In 2018, the GEM curriculum was published. The co-authors are Breanna Banks and Sarah Bercaw from the University of Delaware. The program is research based and theory driven, meeting the National Health Education Standards. The program is designed to integrate mind and body awareness, increase focus and attention, improve stress management skills, improve self-monitoring and social behavior, and develop goal setting and skills in 7 areas of wellness – social, spiritual, emotional, professional/educational, intellectual, physical, and environmental wellness.

Jefferson County 4-H was so excited about the new curriculum, we purchased it immediately and started to use it in conjunction with the 4-H Yoga for Kids curriculum. The curriculum is user friendly, but we all thought it would be of significance to have one of the authors train us on the curriculum. We reached out and coordinated a training on November 1, 2019 for 17 people. Of course we had 4-H Educators attend, but we were also fortunate to have several schools represented, Watertown, Indian River, and Gouverneur.

The curriculum consists of five lessons. Each lesson takes 45-60 minutes to complete. The lessons are all interactive, including direct participation, reflection, and application of mindfulness-based stress management skills. Each lesson has a theme and they are most effective building upon each other for a complete training. The lessons may include a mental focus practice, move into gentle stretching and posture movement, a breathing technique, a mindfulness immersion technique, and a reflection activity.

Mindfulness in many respects has become a “buzz” word today. It is used often. As defined in this curriculum, mindfulness is a mental state of full awareness and full acceptance of the present moment. It is an active cognitive process of being fully attentive and immersed in experiences moment-to-moment. Evidence proves that mindfulness can decrease negative thinking, which in turn decreases stress, anxiety, and depression.

The 4-H Youth and Family Development program will use the curriculum and offer the programming in the 4-H Afterschool programs, traditional 4-H programs, and at 4-H Camp Wabasso this summer. We can’t wait to explore the opportunities this new program offering will bring to our youth.