

# White people trained in mindfulness were three times more likely to help Black people in staged scenarios

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Could mindfulness change the way we treat people of other races? White people who received training in mindfulness meditation were three times

more likely to help a Black person in staged scenarios than those who were not trained, according to a new study in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

The study focused on reducing the tendency of White people to help Black people less than they help other White people, as previous research has demonstrated.

The participants, all White people, also kept daily diaries, in which they detailed instances where they had the opportunity to help people over two weeks. They described whether or not they chose to help, as well as the race of the person that they had the chance to help. This data also showed that those who received [mindfulness training](#) were more likely than non-trainees to help people regardless of race, but preferential helping of other White people remained.

The study, led by Cal State San Marcos professor Daniel Berry, is the first to find that even a small dose of [mindfulness](#), a self-regulation skill that involves focusing on present experiences, can promote helping [behavior](#) in [everyday life](#). Previous studies have only tested these questions in constrained lab settings.

In the staged scenario experiment, self-identifying White participants were randomly assigned to complete a four-day mindfulness meditation [training](#) or a sham meditation training. Mindfulness trainees were taught focused breathing exercises that rested their attention on the sensations of breathing, thoughts, and feelings that came to mind. Sham meditation trainees were led to believe that they were receiving a real mindfulness meditation and completed breathing exercises that did not involve mindfulness.

"Practicing mindfulness meditation promotes helping behavior in everyday life toward others regardless of the race of the help recipient. It

is crucial that all participants believed that they were meditating; this allowed us to rule out that the possibility that mindfulness trainees acted more helpful because they thought that is what [meditation](#) was supposed to do."

Before and after the training, White participants were put into staged lab scenarios with the opportunity to help a Black person— either to help them pick up a stack of dropped papers or to offer their seat to a person on crutches. The participants were not aware that their social behaviors were being studied.

In the staged scenario experiment, White people who received [mindfulness meditation](#) training were three times more likely help a Black person than a White person who did not receive the training. Participants who received mindfulness training were also more likely to help other White people and those of other races in their daily life as reported in their diary entries, although they were still more likely to help other White people.

The results included two important qualifiers. First, mindfulness training only increased helping behavior among people who were less predisposed to experience mindfulness in daily life. Second, participants in both trainings reported helping racial ingroup members more than outgroup members.

Helping was only measured for a two-week interval after the training session, so Dr. Berry noted that future research could examine whether mindfulness training could produce a more lasting change in helping behaviors. He also explained that it will be important to learn more about the reasons behind the impact of mindfulness.

"Another potential research direction is asking why mindfulness promotes helping behavior in everyday life," Dr. Berry explains,

"perhaps it is that people are better able to regulate their emotions going into these social interactions."

**More information:** Daniel R. Berry et al, Short-Term Training in Mindfulness Predicts Helping Behavior Toward Racial Ingroup and Outgroup Members, *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (2021). DOI: [10.1177/19485506211053095](https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506211053095)

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