



**Mighty Mindsets**  
**By Niamh Doyle**  
**Illustrated by Carol Betera**

**Book Guide**

**About the book**

Children can struggle with life's challenges, big and small. But they can learn to cope, to build new habits and ways of thinking, to feel better about themselves and more able for the ups and downs of life, and that's where this book can help. Written in a child-friendly, humorous way and featuring clear explanations, relatable stories and practical tools your child can use every day, *Mighty Mindsets* helps children – and their families – lead balanced, connected lives.

**About the author**

Niamh Doyle is a writer, parent and teacher. Originally from Waterford, she now lives in Galway with her family. This is Niamh's first book, after many years teaching in both mainstream and special education schools.

## Using the book in the classroom

There has been an increase in recent years in the numbers of children suffering from mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. But research shows that benefits really accrue when practices such as mindfulness and breathing techniques are incorporated into children's daily life, at home and at school. It is the frequency, rather than the intensity, that matters.

By bringing even short practices into the day-to-day life of the classroom, teachers can improve their own wellbeing as well as that of the children. The key is to teach these skills in a way that is fun, so that children will bring the practices into their own lives on a daily basis.

Wellbeing fits naturally into the SPHE curriculum, as follows:

|               |                   |                    |   |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| <b>Strand</b> | Myself            | <b>Strand Unit</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Self Identity</li><li>● Growing and Changing</li><li>● Making Decisions</li></ul>                 |
| <b>Strand</b> | Myself and Others | <b>Strand Unit</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Myself and My Family</li><li>● My Friends and Other People</li><li>● Relating to Others</li></ul> |

The topics dealt with in this book can be incorporated into a school's Wellbeing School Self Evaluation.

The ***Discuss with class*** section at the beginning of each chapter can be done as a whole-class activity, in groups or in pairs. The Activities boxes include extension activities for the class.

It's totally normal to have a few children in each class who don't want to participate. I tell children that it's fine for them not to take part, but I do ask them not to disturb the activity for the other children.

## Chapter 1      Brain Basics

### ***Topic***

Introducing the brain and talking about its physical structure

### ***Discuss with class***

What do you think your brain does?

What protects it?

Why do you *need* to protect it?

### **Activities**

- Look at a diagram of the brain for children, pointing out the main regions.
- Younger children can practise finding their brain by putting their hands on their heads. Students can estimate the size of their brain by putting their hands together, like in the book.
- Discuss how our brain takes in information from the environment around us – through our five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. Ask children to name something for each sense, e.g. 'I can see ... I can hear ...'

## Chapter 2    Inside Your Brain

### *Topic*

How different parts of our brain are involved in how we think and feel

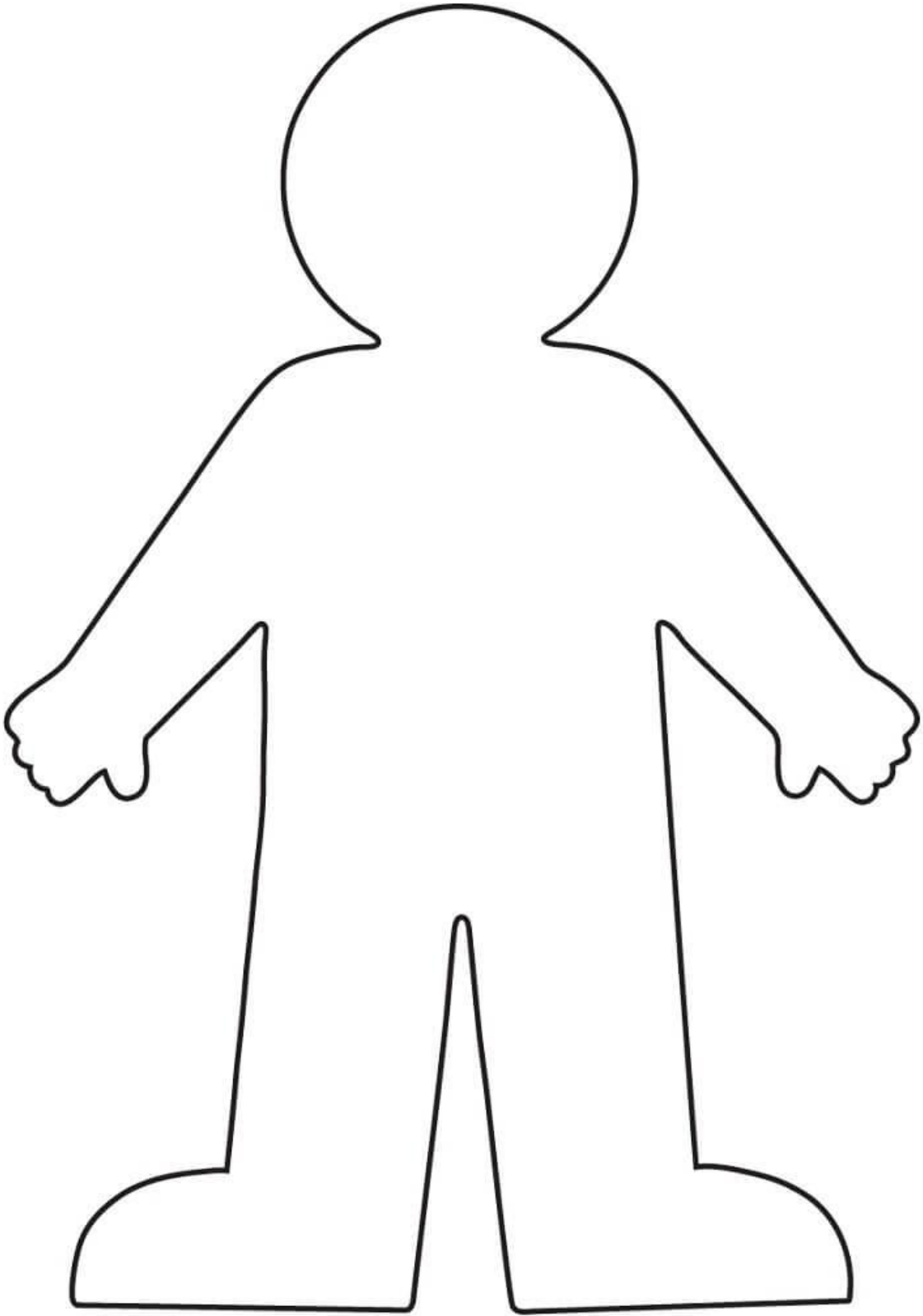
### *Discuss with class*

How do they feel when they get nervous, e.g., before a race or when called up to speak in front of the class. Where can they feel the nerves or anxiety in their body? E.g., hands get shaky, butterflies in stomach, racing thoughts.

Tell students you're going to learn about two parts of the brain today. The **amygdala** (am-ig-duh-la) and the **prefrontal cortex**.

### **Activities**

- Talk about different situations that come up for the students in their day-to-day lives. Discuss whether they are actually dangerous, or something that makes them feel nervous. E.g., going to the dentist, doing a test at school. Have them come up with different scenarios and they have to decide whether it's really dangerous (e.g., the zoo) or just something that makes them nervous (e.g. being sent to the principal's office).
- Practise this throughout the day or the week, taking a moment to decide: Is this dangerous, or am I just feeling nervous?
- Print off the blank template of a body on the next page and have the students colour in or label where they feel nervous, e.g., butterflies in stomach, shaky hands and legs, busy thoughts in head, lump in throat.
- Students practise taking a moment to listen to their body. Their heartbeat, their breath, their temperature, their energy, their stomach. This can be a nice transition activity between lessons, or after coming in from the yard.



## Chapter 3      Mindfulness

### ***Topic***

Becoming aware of the present moment, what's happening all around us

### ***Discuss with class***

- Can anyone think of something that can help when we are feeling nervous or anxious? A way to help our brain relax?
- Does anyone know what mindfulness is?

### **Activities**

- Ask students to turn on their 'spidey senses' and tune in to what their senses are telling them about what's happening around them. What can they see, hear, smell, taste, touch.
- Younger children can practise the activity in the book. With the children sitting on the floor in circle time, the teacher walks around, blowing bubbles high into the air around the children. The aim for the children is to watch the bubbles, without popping them. It's not a problem if they do burst them, just watch how they get used to the activity over time and how some students might learn to watch even a little bit more before popping a bubble!
- Have the students relax in their seats, hands on tummy or legs. They can close their eyes or look down at their lap. Ring a 'mindfulness bell' (any soft bell will work). Ask them to raise their hand when they can no longer hear the bell ringing. Note: It's normal to have one or two students not raise their arm at all, and that's OK.

## Chapter 4 Emotions

### ***Topic***

Emotional literacy, how you are feeling

### ***Discuss with class***

What are emotions?

Can anybody name some emotions or feelings that we all have?

### **Activities**

- Start with a discussion about the different emotions we feel. draw happy lines, angry lines, etc. Put on music and students draw lines and shapes to match the music. Children then pick an emotion and, using paint or crayons, they can express that emotion on the page.
- Emotions charades. Have some cards with names of emotions written on them. Students take turns coming up and acting out the emotion, the class have to guess which emotion it is. For older children, cards could have more detail, e.g. 'I'm in the yard and I have no-one to play with', 'I just opened my birthday present and it's exactly what I had hoped for!'
- Brainstorm some common situations, and how the students would feel if it happened. The children can come up with their own scenarios, or the teacher can prompt. E.g. your classmate spilt paint on your picture / you went to the zoo and got ice-cream.

## **Chapter 5 Breathing**

### ***Topic***

Introducing the idea that how we breathe affects how we feel

### ***Discuss with class***

Why do we need to breathe?

Do you think your breathing affects how you feel? Why/why not?

### **Activities**

Practise the breathing activities in the book:

- As you breathe in, imagine you are smelling a flower in the garden. As you breathe out, imagine you are breathing out through a straw.
- Mindful teddies – can be done with teddies lying on the floor or sitting in chairs with hands on tummy. Follow instructions in the book.
- Discuss when it would be helpful to practise these breathing exercises (e.g., when feeling nervous, trying to go to sleep, etc.).



## Chapter 6 Your Brain Can Change

### **Topic**

Introducing neuroplasticity

### **Discuss with class**

Why is it good for us to exercise?

Do you think we can exercise our brains?

Do you think our brains can change?

### **Activities**

- Can you think of anything new you could try this week to strengthen your brain? E.g. new sport, musical instrument, learning a few words in a new language, learning a poem off by heart, learning a new song.
- Physical activity helps with neuroplasticity. Taking a quick break between lessons to go for a walk or run in the yard or following along with a dance lesson on Go Noodle, doing some yoga (see Cosmic Kids on YouTube).
- Practise visualisation. Read a story or scene from a book out loud. Ask the children to imagine the scene in their heads as you are reading. Can extend this to an art activity.
- Play memory games, e.g., a shopping list, where each child has to remember the other items mentioned and add their own. E.g., 'I went to the shop and I bought bread. I went to the shop, and I bought bread and cheese. I went to the shop, and I bought bread, cheese and apples.' This activity works best in pairs or groups – it can take too long to go around the whole class, and children get bored after their turn in a large group.

## Chapter 7

## Mindsets

### *Topic*

What you tell yourself you can or can't do

### *Discuss with class*

- Are there things you think you can do? Things you think you can't?
- Give examples. How do you feel when you tell yourself 'I can't do that'.
- Make a list on one side of the whiteboard of things the students say they can do.
- Make a list on the other side of things they say they can't do, e.g. 'I can't swim.'

### **Activities**

- After reading the chapter, label the first list as 'Growth Mindset' and the other as 'Fixed Mindset'. Discuss how to reword the fixed mindset items so that they become growth mindset phrases, e.g. 'I can't swim **yet**'.
- Younger children can watch the Sesame Street song about mistakes on [YouTube](#)
- Talk about famous people such as Michael Jordan who made mistakes or experienced failure but had a growth mindset and kept going.
- Create a class growth mindset slogan, or wallchart with a growth mindset phrase from each student.

## Chapter 8

## Practice

### *Topic*

In order to get better at anything, you need to practise again and again

### *Discuss with class*

Review the chapter on neuroplasticity with the class. Remind them that our brains can change when we practise new skills repeatedly. Brainstorm what they currently practise (at home or at school). Is there anything they would like to get better at?

### **Activities**

- Practise throwing and catching a ball or beanbag by themselves or in pairs. Choose a time each day for 2 minutes practice. This can be a nice transition activity between lessons.
- Discuss something that they like doing outside of school, e.g., drawing, playing soccer, dancing, etc. Discuss picking a time to practise this every day. This can be a homework activity.
- Practise a new class song, choosing one every month. This could build up to an end of year concert performing for other classes or sending a recording home to parents. Discuss with the children how we often only see the benefits of practice after some time, the results aren't immediate.

## Chapter 9

## Perseverance

### *Topic*

Not giving up, even when you might want to

### *Discuss with class*

Review previous chapter about Growth Mindsets. Discuss Michael Jordan from the previous chapter. How do they think he felt when his high school basketball coach wouldn't let him on the team. Why didn't he give up? Is there anything the students felt like giving up on, but didn't?

### **Activities**

- Watch [Class Dojo](#) – three episodes about perseverance.
- Games like chess and draughts are good for learning about perseverance.
- Setting goals with physical activities, e.g., running X laps by the end of the month around the yard / gym. Marking up a wall chart each day to track progress. Discussing perseverance throughout the month – how it can feel harder some days than others, e.g., if we are tired.

## Chapter 10                      Resilience

### ***Topic***

Not giving up when something bad or sad happens

### ***Discuss with class***

The types of sad or bad things that can happen in a person's life – what can happen in school that is extra challenging? For example, struggling with schoolwork, being bullied, falling out with friends, feeling lonely. What can students do in these situations? E.g., talk to a grownup, ask for help with work. Remembering that hard times pass.

### **Activities**

- Talk about self-care practices. What do the students do or what could they do every day to take care of themselves. E.g., exercise / spend time with a friend / limiting screen time / drinking water. How doing these things every day helps us stay healthy both physically and mentally.
- Talk about the examples in the book of people who have displayed great resilience in their lives. Older classes could make a project about resilient people.
- Playing games such as musical chairs. When the game ends, discuss how it feels to be the last person without a chair, being the odd one out. Use this opportunity to discuss the importance of being compassionate and kind to ourselves, and to not compare ourselves to others.

## Chapter 11

## Outlook

### **Topic**

How you see the world

### **Discuss with class**

Our **mindset** is how we see **ourselves**. Our **outlook** is how we see **the world**. Having a positive outlook does not mean we have to feel positive all the time. It's normal – and healthy – to feel sad, angry or lonely. We also need to be able to talk about our problems, to share with someone we trust. This isn't the same thing as complaining.

When we have a positive outlook, we know that we all struggle from time to time and we understand that there are times when we need help, and times when we help others. Sometimes our lives change in ways that we don't want, like moving house or someone being very sick. A positive outlook helps us through tough times, helps us remember there are people who will help us, and there are good things in this world.

### **Activities**

- Discuss with the class: what does it mean to have a positive outlook? What about a negative outlook?
- Pick different scenarios, e.g., Monday morning, it's time to get up for school. What would be a negative way of looking at this? E.g., 'I hate Mondays, it's not fair that I have to go to school.' A positive outlook could be something like 'I'm grateful for this new day' / 'I get to see my friends today after the weekend' / 'I get to go swimming after school today' – use examples that will be relevant to the children in the class.
- An Awe Journal: record one sight or moment each day or once a week that they found beautiful, special or inspiring. E.g., sunrise / sunset, someone being kind, a song they heard. Explain to them that they are bringing their attention to all the good things in the world.

## Chapter 12

## Gratitude

### ***Topic***

Feeling thankful for something specific like a gift or taking a grateful view of the world. This way of looking at the world can grow – we can develop and cultivate gratitude in our lives.

Being grateful doesn't mean not wanting anything to change. For instance, you can be grateful for a playground, but you can also fundraise for new equipment. We can be grateful and proactive at the same time.

### ***Discuss with class***

Gratitude means being thankful for the good things in your life. Discuss with the class what they are grateful for – at school, at home, in the town or area that they live in.

### **Activities**

- Students can use a copybook to write down or draw 3 things they are grateful for every day.
- Gratitude Homework: as their English or Irish writing, the students can write their gratitude list at home. They can ask a family member or childminder to tell them one thing they are grateful for, creating a home-school link to what is being done in class.
- Create a gratitude wall in the classroom or in the corridor outside the classroom. Each child can add their own page (e.g., half an A4 page) with something they are grateful for, coloured in. This can be changed once a week or once a month.

## Chapter 13

## Compassion

### ***Topic***

Empathy is a recognition that we are all human, and we try to understand someone else's emotions – having the ability to see yourself in their shoes. It's the sense of 'I understand what you're going through, I've been there.'

Compassion adds the desire to help them: 'I can understand that you're struggling, and I want to help'.

### ***Discuss with class***

Brainstorm with the students times that they have noticed someone is having a hard time, or times that they have struggled. What can they do to help someone? What can they do when they are the ones struggling? Discuss compassion - being kind to others, and self-compassion – being kind to yourself when you are struggling or having a tough time.

### **Activities**

- Compassion Homework: notice outside of school where you can help someone. It could be at home, preparing dinner. Or at the childminder's, tidying up after an activity.
- Write a letter or a postcard to someone who lives alone. The students could take up a project to send cards to a local nursing home, for instance.
- Self-compassion – students write down three kind things about themselves. No need to put names on the page.
- Working in teams on projects promotes compassion for others. Emphasise the importance of working as a team, encouraging everyone to have an input, and being kind. The project could be based on anything, e.g., Art / Lego / History. The students can work in pairs or in groups of 3 or 4, depending on the needs and abilities of the students.
- An Acts of Kindness Jar. Children can write on a small piece of paper



something kind that someone else did for them. E.g., 'Someone helped me open my lunchbox', 'someone invited me to play with the group on the yard when I was on my own'. Best done anonymously. It's important that this exercise doesn't become competitive, and no names should be used to avoid some children being highly praised and others excluded.

- Role playing. As part of Drama curriculum, the teacher can discuss a topic, e.g.. someone on their own in the yard, someone being bullied, someone having a fight with a friend, someone looking upset in class. What can the children do to help. Discuss first, then role play. Keep it light and fun, and scaffold – write up sentences on the board that they can use, e.g., 'Would you like to play with us today?' 'Would you like me to get a teacher for you?' 'You seem a little sad, can I sit with you a while?' Adapt depending on the age of the students.