11 years – Paws b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Course: Teach Paws b. Live online over 4 days or 8 x 2 hours sessions. • Course cost: £620 per delegate. • Intervention delivery: 12 x 30-60 minute sessions (or 6 longer sessions). <p>9-14 year olds – Dot breathe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Course: Teach dot breathe. Live online over 1-day (or shorter session available). • Course Cost: £225 per delegate. • Intervention delivery: 4 x 30-60min sessions. <p>11-18 years – Dot b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Course: Teach Dot b. Live online over 4 days or 8 x 2 hour sessions. • Course cost: £620 per delegate. • Intervention delivery: 10 lessons at 40-60 minutes plus additional 4 lessons to further develop practice. <p>Resources: A copy of Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Finding Peace in a Frantic World by Mark Williams and Danny Penman.</p>
Language	All curriculum material is available in English. Welsh language curriculum material is available for Dot b, Paws b, Dots, and Dot breathe.

Note details are correct as of July 2023.
Further information available from the [MiSP Website](#).

What did we want to find out?

We wanted to find out whether MiSP improved emotional or mental well-being of learners and staff in the school community. To do this we were looking for published academic research that measured changes to outcome measures related to emotional or mental well-being.

What did we do?

We searched for academic research papers that looked at whether MiSP changed emotional or mental well-being outcomes.

We reviewed papers to identify key information which was summarised and presented to an expert panel. The panel included a range of professionals with experience in Education, Health, Policy and Academia. The panel met and agreed recommendations for this summary based on our evidence identified from the search.

Full details of the evidence review and expert panel decisions are available within the technical report which can be provided upon request. Please email:

hi-programme.support@wales.nhs.uk

What did we find?

We found 13 academic research papers that reviewed MiSP which reported findings for both learners and staff. The well-being outcomes measured within the evidence included well-being; depression; social-emotional regulation; behaviour; resilience; self-compassion; shape and weight concern; perceived stress; anxiety; and life satisfaction. As the results differed between learners and staff, the findings are presented separately.

Learners:

For learners we found that MiSP may not improve emotional or mental well-being but further research is needed. Universal programmes like MiSP are designed to support all learners within their age-appropriate categories. However, we found evidence that suggests MiSP does not improve emotional or mental well-being outcomes universally. The evidence found that the programme may help some learners but may be harmful to others. MiSP may be more effective for older age groups (14-15 years), for girls, and for those who practice mindfulness outside of the classroom. Whereas participating in MiSP may be ineffective, or potentially harmful, for learners aged 11 and under or those who were considered to have a higher risk of poor mental health. These groups reported a reduction in well-being and increased risk of depression. Further research is needed to better understand how MiSP affects different groups of learners.

Staff:

We do not know if MiSP influences emotional or mental well-being for staff. The papers reported reductions in stress levels and improvements in well-being, but we cannot be certain of these results as the studies were not conducted to a high standard.

What are the limitations of the evidence?

The research was often conducted over a short period, or was unable to follow up large numbers of participants over time. Therefore, it is difficult to see the long-term effect of the intervention. Often the programmes were not followed as designed by the developers, this also makes it difficult to draw any conclusions on how effective MiSP can be.

How up to date is this evidence?

Evidence published up to Autumn 2022 was included in this review.

Concluding Statement

For learners we found that MiSP may not improve emotional or mental well-being outcomes, and for some groups there may be a risk of harm.

For staff we do not know if MiSP influences emotional or mental well-being.

If thinking about using MiSP, schools should carefully consider the needs of their school population and who would be engaging with the programme. If already using MiSP, or planning to, schools should think about how they can monitor and evaluate the impact of MiSP against identified emotional and mental well-being priorities of the school community.

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Appendix 1: Review of Broader Evidence Base for Mindfulness-based Interventions

Background

It is recognised that MiSP is one programme within a wider context of mindfulness-based interventions available to use within the school community. During the expert panel discussion it was recognised that schools within Wales may use other mindfulness-based intervention. This supplementary information looks at broader evidence surrounding mindfulness for secondary school settings.

What did we want to find out?

We wanted to find out whether mindfulness-based interventions improved emotional or mental well-being of learners and staff in the school community. To do this we were looking for academic research that measured changes to outcome measures related to emotional or mental well-being.

What did we do?

A scoping exercise was completed to see whether there was any evidence already available that reviewed a broader range of mindfulness-based interventions.

What did we find out?

We found a review by Fulambarker et al. (2022) which looked at the available evidence for mindfulness-based interventions for adolescents. This is a meta-analysis, which means the authors have combined the statistical results of nine studies to provide an overall summary of the evidence. As this review already exists it was not necessary to conduct any further reviews and we are able to summarise the findings.

The meta-analysis aimed to review the effect of mindfulness-based interventions in school settings focussing on adolescents aged 12-14 years. Results suggest that school-based mindfulness interventions are effective for reducing stress in adolescents, but not for anxiety or depressive symptoms. The research suggests adolescents who are at risk of or have experience of anxiety or depression would need different support.

What are the limitations of the evidence?

The authors have identified the following limitations of the evidence. There are diverse learner groups within the studies. The impact of mindfulness-based interventions for learners who did have depression or anxiety were not specifically analysed. The studies analysed did not look at long-term use of mindfulness-based interventions in schools.

How up to date is this evidence?

Evidence published between 2001 and 2020 was included in the review, the review was published in 2022.

Concluding Statement

Mindfulness-based interventions for adolescent learners may help to reduce stress. However, for individuals with depression or anxiety, alternative support is required. Future research needs to understand long-term effects of mindfulness-based interventions.

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