



MINDFULNESS AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR TO PROMOTE SAFE DRIVING PRACTICES IN ALASKA

Shared risk and protective factor (SRPF) approaches are efforts that address the underlying conditions that affect multiple health outcomes. By improving these conditions and shared characteristics, multiple health outcomes are simultaneously improved.

In March 2020, Safe States launched the *Driver Behavior Change Seed Grant Program (Seed Grant Program)* to enhance state and local motor vehicle safety efforts by addressing shared risk and protective factors, focusing on evidence-based behavior change strategies. Four multidisciplinary Safety Teams were funded to develop and implement activities based on evidence-based strategies identified in the resource document *Strategies to Address Shared Risk and Protective Factors for Driver Safety*, developed in partnership with Safe States Alliance and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The emphasis on shared risk and protective factors provides public health and traffic safety agencies opportunities to work collaboratively across multiple sectors to maximize impact and leverage funds efficiently. Shared risk and protective factor approaches also emphasize the social determinants of health, recognizing that individuals' behaviors and environments influence their decision-making across the lifespan.

SHARED RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS ADDRESSED



SHARED RISK FACTORS



Low-Risk Perception



Peer Norms Modeling Risky Driving Behavior

SHARED PROTECTIVE FACTORS



Mindfulness and Self-regulation



Positive Youth Development



Social & Emotional Learning



ALASKA SAFETY TEAM'S DRIVER SAFETY INTERVENTION

The Alaska (AK) Safety Team identified mindfulness training as a protective factor shared across distracted driving, aggressive driving, and speeding behaviors. Mindfulness increases emotional self-regulation, heightens acute awareness, and enhances situational awareness regarding risk perceptions. The AK Safety Team's participation in this pilot intervention provided an opportunity to expand the utilization of SRPF factor approaches to traffic safety by improving self-regulation and promoting safe driving practices. After assessing mindfulness training and its strengths and weaknesses, the team identified teen drivers for their target audience.

The AK Safety Team brought together positive youth development, social and emotional learning, and mindfulness training experts to launch the intervention. Traffic safety, public health, and Tribal partners were also engaged to guide this work and ground efforts in a cultural context. The team connected with the Alaska Mindfulness Center and Mt. Edgecumbe High School to add specific



expertise in mindfulness and access to youth for the project team. An important consideration as the team began planning their initiative was how to maintain fidelity to the mindfulness training protocols within the context of COVID-19. The pandemic also affected recruitment timelines, and the project team ultimately conducted recruitment activities twice due to the extenuating circumstances and shifting timelines.

In response to these constraints, a trainer from the Center of Mindfulness developed a distance learning curriculum. The virtual curriculum was implemented in May 2021, with six out of 15 participants finishing the course. After completing the May training session, the Center for Mindfulness hosted additional training opportunities. In August 2021, the Center for Mindfulness administered a two-hour live outdoor training to 22 Alaska Youth Court volunteers. Additionally, two 75-minute training sessions that lasted four weeks each were provided for young adults 18-25 years of age and youth younger than 18 years of age, reaching 10 additional youth.

As restrictions surrounding COVID-19 evolved during Summer 2021, the AK Safety Team reconnected with the Mt. Edgecumbe High School administration and shifted back to an in-person training format for the mindfulness training, administered during the students' driver education course. The AK Safety Team offered an incentive for the school and a small

stipend for students to acknowledge their contributions and participation. During Fall 2021 and due to the resurgence of COVID-19, the AK Safety Team could not implement their mindfulness training initiative into driver education classes in schools during that season. The stress created by quarantine and isolation requirements thwarted the energy of students and teachers to focus on extra programs beyond maintaining basic learning requirements in schools.



KEY PARTNERS

Alaska Center for Mindfulness

**Alaska Injury Prevention Unit in the
Division of Public Health**

**Alaska State Violence and Injury
Prevention Partnership**

Alaska Youth Court

Mount Edgecumbe High School

**Tribal Injury Prevention Program
in the Alaska Native Tribal Health
Consortium**

CHALLENGES & SUCCESSES

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic created obstacles in the Alaska Safety Team's original plans, causing them to periodically alter approaches throughout the intervention. Instead of conducting an in-person mindfulness training as originally planned, the team quickly worked with the Center of Mindfulness to create and adapt the training to a virtual setting. They hope to continue work on this initiative in its original in-person format in Spring 2022.

The collaboration between the AK Safety Team and their key partners amplified transportation safety in Alaska in a way that is not enforcement-related. There is a new awareness of and appreciation for mindfulness as an evidence-based injury prevention strategy affecting not only driving behavior but multiple other health outcomes. Mindfulness training became embedded in the Alaska Youth Court and within multiple other initiatives that will appear in the Healthy Alaskans 2030 Strategic Plan. In addition, the AK Safety Team requested that the use of the SRPF framework be included in the injury prevention health objective of the Healthy Alaskans 2030 Strategic Plan.

EVALUATION OF INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Using pre-and post-mindfulness and aggressive measurement tools based on a mindfulness measurement scale, the AK Safety Team measured changes in participant skills from the training intervention. Their mindfulness training showed great potential, with most respondents demonstrating increases in mindfulness while decreasing aggressive driving.

	Post-Intervention Changes in Mindfulness Scores	Post-Intervention Changes in Aggressive Driving Scores
May 2021 Session	↑ 23%	↓ 11%
Alaska Youth Court Volunteers Session	↑ 3%	↑ 3%
August 2021 Session: 18-25 years of age	↑ 17%	↓ 20%
August 2021 Session: < 18 years of age	↑ 5%	↓ 13%

SHORT TERM OUTCOMES & NEXT STEPS

The AK Safety Team received additional funding from the Alaska Highway Safety Office and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Core State Injury Prevention Program (SIPP) to support their mindfulness intervention strategies during the Seed Grant Program. The AK Safety Team members are conducting an evaluation project on the state of mindfulness and its impact on driving behavior. Lessons learned from this mindfulness intervention will be expanded to include participants who use snow machines and All-Terrain Vehicles in rural Alaska. Evaluation findings will be used to increase the utilization of the SRPF framework in traffic safety and other public health areas in the state of Alaska.



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