

Enhancing Adolescent Resilience: The Role of Self-Compassion and Mindfulness Practices

by

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**Enhancing Adolescent Resilience: The Role of Self-Compassion and Mindfulness
Practices**

Approved by

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

Dr. Charles Scott, Associate Professor

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate this work to my students, past and present, who have taught me about courage, curiosity, and the power of connection. You inspire me daily to show up with compassion and authenticity.

To my partner, family, and friends, thank you for your unwavering love, patience, and encouragement throughout this journey. Your belief in me has been a source of strength and comfort.

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I also wish to acknowledge my colleagues and mentors in the school community, whose shared commitment to student well-being continues to inspire me. Thank you for creating spaces where young people feel seen, heard, and supported.

Finally, to the adolescents who bravely share their stories and trust in the process of growth: may this work honour your resilience and remind you that you are never alone on your journey.

Abstract

This capstone project explores how mindfulness and self-compassion practices can enhance resilience and improve coping strategies among adolescents. Rising rates of anxiety, depression, and stress in youth underscore the urgent need for accessible, evidence-based interventions that support emotional well-being. Drawing from research in contemplative traditions, psychology, and neuroscience, this paper examines the theoretical foundations and practical applications of mindfulness and self-compassion in adolescent mental health. It presents a 12-week school-based group counselling program designed to cultivate self-awareness, emotional regulation, and self-kindness among high school students. Pre- and post-program assessments using the Self-Compassion Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, and Child and Youth Resilience Measure to provide quantitative measures of program impact. The proposed intervention offers educators and school counsellors a practical, developmentally appropriate framework to embed mindfulness and self-compassion practices into school environments, equipping adolescents with tools to navigate life's challenges with greater emotional regulation, resilience, and self-understanding.

Keywords: mindfulness, self-compassion, adolescents, resilience, emotional regulation, school counselling, mental health, self-awareness, self-kindness.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Mindfulness and self-compassion are fields of knowledge and practice that are very close to my heart. They have been the cornerstones of my own journey of personal growth and development. Growing up, I struggled immensely with anxiety. I was born the eldest of two daughters, a highly sensitive child who often felt overwhelmed and unsafe in the world. I was born six weeks early and spent the first four weeks of life in an incubator, unable to physically connect with my parents. As they were not able to be with me around the clock, I developed an anxious attachment style (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1992), which significantly influenced my development. I frequently felt different and struggled with self-acceptance. I deeply internalized the belief that something was wrong with me—that I was too much—and so I learned to hide within myself, both in public and within my family system.

Despite this, I have always had an insatiable desire to learn. I am curious and in awe of the wonders this world has to offer, and my interest in people paralleled a deep desire to better understand myself. My twenties were a time of deep self-discovery and immense chaos. I traveled the world, craving new experiences and exploring different cultures and ways of life. However, this also included chaotic, transient relationships that left me feeling unworthy of love.

After returning from living in Australia for a year and a half, I began experiencing panic attacks for the first time. I initially believed I was physically ill, until my mother suggested that anxiety might be the cause. This marked the beginning of my journey into therapy. Working with my therapist, I began to uncover how I had felt "othered," and how I tied my self-worth to

external validation. Over many years, I built understanding and compassion for myself. I explored what I needed as a child and how I could now provide those things for myself. This process allowed me to shift the narrative I held about who I was and cultivate the love and kindness I had always craved from others. My self-critical nature began to shift, as I became more aware of my internal dialogue and replaced judgment with supportive and compassionate self-talk.

My journey into deeper self-compassion was paired with the discovery of meditation. A friend and colleague invited me into a local meditation community and encouraged me to sign up for a beginner-level course. This experience was life-changing. For the first time, I encountered the concepts of presence, groundedness, and being centered in the here and now. Daily meditation helped me develop greater self-awareness and cultivate mindfulness. I began connecting with my body and bodily sensations, learning to be more discerning in my thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and relationships. These practices helped me navigate my perfectionism and self-criticism, ultimately strengthening my self-worth. This meditation community was rooted in Eastern traditions (including Buddhism) and spiritual teachings that deeply resonated with me. These values helped me cultivate a more nourishing and fulfilling way of being in the world.

In my early thirties, despite having developed a strong meditation practice and spending years in therapy, I continued to struggle with self-regulation and intense emotions. I found myself in a constant state of burnout. In January 2019, I took a leave from my role as an elementary school teacher, realizing that my way of living was no longer sustainable. I was still deeply entrenched in people-pleasing, lacked personal boundaries, and often felt taken advantage

of in both professional and personal relationships. Despite all my work, I could not understand why I still felt stuck. This led me to explore the possibility of ADHD. Upon receiving a diagnosis, I felt immense relief and a sense of closure—as though the final puzzle piece had fallen into place. Alongside that relief, however, came grief for the little girl who had always felt that something was inherently wrong with her. My journey continue to this day to hold that little girl’s hand, and give her the love, support and acceptance she so desperately craved.

With a clearer understanding of how my brain worked, I was able to return more fully to mindfulness, meditation, and self-compassion in a way that felt more aligned and sustainable. Through continued dedication and practice, I have learned to integrate these tools into my daily life, allowing them to become part of my very being.

Statement of the Problem

As an educator for the past 12 years, I have witnessed a noticeable shift in students' mental health, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. More students appear to be struggling with stress, worry, anxiety, depression, perfectionism, self-criticism, and low self-worth. Terms such as "anxiety" and "depression" are now part of the everyday vocabulary of adolescents. It is increasingly evident that many young people find it difficult to cope with the challenges of life, influenced by various factors including social media, family pressures, and the pandemic.

My own observations are in line with the research. Recent research shows a significant rise in mental health concerns among adolescents in the past decade, both in Canada and globally. Statistics Canada (2023) reported that between 2012 and 2022, the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder among Canadians aged 15 and older doubled from 2.6% to 5.2%.

The largest increases were among youth, particularly young women aged 15 to 24, where the prevalence of anxiety tripled, and major depressive episodes doubled. Although the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased stress, youth mental health was already declining before 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at New York University, has conducted extensive research on the impact of smartphones and social media on adolescent mental health. In his 2024 book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, Haidt argues, with support from the research literature, that the widespread adoption of smartphones and social media in the early 2010s has significantly contributed to rising rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm among teenagers, especially girls.

Similarly, Scott and de Souza (2022) found that "since the mid-2000s, diagnoses of psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depression, among post-secondary students have been on the rise in modern societies around the world, leading experts to call attention to a mental health crisis in the college student population" (p. 1). These findings illustrate that adolescents and young adults are experiencing an unprecedented increase in mental health struggles, and many lack the tools necessary to build resilience and cope effectively with life's challenges.

Therefore, the purpose of my capstone project is to create a tangible, practical, and research-informed resource for educators, school counselors, and adolescents to support mental wellness through mindfulness and self-compassion practices.

Research Question or Thesis Statement

Adolescence is a critical period marked by rapid emotional, social, and neurological development, during which many young people experience heightened vulnerability to mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress. As rates of psychological distress continue to rise among adolescents, there is an urgent need for accessible, evidence-based interventions that promote resilience and healthy coping. This paper argues that self-compassion and mindfulness practices offer powerful tools for enhancing adolescents' emotional resilience and coping strategies. Grounded in contemporary research and supported by practices drawn from contemplative traditions and neuroscience, these approaches help adolescents regulate their emotions, reduce self-criticism, and respond to challenges with greater clarity and calm. By fostering a kinder relationship with themselves and cultivating present-moment awareness, adolescents are better equipped to navigate the complexities of their developmental stage with strength and flexibility.

Positionality Statement

As a school counselor with a background in education and a deep interest in adolescent mental health, I approach this research from both a personal and professional standpoint. My experiences working with diverse youth have shown me the profound impact that stress, self-criticism, and emotional dysregulation can have on students' well-being and academic success. I have observed firsthand how many adolescents struggle to meet high expectations—whether cultural, familial, or internal—and how these pressures often manifest as anxiety, depression, or disengagement. These lived observations have shaped my belief in the value of accessible, preventative mental health tools that can be integrated into the school environment.

My own ongoing journey with mindfulness and self-compassion practices also informs this inquiry. As someone who has personally experienced the benefits of these approaches in managing stress and cultivating emotional balance, I bring a strong bias toward believing in their potential. I recognize this bias and remain committed to grounding my research in evidence-based literature, while also acknowledging the importance of subjective experience and relational context in mental health work. This project reflects a commitment to supporting youth in developing inner resilience—not just to survive the demands of adolescence, but to grow through them with greater self-understanding, compassion, and strength.

Chapter Two: Review of Research Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to explore how mindfulness and self-compassion practices can enhance resilience and improve coping strategies among adolescents. As mental health concerns among youth continue to rise globally, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pervasive influence of social media, there is a pressing need for accessible, evidence-based approaches that support emotional well-being in school settings. Mindfulness and self-compassion—concepts rooted in both psychological science and contemplative traditions—have gained increasing attention for their potential to foster emotional regulation, reduce stress, and promote a more compassionate relationship with oneself. This review synthesizes (a) current research on adolescent mental health, (b) the theoretical foundations of mindfulness and self-compassion, and (c) the research findings on their impact on resilience and coping. The literature is organized thematically to highlight the interconnectedness of these constructs and provide a foundation for the development of a school-based group counseling program that equips adolescents with practical tools for inner resilience and emotional strength.

Theoretical Foundations of Mindfulness

Mindfulness, though increasingly present in contemporary psychology, the education system, and the zeitgeist, has become a buzzword in all areas of our society. However, mindfulness is deeply rooted as a central teaching in ancient Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha was the individual whose teachings form the basis of the Buddhist tradition (Gethin, 2020, *Buddha* section). These teachings, preserved in texts known as the *Nikāyas* or *Āgamas* pertaining to the quest for liberation from suffering (Gethin, 2020, *Buddha* section). Gethin explains that the purpose of the teachings “is to help individuals attain a good life, his analysis of human

suffering centrally involves claims concerning the nature of persons, as well as how we acquire knowledge about the world and our place in it” (*Buddha* section). The Buddha’s core teaching can be summarized in the Four Nobles’ Truths. These truths recognize the presence of suffering (dukkha), identify the causes of suffering (craving and attachment) (samudaya), affirm the possibility of the end of suffering (nirodha) and outline the Noble Eightfold Path as the means to achieve the end of suffering (magga) (Gethin, 2020).

The Noble Eightfold Path are the practices that cultivate wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline. Rahula (1974) summarized the Eightfold Path as the following:

Wisdom (Prajna)

1. Right View – Understanding the nature of reality and the Four Noble Truths.
2. Right Intention – Committing to ethical and mental self-improvement.

Ethical Conduct (Sila)

3. Right Speech – Speaking truthfully, kindly, and helpfully.
4. Right Action – Acting in ways that are ethical and non-harmful.
5. Right Livelihood – Earning a living in a way that does not cause harm.

Mental Discipline (Samadhi)

6. Right Effort – Cultivating positive states of mind and abandoning harmful ones.
7. Right Mindfulness – Developing awareness of the body, feelings, thoughts, and phenomena.
8. Right Concentration – Practicing deep meditation to achieve mental clarity and focus.

As Rahula (1974) notes, mindfulness, a central component of the Eightfold Path, is not merely a meditative exercise but a comprehensive way of being that permeates speech, thought, and action, the path towards spiritual liberation. Moreover, Rahula (1974) argues that mindfulness is not merely a meditative tool but a holistic approach to life, integrating mindfulness into every thought, word, and action. Thich Nhat Than was a world-renowned Vietnamese Thien Buddhist monk, peace activities, teacher and author, known for spreading the teaching of Buddhism around the world and the founder of the Plum Village Foundation. Thich Nhat Hahn is known as the “father of mindfulness” and had a major impact on Western Practices of Buddhism. His teachings developed new ways to apply ancient wisdom to the challenges of modern life.

According to his teaching, mindfulness is an energy that is generated by bringing the mind back to the body and getting in touch with what is going on in the present moment, within and around the self (Plum Village, 2025). Moreover, he purports that the energy of mindfulness helps one live deeply throughout each moment of the day. His teaching continue to express that there is an art to finding creative ways to generate and cultivate the energy of mindfulness, peace and happiness in everyday life (Plum Village, 2025). However, contemporary adaptations of mindfulness, particularly in Western psychological contexts, have faced critiques. Cueto de Souza and Scott (2022) highlight a significant limitation in the popularization of mindfulness, particularly the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn, whose secularization of mindfulness for stress reduction may overlook its deeper spiritual and existential dimensions.

Kabat-Zinn, the creator of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) ’s approach, which primarily focuses on reducing stress and enhancing well-being, is seen as stripping away

the transformative potential of mindfulness by divorcing it from its Buddhist roots. This simplification, Cueto de Souza and Scott (2022) argue, fails to address the existential suffering that mindfulness can also alleviate, specifically the self-transcendence required to move beyond the ego and confront deeper existential concerns. Kabat-Zinn's work remains widely popular and helpful for many individuals, however its application in addressing profound psychological existential crises may be limited. Moreover, Cueto de Souza and Scott (2022) argue that while mindfulness is widely used as a tool for managing mental health crises (such as stress and anxiety), it also has deeper, more transformative potential that is often overlooked, notably the role of self-transcendence, in which connects back to the roots of mindfulness in the Buddhist teachings of the Eightfold Path.

Further criticism of the popularization of mindfulness as a mainstream stress reduction tool comes from Ron Purser (2019) the author of *McMindfulness: How Mindfulness Became the New Capitalist Spirituality*. Purser (2019) explores how mindfulness and MBSR by Jon Kabat-Zinn is “[...] nothing more than concentration training. Although derived from Buddhism, it’s been stripped of the teaching on ethics that accompanied it, as well as the liberating aim of dissolving attachment to a false sense of self while enacting compassion for all other beings (para. 4). Purser (2019) continues to explain that there are worthy dimensions of mindfulness, such as tuning out mental rumination which does lead to overall stress reduction as well as chronic anxiety; “[...] becoming more aware of autonomic reactions can make people calmer and potentially kinder. The problem is the product they’re selling and how it’s packaged” (para. 4). While critiques like Purser’s highlight the commercialization and ethical stripping of mindfulness in mainstream culture, mindfulness-based practices nevertheless demonstrate

significant potential for fostering emotional regulation and resilience, particularly among adolescents.

Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation in Adolescents

Mindfulness-based interventions have shown promise in promoting resilience and emotional well-being among adolescents. Mindfulness as described by John Kabat-Zinn (1993) is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention to the present-moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding experience” (p.145). Razza et al. (2021) explored the benefits of mindfulness in promoting resilience among at-risk adolescents, finding that mindfulness practices help cultivate emotional regulation, reduce stress, and build coping skills. These interventions provide not only immediate relief from stress the study also showed long-term benefits in terms of emotional resilience. Mindfulness-based practices include helping the individual observe their feelings, thoughts, physical sensations in the body, and the external environment with curiosity and nonreactivity (Razza et al., 2021). The authors found that mindfulness programs offer benefits for at-risk youth and that the benefits of these interventions support self-regulatory skills, positive decision-making, enduring values that can be integrated into daily life as well as the benefits of practice for self-compassion (p.16).

Razza et al. (2021) conducted a study that examined the effectiveness of a 12-week mindfulness curriculum for at-risk youth in an urban setting. The study was interested in discovering whether participation in the intervention was associated with gains in self-regulation and self-compassion (p.1). The study included 217 public high school students in Grade 11 and 12. 133 students received program instruction one time, 39 students received it twice, and 45 students served as a control group. The program was delivered by a mindfulness instructor, once

per week. The sessions were 45 minutes long. The authors discuss the unique aspects of a mindfulness-based program because they teach “from the inside-out, focusing on internal experiences, including thoughts, emotions, breath, and other body sensations, to foster students’ innate abilities for self-awareness, self-management, and relationship-building” (Razza, et al., 2021, p. 3).

Moreover, the authors argue that the embodied practices of these interventions are foundational to contemplative education, which is a holistic approach to education, putting the student at the centre of their own learning, fostering inquiry, introspection and meaningful connections between their inner and outer worlds (p.3). The results of the study found that the Inner Strength Teen Program administered as the mindfulness-based program promoted social-emotional competencies among at-risk youth. Notably, those who were in the intervention benefited in long-term self-compassion and regulation compared to peers in the control group. The program did not demonstrate significant short-term effects for regulation. Students had the most benefit in the one-time offering, suggesting that the efficacy of the training was greater for initial participants. The intervention was found to be notably beneficial for fostering self-compassion. Students in the programs demonstrated increased self-compassion over the 12-week period. The authors note that these findings are corroborated with other mindfulness-based interventions studies with teens (Bluth, Campo et al., 2016; Bluth, Gaylord et al., 2016).

Similarly, Bluth et al. (2017) found that within-person changes in mindfulness and self-compassion predict enhanced emotional well-being in healthy but stressed adolescents. This study emphasizes the role of mindfulness in fostering greater self-compassion, which in turn supports adolescents in managing their emotional challenges and cultivating healthier emotional

responses. Bluth et al. (2017) found that “meta-analyses of mindfulness intervention studies with youth have reported effect sizes in clinical samples and that of non-clinical samples, effect sizes for psychopathology almost twice that of overall outcomes (i.e., social skills, well-being, attention psychophysiological measures) and improved cognitive performance and increased resilience” (p. 109).

In line with these findings, Galla (2014, 2016) and Galla et al. (2017) further emphasized the potential of mindfulness to improve emotional regulation and social-emotional learning in adolescents. Galla (2014) argued that mindfulness-based practices in school settings can significantly enhance adolescents’ ability to navigate the academic pressures, social relationships, and emotional difficulties. In addition, Galla et al. (2017) highlighted that mindfulness can be particularly effective in promoting psychological flexibility, helping adolescents to better adapt to challenges and view difficult situations from a more balanced perspective. Galla (2016) found that “participants improved significantly on every measure [...]. More importantly, immediate improvements in mindful attention, self-compassion, rumination, and life satisfaction were maintained during the three-month follow-up period (p. 210). Moreover, the study showed that “within-person change in mindful attention was associated with significant reductions in perceived stress and rumination and increases in positive affect (Galla, 2016, p. 210).

Vo et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study on the Mindful Awareness and Resilience Skills for Adolescents (MARS-A) program, with 71 participants aged 17-18 (27% male, 73% female). Using semi-structured interviews, the authors identified four central themes: enhanced well-being, coping with difficult emotions, managing sleep and/or pain, and no longer

being ‘on autopilot.’ Adolescents reported improved emotional, social, and cognitive well-being, such as reduced social anxiety, feeling more connected, and greater emotional awareness.

Participants reported a more positive sense of well-being including emotional, social and intellectual. In particular, participants responded that they were able to “talk to friends every day at home and at school”, as well as feeling less socially anxious and that they were able to use mindfulness to feel more connected to their environment and others (p.30). Participants noted that they were more able to cope with difficult emotions and that learning new strategies such as body scans and mindful listening helped them “deal with anxiety better now more than one way” (Vo et al., 2024, p.30). Finally, participants reported feeling more in control of their anxieties which helped them to better manage their symptoms, leading to more resilience and effective coping. The author’s concluded that this study showed potential for MARS-A as a MBI for a heterogeneous adolescent clinical population. Moreover, the intervention highlighted common underlying suffering experienced by adolescents and that mindfulness may be a supportive approach to address this common suffering (Vo et al., 2024, p.32).

Finally, in a randomized controlled trial of an adapted school-based MBSR program, Sibinga et al. (2015) found that participants reported significantly lower levels of depression, self-hostility, somatization, rumination, negative affect, and posttraumatic stress symptoms compared to students in an active control group. These outcomes further demonstrate the power of mindfulness-based programming to address internalizing symptoms and enhance emotional regulation, particularly in high-stress school environments.

In their qualitative study of the Learn2Breathe (L2B) mindfulness program, Schussler et al. (2021) found that participants strongly affirmed the need for mindfulness-based programs in

schools, particularly to support stress management and emotional regulation. One participant, Chandra, shared: “lots of people at my school cry, and get really frustrated and pick their nails and bite their nails because of stress....Most people don’t know how to manage stress. And I think this [L2B program] really teaches everyone how to manage it” (p.440). Another student, a high-performing competitive swimmer reflected: “When I get overwhelmed, normally I used to just let whatever happens happen. But now I’m just starting to calm down a little bit and just breathe” (p.440). Students also described applying mindfulness skills in their daily routines. Damon noted: I do it when I brush my teeth. I don’t think it’s helped me brush my teeth any better. It’s calmed me down. It makes me think about things more rationally, and I really do think it took away stress in my life” (p.440).

In terms of self-awareness, students reported noticing greater attention to their thoughts, bodies, and surroundings. Javier explained that: “Being mindful was like paying attention, like watching everything in close detail, like observing everything that may be overlooked” (p.440). Similarly, Ian shared that: that “Paying attention to little things, just savouring a little....Before [L2B] I would try, I don’t know if I would say that I would try too hard, but I would try to look at things too in-depth, whereas afterwards I could take it as it was” (p.440). These reflections highlight the program’s value in cultivating emotional regulation and perspective. In addition to these subjective reports, Schussler et al. (2021) found measurable improvements in stress reduction and internalizing symptoms such as anxiety, rumination, and depression (p.441).

Overall, these studies collectively suggest that mindfulness programs can play a critical role in improving resilience and emotional well-being among adolescents, offering valuable tools for managing stress and building more adaptive coping strategies.

These findings echo what I have observed through mindfulness integration in my own classroom practice and align closely with broader trends I have seen in school settings. Students who engage in brief mindfulness practices often report feeling more centered, less reactive, and better able to manage both academic pressures and interpersonal challenges. In my own classroom, we practiced mindfulness daily after recess. With the lights dimmed, students would enter the room quietly, find their seats, and settle into a grounded, upright position with their feet flat on the floor. Together, we would follow a guided meditation, or I would lead them through breathing exercises such as box breathing or the 4-7-8 technique.

For many students, especially at the beginning, this was a challenging shift. Few had previously experienced moments of intentional stillness or opportunities to connect inward. Over time, however, I observed them becoming more comfortable with silence and more attuned to their emotions and bodies. This daily practice not only supported their emotional regulation but also fostered a calmer, more compassionate classroom environment. Over time, I observed students become more comfortable with stillness and more attuned with their emotions. They were better able to self-regulate, return to learning, and interact with one another with greater empathy.

Looking back, I realize that the environment I cultivated, one rooted in mutual respect, curiosity, safety, and kindness, unknowingly reflected many of the principles of the Eightfold Path. By fostering right intention, right action, and right mindfulness, I was helping students create not just a calm classroom, but a space for meaningful inner growth. These subtle but meaningful shifts in students' self-awareness and behaviour made me reflect more deeply on the broader values guiding our classroom culture. Looking back, I realize that many of the practices

I had intuitively implemented mirrored the principles of the Eightfold Path and were aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing—emphasizing presence, intention, and relational learning. By fostering right intention, right action, and right mindfulness, I was helping students create not just a calm classroom, but a space for meaningful inner growth.

Moreover, I intentionally integrated Indigenous worldviews and principles, including the understanding that learning takes time and patience, that it is experiential, and that everyone has something valuable to share. Each week, we began and ended in a circle, passing around a talking stick, symbolically, a small shell a student had found on one of our field trips. These moments grounded our community and reinforced the values of presence, listening and mutual respect. These practices and embedded values supported us in acknowledge the lands and people of this land, upon which we learn. By the end of the year, I noticed how students were embodying these principles; they had become a part of our classroom culture.

Self-compassion and Adolescent Emotional Well-Being

Self-compassion, extensively studied by Kristin Neff, has emerged as a key factor in promoting emotional well-being and resilience, particularly within mindfulness-based practices. Neff's (2003) work is grounded in Buddhist philosophy, which views compassion as a quality that flows in all directions, toward others and oneself. To grasp the idea of self-compassion, it is helpful to first reflect on compassion more broadly: a warm, caring response to suffering, as opposed to criticism and indifference, which are cold and judgemental. As Neff (2025) notes, compassion wants to help, rather than harm, and this same tender stance can be turned inward.

Neff (2003) defines self-compassion as comprising three interrelated components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Together, these foster a nonjudgemental and connected stance toward one's own suffering. Unlike self-esteem, self-compassion is not dependent on external validation or success. It involves being open to one's pain, offering kindness rather than criticism, and recognizing that imperfection is a shared human experience. Neff (2003) describes it as "in times of struggles, being open and in touch with one's suffering and treating oneself with kindness" and later elaborates that it is "compassion for the experience of suffering turned inward, a productive way of approaching distressing thoughts and emotions that engenders mental and physical well-being (Neff, 2025, p.194).

Research supports the relevance of self-compassion in adolescent development. Bluth and Blanton (2014) found that higher self-compassion was associated with greater life satisfaction, lower perceived stress, and improved emotion regulation, highlighting its potential as a protective factor during a critical developmental period. Similarly, Kelly et al. (2017) demonstrated that self-compassion helps buffer against shame and self-criticism, which are especially prevalent among youth struggling with perfectionism and identity formation. A meta-analysis by MacBeth and Gumley (2012) further confirmed strong inverse associations between self-compassion and depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating its broad relevance for mental health. These findings underscore the potential of self-compassion to serve as a protective and promotive factor in adolescent well-being.

Bluth and Neff (2018) explore the psychological health benefits of self-compassion. According to the authors, since Neff's first two studies in 2003 (2003a, 2003b), there were over 1600 studies on self-compassion. In 2025, there are now over 4,000 journal articles and

dissertations on self-compassion (Neff, 2025). Self-compassion has been consistently linked to positive mental health and appears to be a source of strength and resilience when faced with the stressors of life such as life transitions, chronic health issues, and bullying by peers (Bluth & Neff, 2018). Promisingly so, it appears that self-compassion research is starting to be conducted with more diverse populations along with the methodology, where the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003a), has been translated into 16 languages and researchers are continuing to develop different methods such as experimental mood inductions, brief self-compassion training, self-compassion interventions and new methods such as virtual reality and mobile applications (Bluth & Neff, 2018).

This foundational work laid the groundwork for later studies, including Neff (2013), where she expanded on how self-compassion differs from self-esteem and provides a more stable and compassionate foundation for addressing emotional struggles. Moreover, self-compassion is generally considered to be a positive coping strategy and may be associated with problem-solving and acceptance (Bluth et al., 2016). Moreover, numerous studies have shown that self-compassion is a modifiable trait (Bluth et al. 2018; Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 20117; Bluth et al., 2016), and that “[...]interventions can be created that cultivate and enhance self-compassion, and thereby potentially strengthening resilience and curiosity” (Bluth et al., 2018, p.2). Neff (2016) explores the self-compassion framework and its application in various life stages, including adolescence. She asserts that self-compassion fosters resilience by helping teens view their experience through a lens of understanding and acceptance, rather than judgement and self-criticism. This ability to reframe negative experiences is essential for enhancing emotional regulation and coping mechanisms. Self-compassion is both a trait and a psychological process that can be self-generated during times of emotional distress and struggle (Bluth et al., 2016).

In the context of adolescents, self-compassion has been shown to be a predictor of emotional resilience. Adolescence is a developmental state marked by increased self-awareness, emotional intensity, and vulnerability to internalizing difficulties such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Bluth, 2017). During this period, self-critical thoughts and social comparison tend to increase, often exacerbated by academic pressures and social media influences. Neff's (2021, 2022) continued research highlights the role of self-compassion in promoting psychological flexibility and emotional regulation, crucial qualities for adolescents navigating stress and life challenges. Moreover, research increasingly supports the role of self-compassion as a protective factor against these challenges. Resilience is a key strength-based trait in adolescent development, reflecting the capacity to adapt positively to challenges and bounce back from adversity (Bluth et al., 2018). It is understood as a dynamic, developmental process marked by achieving age-appropriate competencies and maintaining mental well-being despite stress or hardship ” (Bluth et al., 2018). Resilient adolescents are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours, avoid risk activities such as substance use, and experience lower levels of anxiety and depression ” (Bluth et al., 2018).

Neff (2025) found that “the most consistent [...] findings in the literature is that greater self-compassion is linked to reduced psychopathology” (p.199). Meta-analyses involving both adults and adolescents have shown that higher self-compassion is moderately to strongly associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, stress, and suicidal thoughts (Ferrari et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2021; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Marsh et al., 2018; Suh & Jeong, 2021). Longitudinal studies support these findings: Stutts et al. (2018) reported that initial self-compassion levels predicted fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, and negative mood six

months later, while Lee et al. (2021) observed that increases in self-compassion over five years were linked to reduced mental health symptoms and feelings of loneliness.

Ferrari et al. (2018) found that self-compassion moderates the link between perfectionism and depression and that self-compassion may be a useful intervention to mitigate the effects of maladaptive perfectionism. The authors caution that future research either experimental or intervention-based is still needed to fully explore this correlation. The authors hypothesize that since self-compassion fosters self-kindness and self-acceptance, it could be used as a way to mitigate the negative effects of perfectionism, thus self-compassion should lessen the negative impact of self-critical thoughts. The findings of this study in the adult and adolescent samples support the authors' initial hypothesis: self-compassion did moderate the maladaptive perfectionism-depression link.

Neff and McGehee (2010) conducted one of the earliest empirical studies on self-compassion and adolescents, revealing that higher levels of self-compassion were associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression, and greater life satisfaction. These findings have since been replicated and expanded upon. For example, Kelly et al. (2017) found that self-compassion predicted increased resilience and emotional regulation in adolescents and young adults, suggesting its potential as a foundation for psychological well-being. A meta-analysis by March, Chan, and MacBeth (2017), consolidated findings across multiple studies and confirmed a consistent inverse relationship between self-compassion and psychological distress in adolescents. This reinforces the importance of teaching adolescents to approach their suffering with kindness rather than criticism—a skill that may be particularly valuable for those prone to perfectionism or negative self-evaluation.

Bluth, Campo, Futch et al. (2016) investigated how self-compassion in adolescents varies by age and gender, and how it relates to emotional well-being outcomes such as perceived stress, life satisfaction, distress tolerance, depression, and anxiety. The study found that older adolescent females had the lowest levels of self-compassion compared to younger females and males of all ages. Additionally, self-compassion was significantly associated with all measures of emotional well-being, with age and gender moderating its effects on anxiety and depressive symptoms.

According to Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul (2017), an adolescent's ability to handle difficult situations is strengthened by their internal coping resources, which can help reduce stress and foster resilience. One effective way for adolescents to build these inner strengths is by developing mindfulness and self-compassion. Practicing these skills can enhance emotional well-being and lower the risk of mental health or behavioural changes. Moreover, it has been found that self-compassion is a modifiable trait, meaning that it can be learned and strengthened through practice and over time as a skill in youth and in adults (Neff & Germer, 2013). Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul (2017) collated results from a variety of studies highlight how interventions that focus on cultivating self-compassion have shown improvements in optimism, self-efficacy, life satisfaction, compassion for others, and body appreciation.

Moreover, Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul (2017) explored the within-person impact of a mindful self-compassion program on teenagers and found that improvements in self-compassion were significantly associated with reduction in perceived stress and negative affect. Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul (2017) explain that "more recently, self-compassion has also been shown to be a modifiable trait which can be strengthened through learning and practicing self-compassion

skills both in youth (Bluth, Gaylord, Campo, Mullarkey & Hobbs, 2016), and in adults” (Neff & Germer, 2013) (p. 3). Moreover, empirical studies on interventions which focus on cultivating self-compassion have demonstrated improvements in optimism, self-efficacy, life satisfaction, compassion for others, and body appreciation and greater decreases in rumination, depression, anxiety and stress” (p.109). Notably, they reported that teens who initially struggled with emotional regulation appeared to benefit most from the intervention, indicating the importance of targeting this group in school-based programs.

Finally, Egan et al. (2021) reviewed the role of self-compassion in the prevention and treatment of anxiety and depression in youth, concluding that it serves as an active ingredient in much evidence-based interventions. The authors emphasized the importance of integrating self-compassion practices into prevention efforts, particularly within school settings where adolescents spend a significant portion of their time. Taken together, these findings underscore the relevance of self-compassion practices as both a preventative and therapeutic construct for adolescent mental health. When embedded into school-based curricula, it offers a promising approach to help students navigate their inner lives with greater ease, resilience and self-understanding.

Mindfulness and Self-Compassion: Enhancing Resilience and Coping

Mindfulness and self-compassion, while distinct concepts, share a close relationship that, when combined, has been shown to significantly enhance resilience and improve coping strategies among adolescents. Both practices promote emotional well-being, but in complementary ways: mindfulness fosters awareness and presence, while self-compassion encourages a kind and non-judgmental response to personal struggles. Research suggests that the

practice of mindfulness can lay the foundation for self-compassion. By cultivating mindfulness, adolescents become more attuned to their emotional states, enabling them to respond to themselves with greater compassion during times of distress. This process reduces the tendency toward self-criticism, which can exacerbate negative emotions and impede effective coping.

As Neff and McGehee (2010) explain, mindfulness in self-compassion allows individuals to break free from the automatic, harsh self-judgments that often accompany difficult experiences. The combination of these practices enables adolescents to approach life's difficulties with a sense of groundedness, acceptance, and compassion for themselves. In situations of stress or adversity, mindfulness helps them stay present without becoming overwhelmed, while self-compassion allows them to treat themselves with kindness instead of succumbing to self-criticism or shame. This dual approach can buffer against the negative effects of stress and promote emotional resilience. Moreover, Bluth et al. (2018) explained that the benefits of self-compassion for teens (and adults) can be summarized by the seven Cs, a model of resilience: competence, character, confidence, contribution, connection, coping, and control (self-efficacy) (p.4). The authors argue that resilience and self-compassion help adolescents with more adaptive coping skills, they are able to have a more positive self-perception, as well as more connection with others, helping to mitigate one's harsh inner critic and creating a more balanced perspective (Bluth et al., 2018, p.4)

Bluth et al. (2017) conducted a study that explored how adolescents responded to participation in the Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC-T) program and how it influenced their well-being. The sample size was limited, with only 9 participants, however the findings showed that the teenage participants reported learning how to be kinder to themselves, notably when

facing mistakes, challenges or negative self-judgement. Moreover, participants shared that they could more often pause and respond rather than react to emotional triggers, improving self-regulation. The participants described using breathing, anchoring and awareness practices to stay grounded and reduce stress or overthinking to stay grounded and reduce stress and ruminating thoughts. Finally, participants noted that they felt closer to others, they gained more understanding and felt more connected due to shared humanity practices. Thus, the study concluded that the MSC-T program was well received by adolescents and did lead to meaningful growth across emotional, cognitive, and relational domains. This study demonstrates the efficacy and connectedness of mindfulness and self-compassion and how together, they offer valuable ways of being for adolescents navigating life's challenges.

Practical Applications in School-Based Programs

The growing body of research on mindfulness and self-compassion underscores their value as practices that can be implemented in school-based programs to promote emotional resilience and coping skills. Galla (2016) highlights that mindfulness and self-compassion interventions are particularly effective for adolescents who experience high levels of stress or anxiety, as these practices provide tools for emotional regulation and self-acceptance. Given the rising mental health concerns among adolescents, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, integrating these practices into school settings offers an accessible and preventive context for implementing such interventions. These programs are often low-cost, do not require specialized therapeutic training to deliver basic practices, and can be woven into existing curriculum or school routines.

Research has demonstrated that these practices are adaptable to a wide range of school settings. For example, Bluth and Eisenlohr-Moul (2017) found that brief mindfulness interventions led to reductions in anxiety and increases in life satisfaction among high school students. Similarly, Vo et al. (2024) reported that participants in a school-based mindfulness group felt more in control of their emotions, experienced improved sleep, and described feeling “less on autopilot” in daily life. These outcomes were especially evident in diverse urban secondary schools, where students faced complex academic and social pressures.

The literature also highlights the importance of teacher and school staff buy-in. In a mixed-methods study conducted by Zenner et al. (2014), teachers reported that mindfulness programs helped create calmer classroom environments, improved student-teacher relationships, and enhanced their own stress management. One teacher reflected, “It’s not just the kids who are learning to pause and breathe, I am too.” In rural districts, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) found that school administrators emphasized the value of consistency and flexibility when implementing mindfulness programs, noting that they needed to be adapted to fit the school’s unique cultural and logistical needs. The development of school-based group counselling programs focused on mindfulness and self-compassion aligns with this growing body of evidence. These programs can equip adolescents with tools to better regulate their emotions, respond to themselves with more kindness, and manage stress in healthy ways. Bluth (2017) emphasizes that these interventions not only support emotional well-being but also promote a deeper sense of self-worth and connection to others, an essential component of adolescent development.

What stands out across these studies, and within my own practice, is that these interventions support more than just short-term stress reduction. They nurture self-awareness,

emotional intelligence, and compassion, helping adolescents navigate life with greater ease and resilience. Importantly, these programs are not limited to therapeutic settings; they are increasingly being embedded within classrooms, advisory periods, or school-wide SEL initiatives. Whether implemented in a small rural elementary school or a large urban high school, mindfulness and self-compassion practices can be tailored to meet the needs of diverse student populations.

Overall, the literature suggests that mindfulness and self-compassion interventions are most effective when embedded into the broader culture of the school, supported by staff, and tailored to the needs of the student population, whether that be in a small rural school or a large urban secondary setting. As Zenner et al. (2014) note, “programs integrated into regular school activities showed stronger effect sizes than those without such integration” (p.7). They further emphasize the essential role of staff, stating, “if mindfulness is to be established in a school-based framework it will have to be teachers who are the agents and ambassadors of change” (p.18). Similarly, Meiklejohn et al. (2012) highlight that “implementation is most effective when mindfulness practice is support by the entire school community and embedded within the overall school culture” (p.300). Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of whole-school engagement, teacher leadership, and context-sensitive implementation for cultivating sustainable, impactful mindfulness and self-compassion programming in schools.

In my own classroom and counselling work, I have seen firsthand how students benefit from these practices. Mindfulness activities like guided breathing, grounding techniques, and reflective circles not only create space for emotional expression but foster a culture of safety, empathy and belonging. Students who once struggled with reactivity or social anxiety began to

approach themselves and others with greater patience and understanding. These observations echo what the research describes and affirm for me the transformative potential of such practices in school settings.

As I reflect on the research, I am increasingly convinced that these practices should be considered foundational to school-based mental health promotion. They offer not just coping strategies, but a way of being, that nurtures emotional intelligence, connection, and resilience. As an educator and school counsellor, I find this body of research affirming and inspiring. It validates what I have seen firsthand: mindfulness and self-compassion practices are foundational skills to student well-being and academic success. I believe that with proper training and support, these practices can become embedded in school cultures in ways that are meaningful for both staff and students.

In chapter three, I will explore the implications of these findings for students, teachers, counsellors, school administrators, and families. I will also offer practical recommendations for implementing mindfulness and self-compassion programs in diverse school contexts.

Chapter 3: Program Design and Implementation

This chapter presents a school-based group counselling program designed to enhance adolescent resilience and coping through mindfulness and self-compassion practices. Grounded in Self-Compassion Theory (Neff) and Mindfulness-Based Approaches (Kabat-Zinn, Germer), the 12-week program integrates Buddhist teachings, particularly the Eightfold path, with developmentally appropriate strategies. It is tailored for high school students experiencing elevated stress, perfectionism, or emotional dysregulation, and aligns with the growing need for accessible, evidence-informed mental health supports in schools.

To measure program impact, three well-established tools are used at the start and end of the program:

- The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003) assesses levels of self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity.
- The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983) evaluates perceived levels of stress and overwhelm.
- The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-12; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011) captures individual and contextual resilience factors.

Data collected through the SCS, PSS and CYRM-12 scales will be analyzed to evaluate changes in self-compassion, perceived stress levels, and resilience before and after the program. This pre- and post-assessment comparison will provide quantitative insights into the program's immediate effectiveness and help identify areas for improvement or additional support for participants. In addition to measuring short-term outcomes, follow-up assessments at three, six-,

or twelve-months post-program could offer valuable insights into the program's long-term impact. Although this capstone does not include a formal plan for longitudinal data collection, incorporating such follow-up assessments in future iterations would be a meaningful step toward understanding the sustainability of gains in self-compassion, emotional regulation, and resilience. By tracking these measures over time, educators and school counsellors could identify whether program benefits persists, diminish, or evolve, and adjust interventions accordingly. Longitudinal research in this area is crucial, as it can inform best practices and provide evidence for the lasting effectiveness of mindfulness and self-compassion interventions in supporting adolescent mental health.

Drawing on the findings from the literature review, this program emphasizes emotional awareness, cognitive reframing, self-kindness, and present-moment attention. Weekly sessions will integrate Common Humanity Circles (dialogic circles) either to start the session or to end, where students can reflect on the week's topic, share insights or challenges, and offer feedback on the practices introduced. Circles will promote an inclusive, student-centered environment by giving each participant a voice and helping the group co-create a supportive learning community. These discussions will also help the facilitator assess engagement and adapt activities to better meet student needs. Weekly sessions will include experiential practices, psychoeducation, reflective journaling, and group dialogue to help adolescents cultivate self-awareness, regulate stress, and respond to themselves and others with greater compassion. This chapter outlines session themes, learning objectives, practices, and implementation considerations, as well as implications for educators, school counsellors and school stakeholders.

The weekly themes and practices are grounded in core concepts from the Eightfold Path, adapted into developmentally appropriate language and activities for adolescents. This structure ensures that the program maintains philosophical integrity while remaining accessible and relevant to students in a school-based setting.

12-Week Mindful Self-Compassion Group Program for Adolescents

Format:

- Weekly 60-minute sessions
- Ideal group size: 8-12 students
- Facilitated by a school counsellor
- Includes pre- and post-assessments (SCS, PSS, CYRM)

Weeks 1-2: Introduction & Mindfulness Foundations

Themes: Self-awareness, safety, presence

Eightfold Path Links: Right View, Right Intention, Right Mindfulness

Objectives:

- Introduce mindfulness and self-compassion
- Create a safe and inclusive group container
- Complete baseline assessments

Activities:

- Program Purpose Discussion and Student Feedback in Common Humanity Circle:
 - o Facilitate an open conversation about why the program is being implemented, including current trends in adolescent stress and the benefits of mindfulness and self-compassion.
 - o Invite students to share their thoughts, hopes, and any concerns about participating. This dialogue will help students feel heard, enhance their sense of ownership, and increase buy-in for the program.
- Guided body scan and breathing
- Group agreements and safety mapping
- “What is mindfulness?” circle discussion
- Journalling prompt: “When I feel overwhelmed...”
- Pre-assessments: SCS, PSS, CYRM

Weeks 3-4: Mindfulness & Stress Management

Themes: Grounding, attention, stress response

Eightfold Path Links: Right Effort, Right Mindfulness

Objectives:

- Strengthen awareness of the stress response
- Introduce somatic grounding and daily coping techniques

Activities:

- Common Humanity Circle discussion:

- When do you feel most stressed during your day or week?
- What did you notice about your body or thoughts when we practiced grounding?
- How could you use these tools outside our group?
- 5-4-3-2-1 grounding, mindful walking
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Mapping stress triggers and stress response patterns
- Mindful coping plan and peer sharing

Weeks 5-7: Cultivating Self-Compassion

Themes: Inner voice, common humanity, kindness

Eightfold Path Links: Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Effort

Objectives:

- Explore Neff's three components of self-compassion
- Begin shifting self-critical patterns

Activities:

- Common Humanity Circle Discussion:
 - What is your inner voice like when you make a mistake?
 - How did it feel to write a self-compassionate letter?
 - What does being kind to yourself look like?
 - When have you struggled?
- Writing a self-compassionate letter

- Affirmation generation and self-kindness bingo
- Role-Play: responding to mistakes with compassion

Weeks 8-9: Emotional Regulation & Resilience

Themes: Emotional literacy, flexibility, internal coping

Eightfold Path Links: Right View, Right Concentration, Right Effort

Objectives:

- Expand emotional regulation tools
- Build inner strength and healthy response patterns

Activities:

- Common Humanity Circle Discussion:
 - What emotions have you noticed coming up for you recently?
 - Which strategies helped you feel more balanced or calm?
 - How do you bounce back when things don't go as planned?
- RAIN technique for emotion processing
- Resilience Tree: roots (strengths), trunk (current habits), branches (goals)
- Role-play: bouncing back after setbacks
- Mindful technology reflection and value-aligned screen use

Weeks 10-12: Integration, Reflection & Application

Themes: Growth, meaning, forward planning

Eightfold Path Links: Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Intention

Objectives:

- Apply key concepts to real-life contexts
- Reflect on personal growth and future intentions
- Evaluate progress through post-assessment tools

Activities:

- Common Humanity Circle Discussion:
 - What have you learned about yourself during these weeks?
 - How will you keep practicing what we've learned after the program ends?
 - How have you noticed changes in how you respond to stress or challenges?
- Personal wellness plan: "How will I keep this going?"
- Post-assessments: SCS, PSS, CYRM-12
- Group celebration: gratitude circle and mindful tea
- Final journalling: "What I've learned about myself"

Conclusion

Adolescence is a time of immense transformation, a developmental stage marked by rapid shifts in identity, emotion, and social connection. As mental health concerns among youth continue to rise, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ever-present influence of digital culture, there is a growing urgency for accessible, evidence-based tools that

help young people build inner resilience. This capstone project has explored how mindfulness and self-compassion, practices grounded in both contemplative traditions and contemporary psychological science, can support adolescents in developing skills they need not only to cope, but to thrive.

Drawing on a wide body of research, it is evident that mindfulness and self-compassion offer powerful benefits. These practices help adolescents regulate their emotions, reduce self-criticism, and connect more deeply with themselves as well as others. Mindfulness fosters present-moment awareness and grounded attention, while self-compassion cultivates a kinder inner voice and promotes emotional flexibility. When practiced together, they enhance psychological resilience and provide adolescents with sustainable tools for navigating life's stressors.

My own experience as both an educator and school counsellor has affirmed these findings. I have witnessed the transformative effects of these practices in classrooms and counselling spaces, from quieter transitions after recess to deeper student reflections and more compassionate peer interactions. In my Grade 6/7 classroom, I intentionally integrated self-compassion and mindfulness practices, following the Eightfold Path (unknowingly at the time) alongside Indigenous Principles of Learning. We began and ended each week with common humanity circles to check in, build connection, and strengthen relationships and safety within our classroom community. Initially, students were shy and hesitant to share, but as the year progressed, they began to look forward to this time to connect with their peers and teachers.

Because of my passion for meditation, I incorporated it into our daily routine from the start of the school year. I introduced the purpose and benefits of meditation and mindfulness,

explaining how these practices could support us in our daily lives. After each recess, we would gather as a class; I would dim the lights, play calming music, and students would find their seats. Over time, this became a seamless and anticipated transition, with students expressing disappointment on days when we were unable to practice together. I would lead them through meditations, breathing exercises, sound meditations, or quiet moments of reflection. Students would share that they felt calm, grounded, peaceful, ready for learning afterwards.

From the beginning of the year, I taught and integrated a growth mindset approach, emphasizing that learning is a process, mistakes are opportunities for growth, and supporting one another is essential. This mindset was foundational in shifting classroom culture and helping students see themselves and their learning journey more positively, which connects beautifully with the Eightfold path. I observed many benefits from developing these competencies: students used more encouraging language with each other when mistakes were made, offered support, asked thoughtful questions, and gave and received constructive feedback with openness.

Students began using mindful and growth mindset language when someone was struggling. They applied breathing techniques and mindfulness tools during times of stress or dysregulation, such as conflicts with friends, anxiety about tests or presentations, or challenges at home. I noticed students reminding their peers of these strategies and even walking them through calming exercises when needed. The classroom environment became safe, kind, and respectful fostering curiosity and creativity when mistakes were welcomed and embraced.

Additionally, students demonstrated their understanding and application of these practices beyond the classroom. They shared breathing techniques and growth mindset concepts with parents and siblings, using these tools to support themselves and others during stressful

times at home. They developed greater confidence in advocating for themselves and each other, believing in their own abilities and those of their peers.

These observations from my classroom illustrate the powerful, practical impact of integrating mindfulness and self-compassion practices, rooted in principles of the Eightfold Path, on fostering emotional regulation resilience, and supportive relationships among adolescents. They underscore the central argument of this capstone: that school-based mindfulness and self-compassion programs can provide students with essential tools to navigate challenges with greater self-awareness, kindness and confidence.

The 12-week program proposed in Chapter Three is a practical response to these needs. It is built to be developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and easy to integrate into school settings. It offers a structured but adaptable way to bring mindfulness and self-compassion into the lives of young people, with the goal of supporting long-term emotional wellness and growth. This work is just a starting point. I believe we must, as educators, school counsellors and school leaders, continue to reflect on the diverse needs of our learners and seek out interventions that honour both research and lived experience. We must approach this work not as experts with answers, but as facilitators of safety, curiosity and care. By embedding practices of mindfulness and self-compassion into our school cultures, we create environments where students feel seen, valued, and empowered to face challenges with courage and compassion.

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