

# Meditation in Schools

Mental Stillness is an evidence based meditation strategy aimed at providing young people in schools with a simplified, secular adaptation of meditation suitable for the school environment to enhance resilience and wellbeing.

Mental Stillness utilises a simple strategy developed as a result of extensive, unique research conducted in Australia as part of the Meditation Research Programme (now based at Sydney University's Department of Psychiatry).

Our research indicates that meditation offers dual benefits to educational organisations: first, as a primary prevention mental health strategy; second, as a strategy that facilitates learning by improving students' focus and engagement. It is a low cost intervention that most children find innately enjoyable. In addition, meditation works to complement other school and classroom strategies that may already be in place.

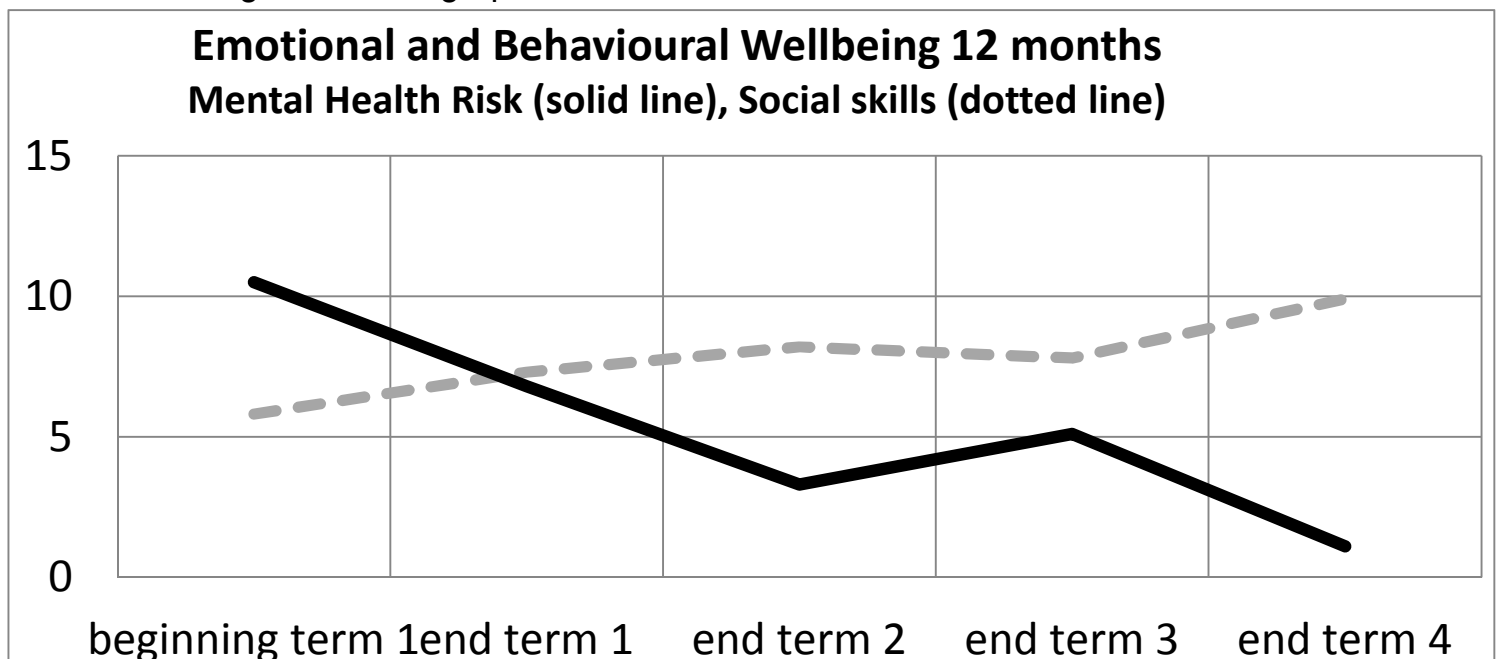
Meditation is authentically described as the sustained experience of the present moment in a state of mental silence. This experience is often reflected in children's descriptions of play, music, performance art, sport and other activities that are commonly described as involving "flow". Meditation can be understood as a highly refined method, developed over thousands of years of experimentation, to allow the practitioner to systematically tap into the benefits of this experiential state for ongoing health, wellbeing and personal growth.

Generally, a typical "lesson" involves practical exercises aimed at focusing the attention and enhancing awareness of the present moment, allowing the participant to effectively control negative thoughts and feelings.

Typical sessions can be from 15 to 45 mins in duration, depending on the school's timetable and availability of the instructors. We aim for a minimum of 2 contacts per week. The instructor uses a variety of different strategies that may involve visualisation, breathing, increased body awareness and posture, imaginary stories, affirmations.

Recently, we have completed a quality audit of 12 month programme conducted at a primary school in Sydney in which a full class of 3rd grade children (n=26) were taught mental stillness-based skills for 10 minutes every morning for a full year. Children were assessed by the class teacher using the SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire), a standardised and validated mental health risk scale.

By the end of the school year serial SDQ scores indicated an 80% reduction in mean mental health risk scores ( $p < 0.01$ ) and a 30% improvement in social skills scores ( $p < 0.01$ ). Qualitative feedback was also very encouraging, showing that children enjoyed the sessions and wanted more. The class teacher felt that the children were more calm and focused as a result of the exercise and was enthusiastic for the initiative to continue. Although initially concerned that teaching time would be lost as a result of the Mental Stillness sessions, she soon realised that the small loss of time was outweighed by the improvement in the children's level of engagement and cooperation with learning tasks. See graph below.



Our aim is to further develop and evaluate this initiative with a view to making it into a non-commercial resource for schools in the public and private sector.

**Further Information:**

[www.researchingmeditation.com.au](http://www.researchingmeditation.com.au)

[www.mentalstillness.org](http://www.mentalstillness.org)

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Dr Ramesh Manocha is a practising GP and researcher at the Discipline of Psychiatry, Sydney medical School, Sydney, Australia. His PhD focused on evidence based application of meditation to a wide variety of issues including work stress, quality of life, chronic disease, menopause and ADHD. He has recently completed an extensive systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials of meditation which is just one of his unique contributions to the field of meditation research. Ramesh is also recognised as a leading developer of professional education resources in the field of women's and children's health, mental health and adolescent medicine. He is frequently engaged in Australia and overseas as a speaker, teacher and research consultant.