

Using Mindfulness Skills to Reduce Risk Factors in Sexual Health

Situation:

Many times, when we look at pregnancy prevention, we look at the symptoms and not the underlying causes. As a result, our outcomes are less than we desire. Studies indicate a link between sexual risk behaviors and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's).

People who are traumatized look for ways to cope with their trauma. Some turn to alcohol, drugs and sex to reduce the impact of these experiences. For many, these methods serve to reduce intrusive memories, to sooth themselves, reinforce their low self-esteem.

These coping strategies brings superficial closeness to others and gives an immediate fix to their problems. Many times, they are following the pattern of coping from their family of origin.

Approach:

The skills that help people deal with their trauma include self-soothing, greater self-understanding, relationship building, self-care, and a positive future vision. Mindfulness is also frequently identified as an effective approach for emotional, attentional, and behavior (e.g. aggression) disturbances.

Intervention:

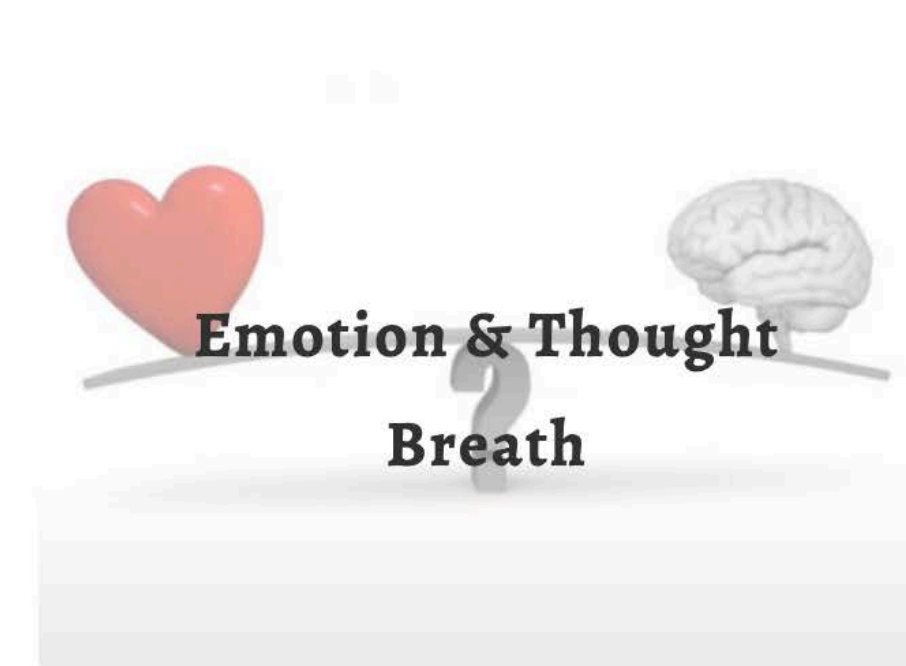
*Mind Matters Minutes*¹ provide teachers and direct service providers with free, short video practices from the *Mind Matters*^{2,3,4} curriculum that can easily be shared with young people either in person or online. Each practice presents a skill to reduce reactivity and build resilience.

(www.DibbleInstitute.org/Mind-Matters-Minutes/)



Implications for PREP/SRAE Grantees:

Youth will more easily use self-regulation skills to manage their emotions, thereby make better decisions. Young people often make risky decisions when they are in a fight, flight, or freeze mode. By learning self-soothing skills young people will begin to engage more in the pregnancy prevention content and reduce their risk of pregnancy.



University of Louisville – Random Control Trial



Population Description: Demographics, Trauma Experience, Baseline Functioning

In the first wave of the study, 86 participants from Maryhurst Residential Treatment and Kentucky Youth Career Center completed baseline surveys for Mind Matters. The average age of participants was 15.91. This sample has significantly higher levels of trauma and impairment than the national average. They reported significantly more impairment in social competence, resilience, emotional regulation, and overall behaviors. The average number of ACES was 4.9, placing them in the highest category of risk for long-term outcomes. Subsequently, they also reported significantly higher numbers of PTSD symptoms than the national average.

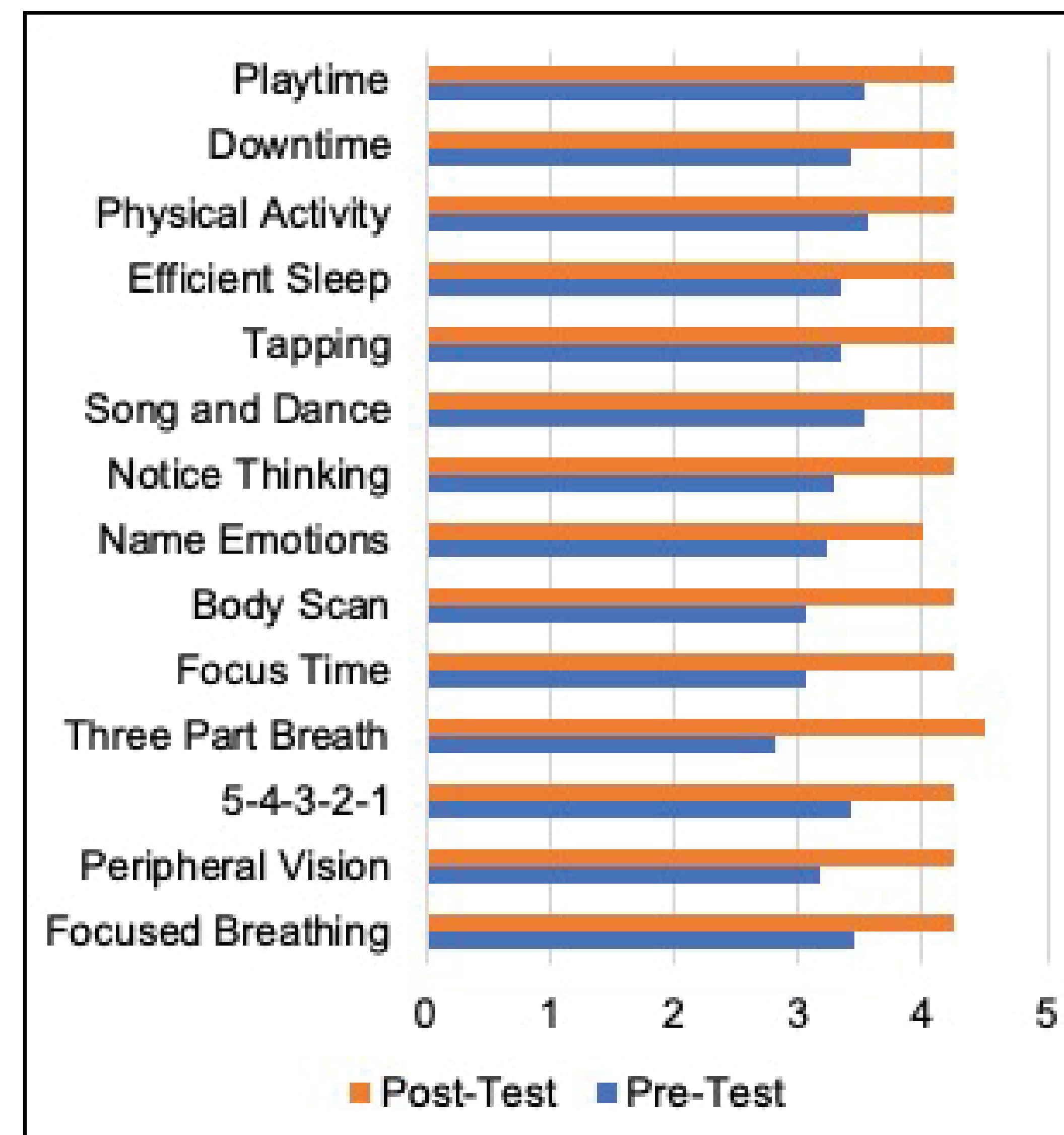
Preliminary Outcomes: Knowledge and Skill Gain

Preliminary analysis shows statistically significant improvement in knowledge and skills from pre- to post-intervention. Participants developed better knowledge and skills for coping with trauma and adversity. Partners report youth using the skills in daily life in residential treatment.

“For the clients who are engaged in the MIND MATTERS, they are utilizing the learned coping skills in their individualized treatments and on the milieu floor. I have heard kids shouting their 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 observations from across the hallway and giggling while comparing.”

—MIND MATTERS FACILITATOR

Skill Acquisition After 12 Sessions



FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Trauma-Centered Practice

Trauma such as that experienced by the youth in this study has significantly long-term effects on multiple domains of functioning and should be a treatment priority.

Preliminary findings suggest that this curriculum may be an effective strategy to promote knowledge and skills for coping with trauma.

This program may be incorporated into a variety of treatment settings. The program should be embedded into regular programming and supports such as incentives used to promote attendance.

Trauma Focused Research

Given the abundance of research on the impact of ACES on long-term functioning, research is needed on whether participation in programs such as Mind Matters can build resiliency skills and different trajectories for high risk youth.

Trauma Informed Organizations

Trauma informed organizations embed skills from programs like Mind Matters into formal programming but also incorporate in the therapeutic milieu.