



3-Hour  
Professional  
Development  
Teacher Resources



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# Course Outline

## Mindful Education for Teachers Agenda

### I. Welcome, Introductions

- Introductions
- Agenda review
- Invitations and Agreements

### II. What is Mindfulness?

- What mindfulness is
- What mindfulness isn't
- Paying attention on purpose without judgment
  - Of our five senses
  - Of our thoughts and emotions
- The mindful pause - create space and replace impulsive reactions with thoughtful responses
- Formal vs. Informal - Why do we meditate?
- Why do we teach mindfulness?

### III. Research and Neuroscience

- Benefits for educators
  - Reduced stress and burnout
  - Greater success in doing their jobs
  - More emotionally supportive and better organized classrooms
- Benefits for students
  - Improved attention and executive function
  - Greater social and emotional skills, including emotion regulation, behavior in school, and empathy
  - Enhanced well-being, including lower test anxiety, stress, post-traumatic symptoms and depression
- The Mindful Brain
  - Role of Prefrontal Cortex
  - Amygdala
  - Hippocampus

### IV. Mindfulness in Education

- How do we bring mindfulness to our schools?
- State of Ohio and Mindfulness Education
  - 2019-2024 Strategic Plan for Education
  - PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports)
- What is Social Emotional Learning?
- Integrating Mindfulness & Social Emotional Learning

### V. Resources

- Personal practice apps
- Social Media

### VI. Closing, Reflection, Questions

- Evaluations
- Questions



# The Research on Social-Emotional Education/Mindfulness

This page summarizes research on the benefits of social-emotional education and mindfulness, including neuroscience, the latest scientific studies, and specific benefits particularly relevant to educators and students. *Scholarly research finds that social-emotional education and mindfulness practice decreases stress and anxiety, increases attention, improves interpersonal relationships, strengthens compassion, and confers a host of other benefits.* (adapted from Mindful Schools)

<p><b>Attention</b></p> <p>Numerous studies show improved attention, including better performance on objective tasks that measure attention. Social-emotional/mindfulness practice teaches students how to pay attention in a particular way, and on purpose.</p>	<p><b>Emotion Regulation</b></p> <p>Social-emotional/mindfulness training is associated with emotion regulation across a number of studies. Social-emotional/mindfulness education creates changes in the brain that correspond to less reactivity, and better ability to engage in tasks even when emotions are activated.</p>
<p><b>Compassion</b></p> <p>People randomly assigned to social-emotional/mindfulness training are more likely to help someone in need and have greater self-compassion.</p>	<p><b>Calming</b></p> <p>Studies find that social-emotional/mindfulness training reduces feelings of stress and improves anxiety and distress when placed in a stressful social situation.</p>

## Social-Emotional Education Changes the Brain

### Amygdala

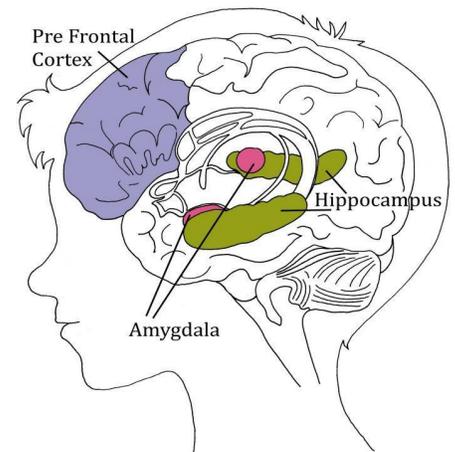
Aroused when detecting and reacting to emotions, especially difficult or strong emotions such as fear. This part of the brain is less activated and has less gray matter density following social-emotional training.

### Hippocampus

Critical to learning and memory, and helps regulate the amygdala. This part of the brain is more active and has more gray matter density following social-emotional training.

### Prefrontal Cortex

The part of the brain most associated with maturity, including regulating emotions and behaviors and making wise decisions. This part of the brain is more activated following social-emotional training.



# Evidence Of The Benefits Of Social Emotional Learning/Mindfulness In Education

## Social Emotional Training with Teachers

When teachers learn social-emotional training/mindfulness, they not only reap personal benefits such as reduced stress and burnout, but their schools do as well. In randomized controlled trials, teachers who learned social-emotional and mindfulness training reported greater efficacy in doing their jobs and had more emotionally supportive classrooms and better classroom organization based on independent observations.

## Social Emotional Training with Students

Studies find that youth benefit from learning social-emotional and mindfulness training in terms of improved cognitive outcomes, social-emotional skills, and well being. In turn, such benefits may lead to long-term improvements in life. For example, social skills in kindergarten predict improved education, employment, crime, substance abuse and mental health outcomes in adulthood.



- Cognitive Outcomes
- Attention and Focus
- Grades
- Improved memory
- Improved executive functioning skills

- Social-emotional skills
- Emotion regulation
- Behavior in school
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Social-skills

- Well Being
- Test anxiety
- Stress
- Posttraumatic symptoms
- Depression



# Integrating Mindfulness & Social Emotional Learning

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## Mindfulness Practices, Skills & Outcomes

As mindfulness is relatively new to education, many educators want more clarity about how mindfulness fits in with social and emotional learning (SEL). Many educators wonder if they should be choosing one approach instead of the other, or using both approaches.

Here, we analyze the similarities and differences between mindfulness and SEL. We'll show how the two are different and complementary, and describe how integrating mindfulness will increase the effects of existing SEL programs.

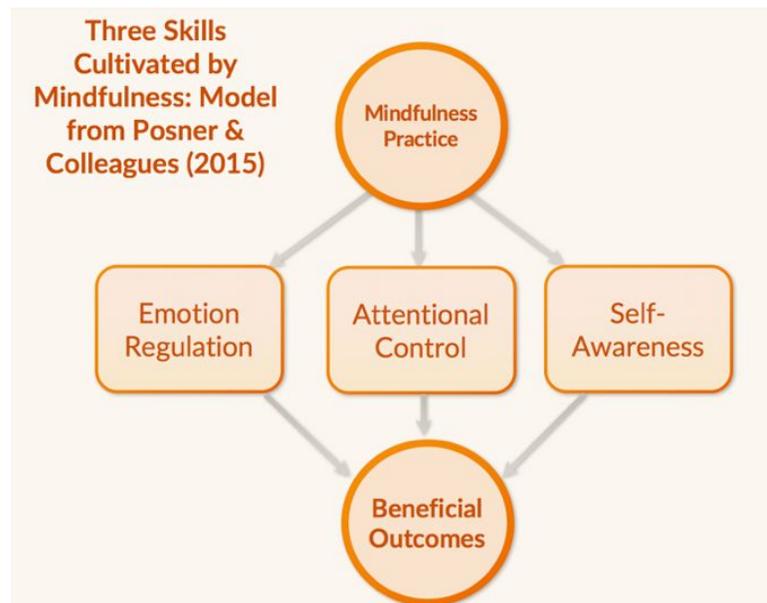
First, let's describe the practices, skills, and targeted outcomes of mindfulness and SEL.

The practices of mindfulness include:

- Explicit training of attention. For example, students learn to focus on the breath or sounds.
- Developing emotionally positive states including kindness, compassion, and gratitude. Exercises help students deeply feel the positive emotions.
- Training in regulating our responses to impulses. Mindfulness is a practice of developing an ability to let go of reactivity and act from a place of greater ease, stability, and wisdom, rather than compulsively pursuing our preferences.
- Psychoeducation, which includes information that normalizes the experience of students and enhances understanding of their internal life and behavior.

## Mindfulness Skills

The practices and psychoeducation of mindfulness are hypothesized to develop specific skills. In one prominent model of mindfulness, Michael Posner and colleagues suggested three core skill sets: emotion regulation, attentional control, and self-awareness.



## Mindfulness Outcomes

What are the aims of mindfulness and what are its benefits? As a practice and approach to living, mindfulness aims at profound flourishing. Practiced over a period of years, mindfulness seeks to create an emotionally balanced, meaningful life, animated by a spirit of compassion and caring.

Among youth, outcomes of interest include stress management, emotional well-being, and cognitive performance. While preliminary, some studies with youth find improvements in these areas.



Now, let us consider the practices, skills and outcomes of SEL.

## SEL Practices, Skills & Outcomes

The practices of SEL include:

While SEL programs take diverse approaches, we try to synthesize common features here:

- Psychoeducation and exercises designed to enhance goal-directed behavior.
- Reinforce attitudes of mutual respect and commitment to building a supportive group.
- Learn emotion recognition and regulation.
- Provides tools for resolving differences by developing greater emotional intelligence and communication skills. For example, the practices of perspective-taking aim to develop empathic connection and prosocial behavior.
- Tools and psychoeducation regarding decision-making attempt to minimize impulsivity and reduce destructive behaviors including truancy, substance use and conduct problems.

## SEL Skills

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the leading organization in disseminating SEL programming, highlights five core SEL skills, illustrated in the diagram below.

The skills in red (self-management and self-awareness) are skills practiced internally, those in blue (social awareness and relationship skills) are interpersonal, while responsible decision-making is in green to denote that it is practiced both internally and interpersonally.



## SEL Outcomes

In an important review of more than 270,000 students receiving SEL programming, researchers highlighted five key outcomes of SEL programs:

- ~Healthy attitudes
- ~Positive social behavior
- ~Reduced emotional distress
- ~Improved academic performance
- ~Reduced conduct problems including substance use

The researchers found that universal SEL programs, delivered by classroom teachers, demonstrated benefits in all five key outcomes. These benefits were considered small but meaningful. Of special interest, academic performance was improved by 11% - which is larger than the average effect of a typical academic-focused intervention.



## Differences Between Mindfulness & SEL

There is some overlap between the practices, skills, and outcomes targeted by mindfulness versus SEL programs. We should bear in mind that many mindfulness programs include or explicitly incorporate aspects of SEL, and SEL programs sometimes involve small doses of training in mindfulness practices.

**Differences in practices:** The practices of SEL rely more heavily on psychoeducation and interpersonal skill development. Although mindfulness may include some similar exercises, mindfulness functions more centrally as an attentional training. As such, mindfulness more closely resembles training such as physical exercise. In mindfulness practice – as in exercise – there is less emphasis on cognitive understanding, and more emphasis on engaging the attention in particular ways.

**Differences in targeted skills:** While the skills of the approaches have considerable overlap, SEL more explicitly focuses on creating harmonious classrooms and communities. Mindfulness invests heavily in developing self-regulation. A focus on self-regulation directly supports the first two SEL skills – self-awareness and self-management. SEL emphasizes interpersonal and decision-making skills. When students self-regulate more effectively due to mindfulness, we expect their relationships to improve. However, mindfulness does not directly target relationship skills in the manner SEL does.

**Differences in targeted outcomes:** Inspecting the target outcomes of mindfulness and SEL, again, we find overlap and notable differences. Mindfulness is often less explicitly goal-oriented. Of course, in order to conduct research and introduce mindfulness in education, mindfulness programs need to specify targeted outcomes. Nevertheless, explicit emphasis on particular desired outcomes can undermine the unpressured, investigatory spirit of the practice. SEL more clearly specifies the desired outcomes: prosocial behavior, emotion regulation and academic performance. SEL is also more likely to specify long-term outcomes regarding success in adulthood.

## What value does mindfulness add?

By targeting the three key skills of attentional control, self-awareness, and emotion regulation, mindfulness builds student self-regulation to a greater extent than social emotional programs alone. In turn, self-regulation allows students to think clearly enough to choose a strategy they learned in their social and emotional learning curriculum.



Here is an example of how mindfulness can support more positive behavior and allow students to use SEL strategies. Suppose Sally tells Billy he is a big jerk. The self-awareness piece of mindfulness training allows Billy to stop and notice that he feels angry and hurt. He might decide to bring his attention first to sensations in his body, and then taking some slow breaths, and in this way regulate his emotions. He might then decide to use a strategy he learned in SEL, such as using words to describe what he's feeling and make a request. For example, he might say, "Sally, I felt hurt and angry when I heard you call me a jerk. Could you please explain what made you say that?"

Secondly, the attention training aspect of mindfulness is likely to be relevant for academic achievement and learning SEL skills. Mindfulness decreases mind-wandering, which is associated with poorer task performance. Experimental evidence suggests that enhanced attention can improve reading comprehension and improves cognitive capacities.

Lastly, mindfulness may be beneficial in promoting the prosocial attitudes and behavior that form the centerpiece of SEL. The classic description of empathy – 'to stand in some else's shoes' – presumes that we already know what it is like to stand in our own shoes. With striking clarity, mindfulness reveals what it's like to experience difficult as well as pleasant emotions. The intimacy of our encounter with ourselves provides a deeper basis for accurate empathy. Recent data support this hypothesis. Mindfulness and empathy are also linked through their shared relationship with stress. While mindfulness decreases stress, stress weakens empathy. The suite of practices including kindness, compassion, gratitude and joy can also promote prosocial behaviors.

### Key Points

- Mindfulness and SEL support one another in a synergistic fashion.
- By targeting the three key skills of attentional control, self-awareness, and emotion regulation, mindfulness builds student self-regulation to a greater extent than social emotional programs alone. In turn, self-regulation allows students to think clearly enough to choose a strategy they learned in their social and emotional learning curriculum – in the heat of the moment.
- Mindfulness can support students in paying closer attention, enabling them to better learn academic content and SEL skills.
- Mindfulness can promote prosocial attitudes and behavior by fostering empathy, kindness, compassion, and gratitude.



# What Mindfulness Is

## Mindfulness is

- **paying attention on purpose**  
Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around us.
- **a way of living**  
Mindfulness is more than just a practice. It brings awareness and caring into everything we do—and it cuts down needless stress.
- **evidence based**  
We don't have to take mindfulness on faith. Both science and experience demonstrate its positive benefits for our health, happiness, work, and relationships.
- **for everyone**  
Mindfulness is not a special added thing we do. As humans, we already have the capacity to be present, and it doesn't require us to change who we are.
- **letting go of taking things for granted**  
We accept the lot we've been given in life. We assume and expect things will stay the same. Mindfulness challenges us to awaken from these mind-habits and appreciate the little things.
- **returning our thoughts to the present moment**  
A common misconception about mindfulness is that it means to stay in the present moment. We don't always have control over our naturally wandering mind, but we have control over the return. We can always *return* our mind to the present moment, return it to our breath or our senses which can be found in the present moment.
- **the self-regulation of attention and emotions**  
The scientists used the word "self-regulation" to refer to how you can take control of your attention, you can regulate your focus. It's also about regulating your emotions. If we are more aware of the emotion that we are feeling, we can work through it thoughtfully instead of reacting to it.



# Mindfulness is not

- **a religion**

The primary aim is not a set of beliefs but the engagement with practices that enhance well-being.

- **all about stress reduction**

Mindfulness can significantly reduce stress but it's not about stress reduction. Rather than remove stress, mindfulness helps us learn to relate to stress differently.

- **a disciplinary tactic**

While mindfulness can help student behavior and school and classroom climate, it will backfire if used punitively or with the aim of controlling student compliance.

- **a silver bullet for all problems**

As we all know, there is no silver bullet. But, in a world that's increasingly fast-paced, where kids are bombarded with media and screens, where they have less and less downtime to just be, these practices can teach kids essential skills.

- **only calmness and happiness**

While over time practitioners generally experience more calmness and happiness, mindfulness is about being with whatever is happening, even if that is the opposite of calm and happy.

- **the absence of thought**

It's not about clearing the mind! Mindfulness gives us the ability to be aware of our thoughts, and direct our attention, and thus not be so controlled by runaway thoughts. We learn the skill of becoming aware of our thoughts, without necessarily doing anything with them.

- **about being complacent**

Acceptance does not mean agreement or complacency. It means acknowledging whatever's going on, which is a good idea because it's already happening.

- **just about meditation**

Meditation is an exercise that helps us strengthen our mindfulness practice the way physical exercise strengthens our muscles. The more we practice meditation, the more we deepen our capacities to be aware and compassionate, in other words, our mindfulness practice.



# Resources for Mindful Education for Teachers

## **Mindfulness Practices** (find online meditations with a web search)

- **Guided meditation: mindful breathing**
- **Guided meditation: body scan**
- **Guided meditation: sending kind thoughts** (*To ourselves and others.*)
- **Pause and breathe** (*Pause when you notice stress arising. Take one mindful breath.*)

## **Books for Children**

- Charlotte and the Quiet Place by Deborah Sosin
- Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda by Lauren Alderfer
- My Five Senses by Alike
- Take the Time: Mindfulness for Kids by Maud Roegiers
- Visiting Feelings by Lauren Rubenstein
- Moody Cow Meditates by Kerry Lee MacLean
- Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children by Thich Nhat Hanh
- What Does it Mean to be Present? by Rana DiOrio
- Rosie's Brain by Linda Ryden
- A Handful of Quiet by Thich Nhat Hanh
- Puppy Mind by Andrew Jordan Nance

## **Books for Teachers & Parents**

- Building Emotional Intelligence by Linda Lantieri
- Child's Mind by Christopher Willard
- Sitting Still Like A Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (And Their Parents) by Eline Snel
- The Mindful Child & Mindful Games by Susan Kaiser Greenland
- The Way of Mindful Education: Cultivating Well-Being in Teachers and Students by Daniel Rechtschaffen
- Trauma-Proofing Your Kids by Peter Levine and Maggie Kline
- Whole Brain Child by Dan Siegel
- Teach, Breathe, Learn by Meena Srinivasan
- Everybody Present by Nikolaj Flor Rotne, Didde Flor Rotne

## **Articles** (find with a web search of the title)

- *The Power of Mindfulness: How a meditation practice can help kids become less anxious, more focused*, Child Mind Institute
- *Mindfulness in the Classroom: Five Skills That Influence Your Ability to Work With All Kinds of Learners*, Education World
- *Can Mindfulness Make Us Better Teachers?*, Huffington Post
- *In the Classroom, A New Focus on Quietening the Mind*, New York Times
- *How to Help a Traumatized Child in the Classroom*, Greater Good Science Center
- *The Science of Trauma, Mindfulness, and PTSD*, Mindful
- *Why Teachers Say Practicing Mindfulness Is Transforming The Work*, MindShift
- *Low-Income Schools See Big Benefits in Teaching Mindfulness*, MindShift
- *How Schools Use Brain Science To Help Traumatized Kids Heal and Learn*, MindShift



## Apps

- Align Mindfulness
- Insight Timer
- Stop, Breath, Think
- Calm
- 10% Happier
- Meditation Studio
- Smiling Mind
- Take a Break
- Take a Chill

## Social Media



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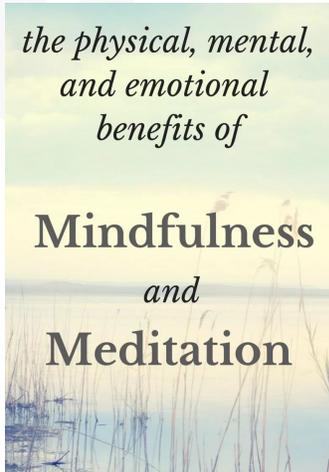
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# THE PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION



You're hearing about mindfulness everywhere, right?

That's because there are amazing benefits to mindfulness and meditation!

Much of the research on mindfulness and meditation reveals the amazing *neuroplasticity* of our brains — while we used to think that our brains stopped developing in our early twenties, we now know that our experiences can shape our neural development well into our sixties and beyond. The more we exercise a particular neural pathway in the brain, the more we strengthen it. In the cute phrase neuroscientists use, "Neurons that *fire* together, *wire* together."

For example, a study of London cab drivers revealed that they had larger-than-average hippocampuses. The hippocampus plays an important role in memory — and the researchers concluded that all of the spatial memories the cabbies created while driving through one of the world's largest cities actually *increased the area in their brains devoted to making new memories*.

Recent studies indicate that as little as *12 minutes of meditation a day*, over an 8-week period, is enough to create changes in the brain! Read on for a summary of some of the most amazing findings in meditation research:

## Physical Benefits

- Meditation practice has been demonstrated to increase immune function — in one study, people who meditated produced more antibodies to a flu vaccine than people who didn't meditate (which makes me excited because I just got a flu shot yesterday!)
- Meditation is also linked to an increase in telomerase (at the end of our genes), which can possibly reduce cell damage in the body.
- Mindfulness, including eating mindfully, has been linked to weight loss.
- In one study, participants who practiced meditation lowered their blood pressure and cut their heart attack risk in half over five years.
- Meditation reduces levels of the hormone cortisol (which raises blood pressure and levels of stress).
- Taking a few deep breaths engages our parasympathetic nervous system (our "rest and digest" mode), and deactivates our sympathetic nervous system (our "fight, flight, or freeze" mode).



## Mental Benefits

- Meditation increases neural connections in the brain, and has been shown to strengthen myelin (the protective sheath on our neurons that facilitates signaling in the brain).
- Meditation is linked to having a longer attention span and improves concentration.
- Meditation increases activity in the prefrontal cortex (associated with planning and judgment) and in the anterior cingulate (associated with emotional regulation, learning, and memory).
- In one study, participants who meditated for 30 minutes a day for 8 weeks had an increase in gray matter in the regions of the brain associated with memory, sense of self, and empathy.
- Students who meditated prior to an exam performed better than students who did not. The researchers linked meditation to improved cognitive functioning.

## Emotional Benefits

- Mindfulness and meditation practices have been extensively linked to easing symptoms of depression and anxiety, and these techniques are used in many therapy settings.
- A 2007 study of students who had been taught meditation techniques revealed a decrease in test anxiety, nervousness, and self-doubt, and an increase in focus and concentration. Further studies have shown reduced absenteeism and suspensions in schools where mindfulness programs have been implemented.
- Mindfulness and meditation helps us learn to turn off the negative self-talk or rumination that our minds often resort to when left on their own.
- Meditation reduces our emotional reactivity. One study found that mindful stress reduction practices actually decreased the size of people's amygdala (responsible for our aggression, anxiety, and fear — an overactive amygdala is associated with depression).
- These practices can make us more compassionate. People who meditate show more activation in the area of the brain associated with empathy when they are exposed to someone who is suffering.

## The Anecdotal Evidence

This information is impressive, but is also very clinical. I want to end with some personal stories about the benefits of mindfulness and meditation.

I love this post from Michelle Noehren of CTWorkingMoms, What I Know About Motherhood Now That I Practice Meditation. Michelle writes, "I've experienced a dramatic drop in my anxiety level and I feel like I've healed some relationships in my life that were difficult, not because the other person changed anything, but because I now fully understand that I have the ability to change situations solely based upon the way I think."



I have shared with you my experiences with postpartum depression and anxiety. In addition to seeking professional help, I have greatly benefited from practicing mindfulness and meditation. I am a lot calmer than I used to be in dealing with my children, often responding with compassion and a hug, rather than reacting with anger. Practicing mindfulness has indeed made me a better parent.

It has also helped me in overcoming my depression. The first time I read about rumination {the negative self-talk often associated with depression} I was shocked to see it listed as a symptom of depression. I thought everyone did that! If we had a bad morning getting ready for school, my 20-minute drive to work was filled with thoughts of what a terrible mother I was, worrying my life would never feel normal again with these two little children to take care of, and anticipating the continuation of the drama when picking them up after work and then starting over with mama-stress and dinner-time battles.... By the time I got to work I was emotionally exhausted, and found little joy in being a teacher or a mother.

Mindfulness and meditation have made me so much more aware of my thoughts, and how I can stop my mind from dwelling on the negative. I now realize my thoughts are just the stories I tell myself *about* my life, they are not my life itself. The emotions come and go, and I don't need to waste my energy indulging anger, worry, or frustration. Mindfulness allows me to find the skillful response instead of jumping to an emotional reaction. I pay attention to the present moment and become aware of the good that's always there, waiting to be seen.

As I have begun sharing this practice with colleagues, teachers, and students, many people have thanked me for teaching mindfulness. A common theme has emerged in all of the stories I hear from people who have discovered these techniques — almost always, they will say, "Mindfulness changed my life."

I know it has changed my life. And that's why I want to share it with all of you.



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