



## Finding Focus: Attention Training for High Schools

**T**HANKS TO A TEAM OF RESEARCH SCIENTISTS at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Texas, Austin, high school students now have access to a mindfulness-based attention training course designed to increase focus, reduce stress, and help to regulate emotions.

The course, Finding Focus, is freely accessible both online and through an app. An interactive and personalized resource that's twenty-two days in length, Finding Focus is comprised of four twelve-minute lessons and four-minute daily exercises. The lessons cover the following:

### LESSON 1: Attention

Three key skills are taught for training attention: anchoring, focusing, and releasing.

### LESSON 2: Thoughts

Students are taught strategies for effectively managing distractions or counterproductive thoughts.

### LESSON 3: Evaluations

Students are taught strategies for identifying and releasing unhelpful personal evaluations and attitudes.

### LESSON 4: Emotions

Students are taught ways to use attention to enhance positive emotions and to reduce and manage difficult ones.

The daily four-minute exercises are referred to as Daily Beats, since most of them involve music. Daily Beats are intended to help students practice skills taught during the four lessons. Students gain practice in identifying a specific anchor and releasing distractions when they arise.

One type of Daily Beat is Music Meditation, where students hear a musician's introduction and then practice remaining focused on one of the musician's songs. Another type is Breath Syncing, where students practice syncing their breathing to the rhythm of a song. All Daily Beats are designed to help students learn to focus and relax, particularly since students get to choose their music genre.

Students also learn to notice their emotions more, without judging themselves in the process. Exercises appear to be particularly helpful to students who find themselves experiencing stress and anxiety.

The course is available to high school teachers and students across the United States free of charge. While the course is designed for students to complete independently, teachers are asked to oversee the process in a classroom setting. Teachers wishing to provide the course to their students are provided a step-by-step implementation guide. The guide includes instructions on how to introduce the course, how to enroll students, how to monitor progress, and how to engage students in ongoing classroom discussions about the course material.

Alexander Pasch, a research assistant at Finding Focus and the director of strategic partnerships, noted the

promising findings from two feasibility studies in 2019 and 2020, as well as a recent randomized control trial submitted for peer-review. The RCT found that, compared to students who attended school as usual, students who completed the Finding Focus course were more likely to believe their attention could improve with practice, felt more comfortable in their ability to train their attention, mind-wandered less during class and daily life, and had improved emotional regulation.

Readers who wish to learn more about Finding Focus, especially high school teachers who want to share it with their students, can go to <https://www.findingfocus.app>. Those interested are also encouraged to contact Alexander Pasch directly at [alexanderpasch@utexas.edu](mailto:alexanderpasch@utexas.edu). Consult the references that accompany

this article to learn more about the feasibility studies mentioned above. **A**



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**REFERENCES**

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