



# Wisdom of a Youth

How one fifteen-year-old is changing the landscape of child and youth mental health education around the world

By: Courtney Bergart

Adam Avin is the founder of the Wuf Shanti Children's Wellness Foundation, a non-profit organization promoting mindfulness, yoga, and social-emotional learning for children and youth. He also pioneered the Kids Association for Mindfulness in Education (KAME) and he is the co-founder of the International Mindful Kids Peace Summit. Adam is a strong advocate for wellness, using principles of mindfulness and positive psychology to initiate change. The organization uses a variety of modalities such as music, games, and videos to promote wellness for children.

Adam created the lovable dog creature, Wuf Shanti, at the age of 11, to honor the passing of his great-grandfather, Jack. Adam was invited to do a TedxTalk

about mental health education and the benefits of social emotional learning for the next generation. Adam speaks proudly about carrying on his grandfather's wisdom: "My great grandpa passed away and we wanted to share his positive messages...I drew this dog [Wuf Shanti], and we put this picture plus his teaching together to create Wuf Shanti. Now we have seven books, a free mobile app, and 100 videos on the Children's TV Network. It is amazing that we can help so many kids."

Adam, now fifteen years old, is balancing the life of an average teen with the responsibilities of the non-profit organization. When asked about what it means to be a "normal teen," Adam replied, "You know, trying to live like a normal teen! Wake up for school at 630 a.m., come home,

do homework. I play golf and basketball and ride my bike around. I relax at the end of the day after a hard day's school [laughter]...I manage things because I have a great support system...things get busy with preparing for the summit, having three interviews at night, and then doing my homework. It doesn't seem like fun, but I know I am helping people. I get everything done at the end of the day."

The Wuf Shanti organization has grown and changed with Adam. He literally grew out of the dog mascot costume. "As I got older, I realized the kid's version of Wuf Shanti needed to be different for teens dealing with stress. I deal with stress as a normal student." Seeing this need, Adam co-created the International Mindful Kids Peace Summit, which is the first of

its kind, a five-day program focused on teaching youth about social emotional learning (SEL). This summit is broadcast in schools across the globe. Topics covered in this summit include diversity, inclusion, communication, kindness, anti-bullying, mindfulness, positive psychology, and social-emotional learning.

Twenty-first century youth face unique mental health challenges that are inextricably tied to the rapidly changing nature of technological advancements. Adam echoed this, commenting, “I think looking at the age we live in is important...phones, social media...you look on your phone and you see, for example, friends hanging out without you and you wish you were there. Sometimes it just brings you down. We’re forgetting how to communicate. I actually deleted all of my social media apps before school started. I feel so much better.” He highlighted the importance of learning to cope with emotions at a young age and creating healthy habits founded in principles of social emotional learning.

Adam reflected on how adults can support children with learning mindfulness, saying, “the most important thing is to support them and to be role models. They need to walk the walk. That way they can help us cope with our emotions better as we grow up.”

Adam is one of the youngest certified yoga and MBSR-T(mindfulness based stress

reduction for teens) instructors. Mindfulness and yoga practices have been found to have significant positive effects on mental and physical well-being. For mindfulness beginners, Adam proposed the following advice: “I think to practice mindfulness, at any time of the day, just focus on something other than what is going on inside your head. Sit, breathe, calm down, and learn to control emotions... [the hardest part about mindfulness] is definitely bringing my mind back to the present moment. The mind wanders 50,000 times per day — that’s a scientific fact.” He spoke about simple mindfulness exercises that can be incorporated into a daily routine, such as “jamming out” to a favorite song, or focusing on nothing but the swing when playing golf.

It is clear that Adam’s commitment and vision has had an impact on children around the world. He spoke about working directly with schools, peer counselors, guidance counselors, and other educators to improve school systems and promote psychological well-being for children and youth. Adam commented on the importance of learning to regulate emotions to help children grow into more resilient adults. When asked where he saw himself in ten years, Adam laughed and said, “I don’t know...I get asked that question a lot...I am not sure. What I do know is that I’ll be doing something I love but also something that helps people.”



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Check out Adam’s TedxKC talk at this link:

<https://https://www.tedxkc.org/adam-avin-kcyouth/>

For more information on Wuf Shanti, visit the website:

<https://wufshanti.com/about/>

