



# the path to a healthy mind

## mental training more important than ever

Mental health is an urgent public health issue. Many of the challenges in today's society would be positively impacted if everyone were to train their minds to become more focused, calm and resilient.

**47%** of the time, the average American is not paying attention to what they are doing, and report lower levels of happiness when they are inattentive.



People with stronger relationships have a **50%** increased likelihood of survival than those with poorer interpersonal relationships.

YOU CAN  
TRAIN YOUR BRAIN.  
As little as two weeks  
of compassion training,  
**30 minutes**  
per day, changes the  
brain and behavior.



Rates of depression have shown a **33%** increase over the last three years for women, and adolescent suicides have more than doubled in the last seven years.

People in their 60's with low purpose in life are more than **twice** as likely to die within five years as those with a higher sense of purpose, revealing that having a strong sense of purpose is among the most robust psychological predictors of mortality.



Center Founder and Director Richard Davidson recently presented at TEDxSanFrancisco, where he spoke about the path to a healthy mind.

There is a growing body of research both at the Center and across the scientific community that shows that a few minutes of mental training per day can change the brain and improve well-being. Our brain's wiring is not fixed — it is adaptable. This is known as neuroplasticity.

Can neuroplasticity be harnessed to change the world?

## FOUR MAJOR CHALLENGES IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

# how mindfulness training can make an impact

Consider four challenges facing society today. Distractibility, loneliness, negative self-talk and lack of purpose are affecting mortality and quality of life as we know it, but the good news is that we have the ability to cultivate skills that directly impact these challenges.

**Distraction** plays a crucial role in our happiness. One study found that 47% of the time people are not paying attention to what they're doing. Not only that, but those who were more distracted reported lower levels of happiness. By regularly paying attention to what we are doing, we can cultivate better awareness of the present moment and possibly be happier as a result.

The impact of **loneliness** on public health is significant. Studies have shown that loneliness has a greater impact on mortality than obesity, and as many as 76% of middle age Americans have experienced moderate to high levels of loneliness. However, by cultivating skills of connection, we can improve our interpersonal relationships and increase prosocial behavior which can lessen feelings of loneliness.

In recent years, rates of **depression** have shown an increasing trend among all groups, especially in women. Teen depression rate and suicides have also increased in the past seven years. By using mental training, we can gain insight about negative self-talk and explore and develop a healthier relationship with our inner narrative.



**Low life purpose** is a strong psychological predictor of mortality in the latter decades of life. Research has shown that those without a strong sense of purpose are twice as likely to die than those who have a clear view of their true north. Through contemplative training, we can improve our sense of purpose and learn how we can live in alignment with it.

We can cultivate skills of awareness, connection, insight and purpose through regular mental exercise. Research shows that just 30 minutes a day for two weeks of mindfulness training changes the brain. It's possible to start with just three minutes per day to begin to establish a daily habit.

There are many strategies to cultivate well-being. One approach is the Healthy Minds Program, a mobile app that we developed at Healthy Minds Innovations, the external, affiliated nonprofit dedicated to supporting the mission of the Center for Healthy Minds. The Healthy Minds Program leverages the research from the

Center to help users learn how to strengthen qualities of a healthy mind with simple practices they can apply in daily life. We are seeking citizen scientists — those who will use the app and help our researchers learn more about what works and for whom. The foundations portion of the Healthy Minds Program is free to anyone who wants to begin a daily practice.

Nourish your mind — change our world.

Become a citizen scientist — try the Healthy Minds Program at [tryhealthyminds.org](http://tryhealthyminds.org)



## designing a university around well-being and purpose

Tecmilenio University in Mexico was experiencing a decline in enrollment. Leadership analyzed the needs of the university community, and based on those findings decided to reposition the university around well-being and purpose in life. Héctor Mauricio Escamilla Santana leads the university and sat down with us to talk about how a focus on purpose has changed their entire culture.



### How has Tecmilenio repositioned itself around well-being?

When we redesigned the university in 2012, we learned from research about well-being and happiness. Since then, we have been using well-being theory and practices for all students, faculty and staff. Our vision is to prepare positive people with purpose in life and the competencies to achieve it. Purpose in life is at the center of Tecmilenio's well-being ecosystem. Everything we do — training of faculty and staff, student curricula and activities as well as our facilities — is aligned around embracing purpose, well-being theory and practice.

### How does your ecosystem support people from all walks of life in the university?

We have a network of tutors and mentors at the university. We train them carefully. If they believe that a student needs additional help, they recommend that the student sees a mental health professional. I like to think that working on students' character strengths and providing a supportive ecosystem with wellness and mindfulness practices provide well-being skills to cope with the challenges students face. For example, we know our students have anxiety and stress due to social media. We hope we're providing skills to help with that.

### What are some of the biggest challenges for scaling this type of university?

We want to do more studies to make sure that we are using the right methodologies and show that our ecosystem is working. Also, we must partner with scientists in centers like the Center for Healthy Minds to build a strong well-being culture because the challenge is that faculty, staff and leadership must "walk the talk" within our ecosystem of well-being. We are very happy because we're influencing our sister University Tecnológico de Monterrey as well as other universities around the globe.

# related findings

## HAVING A PURPOSE IN LIFE MAY PROTECT AGAINST UNPLEASANTNESS



In a 2013 study, Center researchers found that those who reported higher levels of meaning and purpose in life showed improved emotional recovery following exposure to negative pictures than those who have a lower sense of purpose. The results from the study provide objective evidence that having a purpose in life may afford protection from negative events and stressors through enhanced emotion regulation.

Read the synopsis at [go.wisc.edu/having-purpose](http://go.wisc.edu/having-purpose)



## your annual gift it's a big deal to us

*"I started supporting the Center in 2014 when I learned about the research they were doing in schools. Imagine if every child was taught kindness along with math and reading? It would be transformational. I'm happy to make a gift every year to help create a kinder world. Thank you, Center for Healthy Minds!" — Lynn Harmet, annual donor*

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- Almost 35% of our annual funding is provided by your donor gifts
- Nearly one-third of annual giving occurs in December
- Almost 30% of nonprofit organizations raise between 26-50% of their annual funds at year-end

Annual giving is a big deal for nonprofit organizations, including us. As you review your year-end giving plans, please consider the

## MINDFULNESS MEDITATION IS USEFUL IN DEPRESSION TREATMENT

Center researchers published a review paper in 2019 that provided a bird's-eye view of the study of mindfulness for mental health disorders. Depression is a condition where there is evidence that mindfulness meditation is effective for treatment, and there is also significant evidence as to why it works. Rumination — repetitive, negative thinking about the past — is a big factor in sustaining depression. Mindfulness meditation directly targets rumination because people are training themselves to notice when they become lost in thought and return their attention to the present moment.

Read the synopsis at [go.wisc.edu/mindfulness-depression](http://go.wisc.edu/mindfulness-depression)



Center for Healthy Minds. Your gift of any amount will ensure we have the resources needed to continue cultivating well-being and relieving suffering through a scientific understanding of the mind. Thank you.

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