

Meditation could help put an end to bullying in schools. Researchers at the Center for the Investigation of Healthy Minds in Madison is testing that theory, with some high-powered backing: The Dalai Lama himself.

Here's the theory: If kids know how to relax and focus their minds, they won't lash out or react with anger.

Jamie Shields started meditating before and after school a few years ago, and said it has helped her performance in high school.

"Wake up in the morning and go home at night and just meditate and you just forget about everything and stress just rolls off and i'm able to focus more what i'm working on - homework, studying in school. I can stay more alert throughout the day," Shields told us.

The researchers in Madison want to bring that focus to a younger group. They believe kids entering middle school would benefit most, as that is a tumultuous age. Puberty hits, there's more school pressure, and middle school can be especially tough for kids who feel "different."

Richard Davidson heads the Center for the Investigation of Healthy Minds, and has been studying meditation for decades.

"Our research has now identified the brain systems that are important for attention and emotion regulation and we've shown these brain systems are impacted by regularly practicing meditation," he said. Davidson added, meditation will not only help students perform better in the classroom, but it could make them happier overall.

"Certain qualities like the capacity to cooperate and be kinds to other people, come from meditation," he explained.

Laura Pinger, a former teacher who now works at the center, will teach meditation in the classroom. She told us pre-middle school is the perfect age for children to start.

"I think in some ways it makes them more receptive to it because they have that need for something to help calm them or help find some other way to deal with things that are stressful in their life," she said.

Students in other parts of the country say meditation is helping both in the classroom and at home. Madison Stephens and her sister Ali, both middle school students, enjoy the time they spend meditating.

"It helps us be a lot nicer to each other and it helps me do a lot better with school," Madison said.

Ali agreed. "I don't get mad at my friends or my family and stuff and it just takes away all my stress."

In fact, researchers have discovered meditation causes changes in the brain itself. People who meditate have a higher pain tolerance and react much more calmly to stress.

Richard Davidson explained. "There are certain universal values that are part of the healthy mind, one of those is kindness, the other is compassion it seems when people are exhibiting those qualities they feel better about themselves," he said.

Researchers here want kids to learn one important belief about who they are.

"In our classroom we listen to each other, we stand up for each other when there's a problem, if someone asks us to stop, then we stop and this is who we are whether anyone else is looking," Pinger explained the classroom motto.

The Center is launching the meditation program in two Madison schools and hopes to expand to other cities.