Development of a mindful eating intervention among elementary school children and their parents

Goto, K., Wolff, C., Giampaoli, J., Seipel, B., Pierson, S., Wylie, A.
California State University, Chico and the Center for Healthy Communities at CSU, Chico

ABSTRACT and OBJECTIVE

Objective: The current study examined the feasibility and appropriateness of proposed activities for a mindful eating intervention among third through fifth grade children and their parents in northern California.

Description: Four focus groups and a parent workshop were conducted with parents of children from a low-income elementary school.

Evaluation: Results revealed that parents valued mindful eating practices and demonstrated openness to learning mindful food parenting skills. Parents also showed a desire to obtain simple and healthy recipes and involve their children in mindful cooking at home.

Conclusions and Implications: Six monthly mindful eating lessons and activities for classroom implementation, as well as mindful eating activities for use by parents and children at home, were developed and evaluated by a professional panel. Mindful eating practice topics include: enjoying sensory aspects of food, hunger and fullness awareness, emotional awareness, limiting environmental distractions that promote mindless eating, identifying resources and individuals involved in producing food, and preparing and eating cultural dishes together as a family.

BACKGROUND

There is limited information about the effectiveness of mindful eating interventions among children especially in non-clinical settings. For example, food-cut research demonstrated evidence that children as young as six years old have been successfully taught to regulate craving. However, it is not yet known whether general mindful eating interventions in non-clinical settings can successfully alter children’s response to external and internal food cues, emotional eating, and highly palatable food intake. Lastly, it is not yet known whether and how parents’ involvement at home and mindful feeding practices with their children affect food behaviors. A recent study demonstrated that mindful food parenting with present-centered awareness predicted greater consumption of healthy foods and less consumption of unhealthy foods among children, providing the rationale for involving parents in a mindful eating intervention among children.

DESCRIPTION and EVALUATION

PARENT WORKSHOP and FOCUS GROUP

A parent workshop introduced the idea of mindful eating and described classroom and take-home activities at the beginning of the intervention. A bilingual nutrition educator was available at the parent workshop. A total of 35 parents of 2nd to 4th grade students participated in the focus group.

Study results from the parent workshop and focus group revealed that parents valued mindful eating practices and demonstrated openness to learning mindful food parenting skills. Parents also showed a desire to obtain simple and healthy recipes and involve their children in mindful cooking at home.

Table 1. Mindful eating lessons and take-home activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Lesson topics and classroom activities</th>
<th>Take-home activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lesson 1: Master Mindless Munching</td>
<td>Recipe books, magnets, or pencils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lesson 2: Sensational Sensing</td>
<td>Shopping lists, a recipe book, or a note to the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lesson 3: Growing to Flow and Gain</td>
<td>A mindful choices interview with a worksheet used in the classroom and take-home activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lesson 4: Owning a Dining Area</td>
<td>A mindful tasting activity with a worksheet used in the classroom and take-home activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lesson 5: Planting Seeds of Mindfulness</td>
<td>A mindful tasting activity with a worksheet used in the classroom and take-home activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lesson 6: Cultural Celebration Feast</td>
<td>A mindful tasting activity with a worksheet used in the classroom and take-home activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INTERVENTION

Foodie U: the impact of a pilot mindful eating intervention on behaviors among children and families is a two-year seed grant project of the Agricultural and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) program funded through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The primary goal of the intervention is to develop and pilot-test strategies based on mindful eating practices for fostering healthy food-related behaviors among elementary school children and their families, primarily consisting of Hispanic and non-Hispanic whites. The objectives of this study are 1) to describe the development and implementation of a pilot mindful eating intervention to improve healthy food behaviors among third-fifth grade children and their parents from a low-income school primarily consisting of Hispanic and non-Hispanic students and 2) to evaluate the impact of the pilot intervention on healthy food behaviors among the participants.

Table 1 displays the mindful eating lessons and take-home activities for Foodie U.

Mindful eating lessons and activities in classroom

Nutrition educators taught six, once-a-month mindful eating lessons. Each lesson was 45-60 minutes and focused on a monthly theme and included food tastings. At the end of each lesson, nutrition educators distributed relevant take-home activity kits. Teachers remained in the classroom to facilitate behavior management.

Mindful eating practice among parents/guardians and children at home

Take-home activity kits were provided to promote the practice of mindful eating at home with parents/guardians. These language appropriate kits included an activity, a recipe, and/or non-perishable items. Students were encouraged to practice the same mindful eating exercise at home with their parents/guardians by using the activity kits. Parents/guardians were also encouraged to use some mindful food parenting skills they learned at parent workshops. Each month, families were presented with three Mindful Eating Challenges (MEC) for additional mindful eating practice at home. Incentives such as recipe books, pencils, or magnets were provided if the parent/guardian survey was returned, the original take-home activity practice was attempted, and at least one MEC was completed.

CONCLUSIONS

Six monthly mindful eating lessons and activities for classroom implementation, as well as mindful eating activities for use by parents and children at home, were developed and evaluated by a professional panel. Mindful eating practice topics included: enjoying sensory aspects of food, hunger and fullness awareness, emotional awareness, limiting environmental distractions that promote mindless eating, identifying resources and individuals involved in producing food, and preparing and eating cultural dishes together as a family.

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS or CONTACT

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