



MINDFUL FOUNDATIONS
WHAT EVERY CHILD DESERVES

**Mindful Foundations Curriculum Alignment with
STAR Early Literacy® (Renaissance) – Opening the Brain for Early
Literacy Learning**



The Core Thesis of This Alignment

STAR Early Literacy® measures what children know. Mindful Foundations creates the neurological conditions in which children can learn and retain what STAR measures.

Early literacy skills — phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension — are not primarily language problems. They are brain-state problems. A child in the survival brain (fight, flight, freeze) cannot process phonemes. A child flooded with cortisol cannot hold a sentence in working memory. A child who does not feel safe or loved cannot direct sustained visual attention to letter discrimination. No curriculum, no matter how well-designed, can teach early literacy to a nervous system that does not feel safe.

Mindful Foundations does not teach literacy. It opens the brain — the emotional brain, the regulatory brain, the relational brain — so that early literacy instruction can land, be processed, and be retained. Every component of Mindful Foundations that is mapped below addresses a specific neurological prerequisite for one or more STAR Early Literacy skill domains. The alignment is not metaphorical. It is neurological, developmental, and instructional.

STAR Early Literacy® — 3 Domains, 10 Sub-Domains, 41 Skill Sets

Domain 1: Word Facility & Skills	Domain 2: Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning	Domain 3: Numbers & Operations
Alphabetic Principle Concept of Word Visual Discrimination Phonemic Awareness Phonics Structural Analysis Vocabulary	Sentence-Level Comprehension Paragraph-Level Comprehension Oral Language / Listening Comprehension	Counting & Cardinality Number Sense Patterning & Ordinal Thinking

Domain 1: Word Facility & Skills — Neurological Prerequisites Mindful Foundations Builds

Word Facility & Skills is the largest STAR domain, covering 7 sub-domains and the majority of early literacy skill sets assessed. Every skill in this domain requires a brain that can attend, discriminate, sequence, and retrieve — all executive functions that are unavailable to dysregulated children. Mindful Foundations builds these neurological prerequisites systematically, before and alongside explicit literacy instruction.

Mindful Foundations Component	STAR Domain	STAR Sub-Domain / Skill Area	How Mindful Foundations Opens the Brain for This Skill
L.O.V.E.E. Foundation Phase — Executive Brain State Activation (Weeks 1–5, Daily)	Word Facility & Skills	Alphabetic Principle (Letter Names, Sequences)	Before a child can recognize or sequence letters, their brain must be in an executive state — not a survival or emotional state. The L.O.V.E.E. method's foundational phase establishes the felt safety that moves children out of the amygdala-dominant fight/flight/freeze response and into the prefrontal cortex where letter recognition, sequencing, and symbolic learning become neurologically possible. A child who feels unsafe or unloved cannot access the cognitive processing required to learn the alphabet — Mindful Foundations removes that neurological barrier first.
Daily Peaceful Pause (Every lesson day, all weeks)	Word Facility & Skills	Visual Discrimination (Letter Matching, Case Recognition)	Visual discrimination — the ability to notice fine differences between letters and match identical words — requires focused, sustained visual attention. The Peaceful Pause is a daily attentional reset that trains children to direct and hold their focus. Research confirms that attentional regulation is the single greatest predictor of early literacy readiness. By beginning every instructional day with a structured attention-orienting ritual, Mindful Foundations primes the visual cortex and attentional networks that STAR's Visual Discrimination items depend on.



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Breathing Strategies — 10+ Tools for Self-Regulation (Toolkit V, all weeks)	Word Facility & Skills	Phonemic Awareness (Rhyming, Blending, Segmenting, Isolation)	Phonemic awareness — hearing, isolating, and manipulating individual sounds — requires a brain that can attend, discriminate, and hold information in working memory simultaneously. These are executive functions that are completely inaccessible to a dysregulated child. Mindful Foundations' breathing strategies (Rollercoaster Breath, Pretzel Breath, etc.) downregulate the stress response and restore working memory capacity, the precise neurological condition in which phonemic awareness instruction becomes teachable and retainable.
Guided Meditations & Visualization Practice (Weeks 3–5)	Word Facility & Skills	Phonemic Awareness (Phoneme Manipulation, Medial Sound Identification)	Advanced phonemic awareness tasks — substituting medial phonemes, isolating final sounds, segmenting multisyllabic words — require children to hold a sound sequence in working memory while mentally manipulating it. Visualization and meditation practice directly builds the internal auditory rehearsal capacity that this skill demands. Children who regularly engage in guided visualization develop stronger working memory and phonological loop function — the exact neural architecture that phoneme manipulation tasks assess.
Emotional Literacy Vocabulary Instruction (Weeks 1–5, daily teacher modeling)	Word Facility & Skills	Concept of Word (Print Concepts, Word Boundaries, Word vs. Letter)	When teachers consistently use and name emotional vocabulary words with intention — pointing out that 'frustrated' is one word, demonstrating how words carry meaning, connecting spoken language to written print — they build children's understanding that speech can be mapped to print. Concept of Word requires children to understand that spoken words correspond to written words with boundaries. Mindful Foundations' rich, intentional vocabulary modeling creates the spoken-to-print conceptual bridge that makes Concept of Word understanding possible.
Sign Language Integration (Toolkit I)	Word Facility & Skills	Concept of Word (Word Recognition, Symbol-to-Meaning Mapping)	Sign language teaches children that meaning can be encoded in symbols — a foundational concept for literacy. When a child learns that a specific hand shape means 'calm' or 'help,' they are developing the symbol-to-meaning mapping that underlies both Concept of Word and Alphabetic Principle understanding. Mindful Foundations' use of sign language as an emotional communication tool simultaneously develops the conceptual infrastructure for print awareness.
Affirmation Cards & Classroom Environmental Print (Toolkit VI, all weeks)	Word Facility & Skills	Alphabetic Principle (Letter-Sound Correspondence, Environmental Print)	The classroom is surrounded with meaningful print — affirmation cards, posted expectations, Heart Posters, strategy names — created at children's eye level and referenced repeatedly during the day. Environmental print exposure is one of the most research-supported predictors of alphabetic principle development. Mindful Foundations ensures that the classroom print environment is rich, purposeful, and connected to children's emotional experiences — making print not just visible but emotionally significant and therefore more memorable.
L.O.V.E.E. Literacy Read-Alouds (Weekly, Toolkit II curated book list)	Word Facility & Skills	Phonics (Letter-Sound Relationships, Decoding, CVC Words)	Weekly read-alouds done in a predictable, calm, relationship-rich context create the optimal neurological conditions for phonics instruction. When children feel safe and connected to their teacher, dopamine and oxytocin levels rise — both of which enhance long-term memory consolidation of sound-symbol relationships. Mindful Foundations read-alouds are not just literacy events; they are neurochemically optimized learning experiences that make phonics patterns more sticky. The emotional safety of the read-aloud ritual is itself a phonics intervention.



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Reward Jar — Counting and Reinforcement System (Weeks 2–5)	Word Facility & Skills	Structural Analysis (Word Parts, Syllables, Compound Words)	Structural analysis requires a child to mentally divide words into meaningful parts — a task that requires sustained attention, working memory, and sequential processing. The Reward Jar is a daily incentive system that reinforces calm, focused behavior — the precise behavioral state in which structural analysis instruction can be received and retained. Children who are behaviorally regulated and motivated can persist through the cognitive demands of word-parts analysis; children in survival brain cannot.

Domain 2: Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning — The Executive Brain in Action

Comprehension — at the sentence and paragraph level — is the highest-order literacy skill STAR Early Literacy assesses. It requires the child to simultaneously hold, sequence, connect, and interpret language. These are purely executive-brain functions. No amount of comprehension instruction reaches a child whose brain is in survival mode. Mindful Foundations builds the emotional regulation, attentional capacity, and narrative reasoning that comprehension instruction requires.

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L.O.V.E.E. Read-Alouds — Pre/During/Post Discussion (Weekly, Toolkit II)	Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning	Sentence-Level Comprehension (Understanding Words in Context)	Sentence-level comprehension requires a child to hold meaning across a string of words — a task that demands both working memory and the ability to stay cognitively present. Mindful Foundations' structured read-aloud format (pre-reading warm-up, interactive discussion during reading, post-reading reflection) creates the calm, engaged attentional state in which sentence-level meaning-making is neurologically accessible. A child who is emotionally activated cannot track sentence meaning; a child in executive brain state can.
Guided Meditations — Narrative Comprehension (Weeks 3–5)	Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning	Sentence-Level Comprehension & Paragraph-Level Comprehension	Every guided meditation in Mindful Foundations asks children to follow a multi-step narrative — a teacher-narrated story in which they must track characters, settings, events, and emotional states. This is oral comprehension practice in its purest form. Children who participate in regular guided meditation develop stronger narrative comprehension because they practice listening, visualizing, and meaning-making in a calm, focused state — precisely the attentional-emotional conditions STAR's comprehension items require.
Role-Play Scenarios — Inferential Thinking (Weeks 3–5 meditations)	Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning	Paragraph-Level Comprehension (Inferential Questions, Text Interpretation)	STAR's paragraph-level comprehension items include inferential questions — questions that require children to go beyond literal text to infer cause, effect, motivation, or outcome. Role-play scenarios in Mindful Foundations train exactly this skill: children must imagine what a character is feeling, predict what might happen next, and reason about why people behave as they do. This inferential social reasoning is directly transferable to literary inferential comprehension — the brain uses the same predictive processing systems for both.
Open-Ended Teacher Questioning During	Comprehension Strategies &	Paragraph-Level Comprehension (Literal &	Mindful Foundations provides sample scripts with open-ended comprehension questions woven through every read-aloud: 'What do you think will happen when she gets frustrated?' /



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Read-Alouds (Sample Scripts, Toolkit II)	Constructing Meaning	Inferential Questions	'Why do you think he made that choice?' These questions cultivate both literal recall (what happened) and inferential reasoning (why it happened) — the two question types in STAR's comprehension domain. Daily practice responding to open-ended questions in a low-stakes, emotionally safe context builds the comprehension habits that STAR assesses.
Emotional Literacy — Sequencing Feelings and Events (Weeks 1–5, daily discussion)	Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning	Sentence-Level Comprehension (Sequencing, Cause & Effect)	When teachers guide children through sequencing emotional events — 'First I felt frustrated, then I used my breath, then I felt calm' — they are building the causal-sequential reasoning that underpins both narrative comprehension and STAR's sentence-level comprehension items. Mindful Foundations teaches children to track and narrate emotional sequences daily, wiring the temporal-causal reasoning network that reading comprehension depends on. Emotional sequencing is a covert comprehension readiness practice.
Neuro Tips — Listening, Processing & Brain State Connections (Every lesson plan)	Comprehension Strategies & Constructing Meaning	Sentence-Level & Paragraph-Level Comprehension (Listening Comprehension Foundation)	Every Mindful Foundations lesson includes a Neuro Tip that teachers deliver in clear, engaging language — explaining why the strategy works at a brain level. Children practice listening to complex multi-sentence explanations and connecting them to their own experience. This structured listening-to-comprehend practice — following an explanation, connecting it to a concept, retaining it — mirrors the listening comprehension prerequisite that underlies STAR's sentence and paragraph comprehension items before independent reading is established.

Domain 3: Numbers & Operations — The Calm Brain Learns to Count

STAR Early Literacy includes a Numbers and Operations domain because early mathematical reasoning — counting, patterning, ordinal thinking — shares the same attentional and working memory prerequisites as early literacy. Mindful Foundations addresses these prerequisites through naturalistic, emotionally engaging mathematical experiences embedded in daily regulation practices.

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Reward Jar — Counting Tokens Toward a Goal (Weeks 2–5)	Numbers & Operations	Numbers & Operations (Counting, Quantity, Number Sense)	The Reward Jar creates a naturalistic, emotionally motivating counting and quantity experience. Children observe tokens accumulating toward a goal — connecting number symbols with quantities in a context that matters to them. Emotional relevance is a critical factor in early number sense development: children learn number concepts more durably when they are emotionally engaged with the counting context. The Reward Jar is simultaneously a behavioral system and a number sense intervention.
Daily Routine Structures — Temporal Sequencing (All weeks)	Numbers & Operations	Numbers & Operations (Patterning, Sequence, Ordinal Thinking)	The predictable daily schedule in Mindful Foundations (first → then → next → last) builds ordinal sequencing and pattern recognition — foundational mathematical thinking skills. STAR's Numbers and Operations domain includes patterning and sequential reasoning. When children can reliably predict and name what comes first, second, and third in a daily sequence, they are developing the ordinal number sense that STAR measures. Predictable routine is covert mathematics readiness.



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Breathing Strategy Repetitions — Counting Cycles (Toolkit V, all weeks)	Numbers & Operations	Numbers & Operations (Counting, One-to-One Correspondence)	Several breathing strategies in Mindful Foundations involve counting breath cycles: 'Breathe in for 4, hold for 4, breathe out for 4.' Children practice one-to-one correspondence between a count and a physical action — a direct bridge to STAR's counting and one-to-one correspondence skills. This embedded counting practice occurs multiple times daily in a calm, focused state — ideal conditions for number sense development. The body becomes the counting manipulative.

The Neuroscience Connection: Brain States & STAR Early Literacy Readiness

The following table summarizes how each brain state affects a child's ability to access STAR Early Literacy skill areas — and how Mindful Foundations moves children from survival/emotional brain into the executive brain state where STAR-assessed skills become accessible.

Brain State (Conscious Discipline)	What Is Happening Neurologically	STAR Skills BLOCKED in This State	Mindful Foundations Tools That Restore Executive State
Survival Brain "Am I safe?"	Amygdala hijack. Cortisol flooding working memory. Fight/flight/freeze response. No prefrontal cortex access.	ALL STAR skills: phonemic awareness, letter recognition, comprehension, vocabulary, number sense — all blocked.	L.O.V.E.E. Foundation Phase, Heart-to-Heart Connection Rituals, Breathing Strategies, Calm Island, Trauma-Informed Behavior Response Guide
Emotional Brain "Am I loved?"	Limbic system active. Emotional preoccupation. Partial prefrontal access. Short attention span. Limited working memory.	Phoneme manipulation, structural analysis, paragraph comprehension, inferential thinking, number patterning — significantly impaired.	Daily Affirmations, Reward Jar (positive reinforcement), Guided Meditations, Fade-Away Co-Regulation, Classroom Community Building (Heart Poster)
Executive Brain "What can I learn?"	Prefrontal cortex online. Dopamine and oxytocin supporting memory consolidation. Full working memory, attention, and executive function available.	ALL STAR skills accessible: phonemic awareness, phonics, concept of word, visual discrimination, vocabulary, sentence & paragraph comprehension, numbers.	Peaceful Pause (daily reset), Breathing Strategy Library, Neuro Tips, L.O.V.E.E. Education Phase, Read-Alouds, Language Modeling, Open-Ended Questioning

How to Use This Alignment: Mindful Foundations as a STAR Early Literacy Readiness Investment

For Classroom Teachers	For Instructional Leaders & Coaches	For Program Administrators
Implement Mindful Foundations daily routines (Peaceful Pause, breathing strategies, affirmations)	When analyzing STAR Early Literacy benchmark data, examine it alongside Mindful Foundations	Position Mindful Foundations as the neurological prerequisite layer of your early literacy framework — the investment that ensures your STAR diagnostic data



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as your STAR readiness warm-up. Every minute invested in opening children's brains to learning multiplies the effectiveness of every minute of explicit literacy instruction that follows.	implementation fidelity data (Swivl observations, reflective practice documentation). Classrooms with high MF fidelity should show stronger growth trajectories on STAR — this alignment explains the mechanism.	reflects children's actual literacy potential rather than their survival-state limitations. MF removes the brain-state ceiling on STAR performance.
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STAR Early Literacy assesses 3 domains, 10 sub-domains, and 41 skill sets across 145 individual literacy skills for Pre-K through Grade 3.