Chapter 6

Finding a Way Forward:
Mindfulness as a Means to Stabilizing Mental Health Among Youth With Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Approximately four million children struggle daily with the challenges of anxiety in the United States. Unfortunately, this anxiety leads to additional implications for their physical health, psychological well-being, and academic performance. This chapter examines current research literature on youth anxiety and mindfulness to argue for the use of mindfulness techniques as a way that youth can self-administer stabilization strategies to address the adverse effects of anxiety. This argument unfolds in three sections. First, this chapter examines scholarship on youth anxiety, noting its prevalence, forms, and effects on youth. Second, this chapter argues for the efficacy of early intervention strategies among youth. Finally, this chapter explores scholarship on mindfulness techniques, arguing or their efficacy as a stabilizing technique for youth experiencing anxiety. This chapter concludes by noting the implications of these findings for teachers and school counselors who often serve as the frontline workers when identifying anxiety among youth.

INTRODUCTION

Youth currently face a multitude of challenges that contribute to the rising number of adolescents suffering from anxiety. The most common mental health disorder in the United States today is anxiety (Merikangas et al., 2010). Globally, 4% of the population suffers from anxiety, topping the list as the most prevalent mental health concern in the world (Ritchie & Roser, 2018). Some of the challenges that lead to high youth anxiety include societal pressure, parental pressure, or self-inflicted pressure both inside and outside the school setting. Approximately four million children struggle daily with the challenges of anxiety in the United States, and the number of diagnoses is rapidly increasing (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Anxiety affects all youth at some point and the ability to process and express anxiety becomes the focus of reaching a positive outcome. The societal environment fosters a lack of awareness and action about youth anxiety. When youth feel ignored and misunderstood, then the lack of interventions can result in the further escalation of anxiety and its effects in their lives (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).

Unfortunately, this rising problem of anxiety among youth leads to numerous additional adverse implications for their physical health, psychological well-being, academic performance, and personal relationships. Mindfulness techniques hold the potential to stabilize the emotional and psychological well-being of youth who experience these numerous and complex adverse effects of anxiety in their lives. This chapter, therefore, synthesizes the current research literature on the youth experience of anxiety and mindfulness to argue for the use of mindfulness techniques as a way that youth can self-administer stabilization strategies that can slow and even halt this progression of adverse outcomes related to anxiety. This argument, therefore, unfolds in three sections. First, this chapter examines current scholarship on anxiety among youth, noting its rising prevalence, the multitude of forms, and adverse effects. Second, this chapter argues for the efficacy of early intervention for stemming the snowballing adverse outcomes that anxiety can have in the lives of youth. Finally, this chapter explores current scholarship on mindfulness techniques, arguing for its efficacy as a stabilizing technique in the mental health of youth experiencing anxiety. This chapter concludes by noting the implications of these findings for teachers and school counselors who often serve as the frontline workers when identifying anxiety among youth.

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