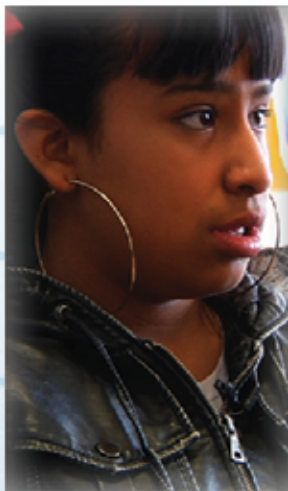


# Room to Breathe

## House Party TOOLKIT

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# FROM THE FILMMAKER

## FROM THE FILMMAKER

The American educational system today is obsessively focused on the acquisition and testing of external knowledge for children. Unfortunately, this has come at a great cost: neglect for the social and emotional education of the whole child.

However, since the mid-1990s, a variety of very effective social and emotional learning programs have been implemented in classrooms across the country. Backed up by major studies, these programs are shown to reduce anger and acting-out behavior, improve attention, learning, and grades, and increase happiness and emotional self-regulation in the students involved in them.

I made **Room to Breathe** to highlight one such program, based on a practice called “mindfulness,” implemented in several of the lowest-performing classrooms in the San Francisco Unified School District.

By hosting a screening of **Room To Breathe**, you will become familiar with mindfulness training, and have an opportunity to initiate a program to bring a social and emotional learning program into the classroom.

Thank you for hosting a screening of **Room To Breathe**.

Russell Long, Ph.D.



# ABOUT THE FILM & TOOLKIT

## About the Film

**Room to Breathe** is a surprising story of transformation as struggling kids in a San Francisco public middle school are introduced to the practice of mindfulness meditation. With students topping the district in disciplinary suspensions, and with overcrowded classrooms creating a nearly impossible learning environment, overwhelmed administrators are left with stark choices. Do they repeat the cycle of forcing tuned-out children to listen, or experiment with a set of age-old inner practices that may provide them with the social, emotional, and attentional skills that they need to succeed?

Run Time: 56 minutes

## About the Toolkit

This toolkit is intended to help you plan a screening of **Room to Breathe** and to strategize ways to bring mindfulness (or a similar program) to your local schools. Included are suggestions for:

- organizing your screening
- engaging participants in meaningful discussion
- using the film screening to raise funds
- turning ideas into action
- connecting with the movement.

After perusing this toolkit, if you still have questions about how best to cultivate mindfulness or other social and emotional learning programs in your community's schools, please send us an email. We're here to help!

In addition to the toolkit, we also offer more tools you may find useful, including a downloadable web banner, press release, blog post, and sign-in sheet. It's available on our website at [www.roomtobreathefilm.com](http://www.roomtobreathefilm.com).

# HOW TO HOST A SCREENING

Hosting a screening of **Room to Breathe** is both easy and fun. Some pre-planning in the weeks leading up to your screening will ensure a successful event with optimal turnout and support from your community.

## STEP 1. GETTING STARTED

At least three weeks before your event, you will want to begin planning the screening. Following are suggestions on how to best prepare, with a menu of options to support a successful screening.

### Set Goals

Setting goals will help ensure that you have a successful event. In your ideal scenario, what outcomes do you hope to achieve? What actions would you like your audience to take after “the lights come up”? Some ideas are:

- Form a Committee to work on bringing mindfulness to local schools.
- Raise funds to facilitate the training of at least one teacher in each of your community’s schools.
- Create awareness about the benefits of mindfulness and social and emotional learning to your social network.
- Convince local decision-makers and school administrators to create and support mindfulness and other social and emotional learning programs in public schools.
- Organize a public screening of **Room to Breathe** under the Community Screening license.

“After I take mindfulness, all the good feelings came to me.”





## Consider Whom to Invite

The goals for your event should inform whom you invite. They will form the foundation of your committee to advocate for bringing mindfulness to the classroom. Target parents, teachers, school administrators, school counselors and psychologists, and school board members. Asking them to attend a screening is often the first step towards building credibility for the program. Inviting community leaders, such as school administrators, teachers and elected officials, could change their perspective on bringing mindfulness into schools. Share with them why you think their participation is of value.

Consider inviting those who have an interest in mindfulness, meditation, social and emotional learning, and better schools. Possible invitees include:

- Parents
- Educators
- School administrators
- PTA/PTO members
- Yoga practitioners
- Meditation practitioners
- School counselors / psychologists
- Restorative Justice activists

"Mindfulness helped me with the focus a lot."



## Create a Comfortable Atmosphere

Arrange your seating to accommodate the number of guests you expect and provide a comfortable atmosphere for your small group.

### Venue Checklist

- ☐ A television or projector with a screen that's big enough for everyone to see.
- ☐ Seating that allows everyone a good view of the screen.
- ☐ A DVD player or computer.
- ☐ Sign-in sheets and handouts for individuals who want to get involved.

**Note:** To avoid technical glitches, be sure to preview the entire DVD and test your equipment before the event.

## Plan the Agenda

Based on your established goals, create an agenda and consider appropriate steps for facilitating conversation and action after the film. There are many possibilities that should be suited to achieve your goals. The following menu provides some ideas that have worked well for other groups.

### Menu of Ideas for Your Screening

- **Have a Guest Speaker.** Invite an educator, mindfulness trainer, or civic leader to speak about some of the themes the film raises, such as classroom management challenges, learning disorders, bullying prevention, or social and emotional learning programs.
  - **Provide Mindfulness Instruction.** Have a local mindfulness instructor conduct a five minute mindfulness training before or after the screening so attendees can experience the impact of mindfulness.
  - **Potluck or Pizza Party.** Consider hosting a potluck or pizza party before or after the screening to allow opportunities for networking and brainstorming.
  - **Form an Action Committee.** Invite people to join a working group to move the idea forward in your community. See page 10 for recommended actions.
  - **Brainstorm.** After the screening, take a few minutes to suggest teachers, school officials, or possible donors who might support efforts to implement a mindfulness program.
  - **Ask for Funding.** If your local school officials or teachers are receptive to implementing a program, consider making a funding pitch at the event to support it. The most successful fundraising usually comes from a direct verbal request made by the event coordinator at the end of the presentation. Follow-up contact with those who indicate interest is also critical.
- Other fundraising suggestions include:
- **Host a Community Screening.**  
The Community Screening license for **Room to Breathe** permits you to charge admission to the film screening. Contact us about purchasing a Community Screening license.
  - **Form a Funding Committee.**  
Similar to the Action Committee, this committee focuses on raising money to pay for mindfulness training for one or more teachers.

## STEP 2. CONDUCTING THE SCREENING

At the screening itself, keep in mind the following suggestions for a successful event:

- **Allot enough time for the screening.** You should plan for at least two hours to show the film and hold a discussion.
- **Start on time.** Aim to begin no later than ten minutes from the posted time. This will give latecomers an opportunity to join the group without delaying the screening.
- **Briefly introduce the film and any special guests.** Present attendees with some questions or ideas to ponder while viewing the film. This will help spur post-screening conversation. You might say, for example, "After the film is over, we will have a dialogue and discuss possible next steps we can take to make a difference. So please write down any ideas that come to you while watching the film."
- **Facilitate a dialogue** after viewing the film. Focus on your established goals and desired outcomes for the screening (see page 5). We've included some frequently asked questions (and answers) on pages 13-14 to help you prepare.
- **Invite your audience to TAKE ACTION.** Ask for a show of hands for those who would be willing to be part of a committee to implement a program, and set an initial meeting time and location for your new committee. Using pages 10-12 discuss steps your group can take to implement a program or create items specific to your community or project.
- **Close the program with a few words.** Emphasize that a commitment to mindfulness does not end with the screening, but by continuing to stay involved. Thank people for coming and remind them to fill out the event sign-in sheet.

Refer attendees to [www.roomtobreathefilm.com](http://www.roomtobreathefilm.com) to download free resources; to sign up for the Room to Breathe e-newsletter, Facebook page, and Twitter feed; for information on how to host their own screenings; and to stay informed and involved.



## Step 3. FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE SCREENING

Send an email thanking your attendees and begin the work of initiating a mindfulness program in your local school. For suggestions on how to start a mindfulness program, see pages 10-12 of this guide.

Below are some suggested steps on how to use your email effectively:

- Send an email thanking your attendees.
- Ask who else they know who might want to be part of the mailing list.
- Remind people to send you suggestions about teachers, school officials, or possible donors who might support the Committee's efforts to implement a mindfulness program.
- Send regular emails to your list to insure that everyone is apprised of the latest developments.
- Remind those who agreed to be a part of the Committee of the next meeting time and location.
- Ask your friends and allies to host a screening of **Room to Breathe**.

"I have been seeing changes in my grades since the mindfulness classes."



# STARTING A MINDFULNESS PROGRAM: WHAT YOU CAN DO

After viewing **Room to Breathe**, many people are interested in implementing mindfulness in their schools. Here is a quick guide to action steps you can take – as an individual or part of a committee – to make this happen.

## **Train Teachers or Parents**

In our experience, it is essential that one active teacher or parent in the target school community have already been trained in mindfulness (or another SEL program). That person will often become the most powerful advocate for the program.

This can be done in several ways:

- Recruit a local teacher or counselor who is already trained in mindfulness to train other teachers.
- Find teachers who might already have a meditation practice: they can be invaluable in bringing mindfulness to the classroom.
- Encourage one or more teachers to be trained in mindfulness through online courses or in-person trainings. This is also a cost-effective way to start.
- Bring a trainer to your school or district site to work with a number of teachers. This is usually more expensive than other options, but more teachers can be trained at once.
- Reach out to the PTA to form a committee to implement a mindfulness program. Often finding one or two dedicated parents is enough to begin implementing a mindfulness program.
- Reach out to school administrators, teachers, parents, school psychologists, and school board members.
- Request that schools provide mindfulness training for their teachers.

There are several different organizations that offer online, in-person or on-site trainings. See page 15 for a summary of each and what they offer. We suggest becoming familiar with these organizations and options before your screening.

## Garner Support

To help implement mindfulness locally, use contacts and partners from the screening to:

- Create a committee that can approach sympathetic administrators and teachers to get a commitment to mindfulness training, and to work together in other ways as needed.
- Raise the funds needed to cover the costs of the trainings.
- Plan further screenings to broaden awareness and support for implementing mindfulness, if needed. Ask that **Room to Breathe** be shown at a school or youth-serving organization. (If that happens, we can help! See below for how to contact us.) Or, host a Community Screening of **Room to Breathe** at a local theater or large venue!

## Use the Media

Coverage in local media and social networking sites can dramatically increase awareness of the benefits of mindfulness and social-emotional learning in the classroom. Keep in mind the following tips for gaining media coverage:

- Contact local media about stories in your community that highlight the use of mindfulness in schools.
- Write letters to the editors of local newspapers expressing your support for mindfulness in schools and the community. Use ideas from the film for talking points.
- Call in to talk radio shows when the topic of discussion relates to mindfulness, violence prevention, bullying, or student graduation rates.
- Be persistent! Know that not every story you submit will get covered. Use the community pages, calendars, and letters to the editor to get the word out about local events and initiatives.
- Include a list of local contacts willing to be interviewed about the benefits of mindfulness, with their contact information. You can include this list with a press release or email that you send to local bloggers. (Visit our website to download a press release template.)
- Be proactive. Search for reporters and bloggers in your area who are writing favorably about schools and education, mindfulness, bullying, social and emotional learning, and independent film. Then send them an email or give them a call.

## ***Pulled from the Headlines...***

Here are examples of recent headlines to give you a sense of how the media covers the topic and can help you model your pitch accordingly.

“Mindfulness class aims to reduce bullying”  
-San Francisco Chronicle

“Believing self-control predicts success, schools teach coping”  
-The Washington Post

“Students learn to focus during mindfulness camp”  
-Laramie Boomerang

## **Use Social Media**

- **Facebook.** “Like” us on Facebook and share our posts with your networks. Or create your own mindfulness group to keep people engaged and apprised of new developments
- **Twitter.** Be sure to find the hashtags that are relevant to your topic and tweet to those tags to get the attention you want. Reporters will not necessarily go to your website but they will look up those hashtags to find out what is going on in the field. Don’t be afraid to directly tweet people you think might be interested in the event.
- **Blog.** A blog can bring attention to your Committee’s work and is a useful way to document your successes and impact. Remember the more you link-out from your blog the higher visibility it will have in web-searches. If you don’t want to start your own blog, offer to write a review of **Room to Breathe** or an op-ed for blogs related to mindfulness, education, and social and emotional learning.
- **Pinterest.** Creating a Pinterest board is a great way to share quotes, infographics, and pictures to draw attention to the benefits of mindfulness and reach new audiences.
- **Linkedin.** Join LinkedIn’s discussion groups on mindfulness. They are a valuable resource for information and a way to enter the mindfulness conversation.

### ***Twitter Tip!***

Useful hashtags include: #mindfulness, #freefilm, #education, #(to city/town the screening is being held), #(the name of the venue where the screening is being held), #breathe, #meditation, #schools, #yoga, and #restorativejustice, #socialandemotionalllearning.

## **Keep up the Momentum!**

Keep in mind that you are not alone in working to bring mindfulness and social and emotional learning programs to schools.

- Make sure to keep your group energized and fun!
- Be a positive role model, mentor, and optimistic leader.
- Use creative problem-solving to support mindfulness.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **Q: What exactly IS mindfulness?**

**A:** “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” - Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is a form of social and emotional learning that can be described as a particular way of paying attention in order to bring awareness to one’s experience.

## **Q: Is it a religious practice?**

**A:** Mindfulness is based on age-old practices from the time of the Buddha, and scholars also believe that similar practices were advocated in older Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim teachings. Today, however, mindfulness is practiced in a secular way using concentrated breath work, body scans, and sensory and motor awareness to become fully present in the moment.

## **Q: In what ways does it benefit students and school communities?**

**A:** Studies demonstrate that the benefits of mindfulness include better focus and concentration; increased self-awareness; stronger impulse control and feelings of calm; reduced aggression, violent behavior, stress, and loneliness; and increased empathy and understanding of others.

Introducing mindfulness to students has the potential to improve academic achievement, mental health, and inter- and intra-personal relationships.<sup>[1]</sup>

## **Q: Is mindfulness beneficial for high-achieving students as well as underachieving students?**

**A:** Yes. Mindfulness has been proven to be beneficial to all types of students in many different types of classrooms and schools. It has been used successfully in lower achieving public schools and higher achieving private schools. All students face stress triggers that can affect their ability to learn. Mindfulness is a tool that can help students reduce their stress levels and increase their ability to focus in the classroom, among other positive benefits.

## **Q: Does mindfulness work to stop bullying?**

**A:** While not designed specifically to address bullying, mindfulness is being used by many schools around the country to help curb bullying, and is having great results. This is because mindfulness cultivates empathy and impulse control. In combination, mindfulness techniques allow children to put themselves in another’s shoes more easily while being more aware of their thoughts and patterns of response, including their words and actions.

1. <http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/mindfulness>



**Q: Are you aware of any existing grants to help teachers receive mindfulness training?**

**A:** We are unaware of specific grants for mindfulness training programs. However, schools should explore whether there are professional development grants, local corporation grants, or community foundation grants available to support teachers learning emergent classroom management techniques.

**Q: What's the best way to bring mindfulness to the classroom?**

**A:** We believe the most efficient way to bring mindfulness to the classroom is to have teachers trained in mindfulness. (See page 15).

**Q: Are there programs where parents and children can take mindfulness classes together?**

**A:** It is ideal for both parents and children to be trained in mindfulness, but we are not aware of any family-oriented programs at this time. However, many organizations offer mindfulness courses that parents can take to build up their own knowledge and practice as their children are learning about mindfulness in school.

**Q: How much does mindfulness training cost?**

**A:** Every mindfulness instruction program has its own rates. As one example, online mindfulness courses at Mindful Schools start at \$125 for a 6-week session (with sliding scale and scholarship opportunities for those in need).

**Q: Is anyone working at the policy level to promote mindfulness in schools around the nation?**

**A:** Yes, U.S. Congressman Tim Ryan (D-OH) is leading legislative efforts to bring social and emotional learning to the classroom. Along with former U.S. Congresswoman Judy Biggert (R-IL) and retired U.S. Congressman Dale Kildee (D-MI), he introduced the Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning Act of 2011 (HR 2437). The act defines social and emotional learning and amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to allow funding for teacher and principal training and professional development to be used for SEL programming.

In addition, an organization named Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning is dedicated to advancing social and emotional learning policies. For more information visit their website at: <http://casel.org/policy-advocacy/>.

**Q: In general, at what age can children start learning mindfulness?**

**A:** By kindergarten, almost all children are ready and receptive to learning mindfulness, but we have seen children starting as early as 3 years of age.

# MINDFULNESS RESOURCES

There is a growing network of people and organizations actively working on bringing mindfulness and social and emotional learning to classrooms, a few of which are listed here. To find more resources, download the Supplemental Resources from our website.

## Organizations Offering Mindfulness Training

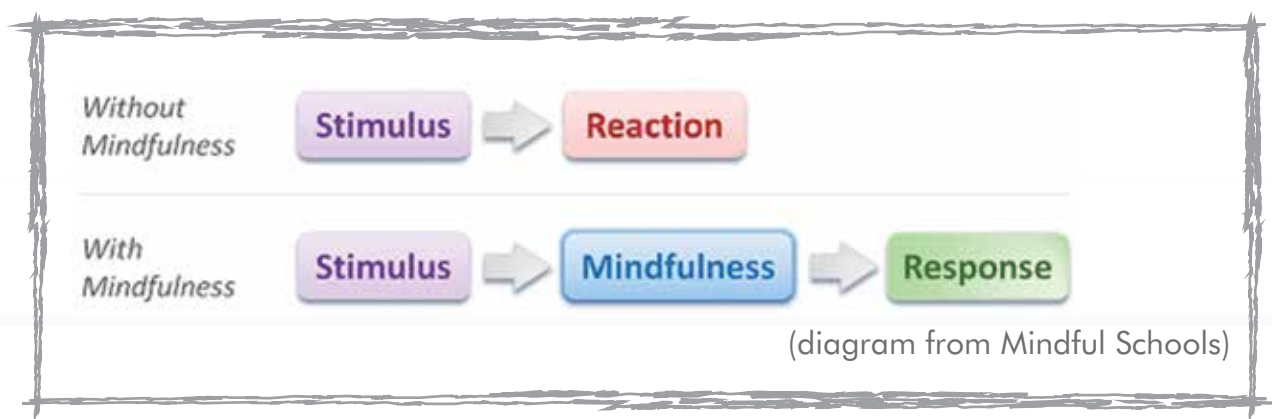
- **Mindful Schools** (the organization featured in **Room to Breathe**), a leader in integrating mindfulness into education, is based in Oakland, California and provides online training to help adults effectively use mindfulness with children so they can “succeed at school and in life.”  
<http://www.mindfulschools.org/>
- **Inner Explorer** offers a variety of programs to implement mindfulness in schools. Through these programs children “bolster academic performance, creativity, social and emotional aptitude, and well-being.”  
<http://innerexplorer.org/>
- **Inward Bound Mindfulness Education** (iBme) is a Washington, D.C.-based “non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of teens, parents, and professionals. Through mindfulness retreats, iBme helps participants cultivate awareness, compassion, and kindness for themselves, others, and the natural world.”  
<http://ibme.info/>
- **MindUP Program** - “The Hawn Foundation is a research-based training program for educators and children...MindUP™ lessons align with all state standards, including Common Core, and support improved academic performance while enhancing perspective taking, empathy and kindness as well as fostering complex problem-solving skills.”  
[www.thehawnfoundation.org/mindup](http://www.thehawnfoundation.org/mindup)
- **The Inner Resilience Program** - The Inner Resilience Program’s mission “is to cultivate the inner lives of students, teachers and schools by integrating social and emotional learning with contemplative practice.” It offers programs, workshops, and retreats for parents and educators, as well as programs geared toward the K-8 curriculum.  
<http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/>

## Research Organizations

- **Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society** “founded in 1995 by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., the Center is an outgrowth of the acclaimed Stress Reduction Clinic – the oldest and largest academic medical center-based stress reduction program in the world.”  
[www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx](http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/index.aspx)
- **Garrison Institute** researches and develops contemplative-based tools and approaches “to help teachers, caregivers and environmentalists sustain and deepen their challenging work.”  
[www.garrisoninstitute.org/](http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/)
- **UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC)** is dedicated to research and education of neuroscience and human behavior. Its mission is “to foster mindful awareness across the lifespan through education and research to promote well-being and a more compassionate society.”  
<http://marc.ucla.edu/>
- **University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Center for Child and Family Well-Being** “promotes the development and well-being of individuals and families across the lifespan by advancing multidisciplinary family research and evidence-based programming and policy making.”  
<http://www.sohe.wisc.edu/familycenter/>

## Advocacy and Policy Organizations

- **Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning** is a Chicago-based research, policy, and advocacy organization that is working to further social and emotional learning.  
<http://casel.org/about-us/mission-vision/>



# CHECKLIST FOR PLANNING A SCREENING

## TASK

- ☐ Set Goals
- ☐ Create an agenda
- ☐ Invite guests

## TIMING PRIOR TO SCREENING

- Two weeks prior
- One weeks prior
- At least two weeks prior, with follow-up confirmation

## CONDUCTING THE SCREENING

- ☐ Agenda
- ☐ Post-film discussion
- ☐ Action items
- ☐ Remind people to sign in

## FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE SCREENING

- ☐ Send an email and reconfirm a Committee meeting to implement a mindfulness program
- ☐ Remind people to send you suggestions about teachers, school officials, or possible donors who might support the Committee's efforts to implement a mindfulness program.
- ☐ Ask your friends and allies to host a screening

We would love to hear how your event went, and to share it with the rest of the **Room to Breathe** community. We ask that you:

- Send us photos. They don't have to be masterpieces.
- Write a summary of your event and email it to us so we can post it to our blog. This is a great way for people to learn from your successes and see they are not working alone on this issue.
- Please send us your attendance list for our own database. Scanning, emailing, or snail-mailing are all fine.

# Acknowledgments & Credits

## Credits

### Written by:

Andrew Bateman

### Edited by:

Leslie Comnes

Russell Long

Executive Producer/Producer/Director

Sacred Planet Films

Steve Ladd

Management & Marketing Consultant

The Video Project

### Graphic Design and Layout:

Erica Wong

The Video Project

Andrew Bateman

### With Collaboration from:

Randima Fernando,

Executive Director

Mindful Schools

Marcia Jarmel

Vikki Abels

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The Video Project is the distributor of **Room to Breathe** and assisted with creating this guide. The Video Project distributes the best in educational media and documentary programming on critical global and social issues to schools, college, libraries and community groups. For more films on education innovations and other issues, visit: [www.videoproject.com](http://www.videoproject.com)

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**Room to Breathe** | [roomtobreathefilm@gmail.com](mailto:roomtobreathefilm@gmail.com) | [www.roomtobreathefilm.com](http://www.roomtobreathefilm.com)