

Mindfulness

Life can be difficult at the best of times and with the current climate it is important to stop and take a minute to ourselves. A good way to do this is by practicing **mindfulness**.

Mindfulness means paying full attention to something. It means slowing down to really notice what you're doing and being aware of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. Being mindful is the opposite of rushing or multitasking. When you're mindful, you're taking your time.

When we practice **mindfulness**, our thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment rather than worrying about the past or imagining the future.

The benefits of mindfulness are endless; it lowers anxiety and stress, increases positive moods, improves social skills and communication and helps with better decision making just to name a few.

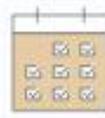
7 Tips To Help Children Practice Mindfulness Successfully:



Use it for positive situations only



Practice mindfulness yourself



Create a daily routine for the children



Prepare the environment



Involve the children in the decision-making process



Share your experience of mindfulness



Encourage the children to share their experiences

There are lots of ways you can practice mindfulness, some are 'simple quick fixes' whilst others can become more of a lesson. Here are a few ideas for you to try;

- ☺ Practice kind thoughts by prompting your child to think of 5 people they'd like to send kind wishes to

- ☺ Bang on a pot/pan and invite your child to signal to you when they no longer hear the sound 'hanging' the air

- ☺ Blow bubbles 'slo-mo' style, emphasizing a big deep breath in through the nose to fill the bubble... and out through the mouth as slow as possible

- ☺ Squeeze and let go, tensing different muscles in the body for 5 seconds and then slowly releasing

- ☺ Tune into the body by getting down on your child's level and feeling each other's heartbeats

- ☺ Focus on breathing by building 'Elsa' ice sculptures' by taking in a deep breath (don't forget to smell the 'chocolate fountain on coronation day!') and then slowly blowing out to create amazing ice creations

- ☺ Have a 'mindful' snack by describing the smell, texture and taste of the food

- ☺ Explore textures in nature, take a walk to collect several different objects and observe/describe how each feels

- ☺ Have your child give you the 'weather report' on how they're feeling, "I'm dark and cloudy with some raindrop tears coming out"

- ☺ Find shapes in the sky by laying down together and choosing different objects to search for in the clouds

- ☺ Practice noticing with art. Choose several different utensils and describe how they all feel different on the paper

- ☺ Take a mindful walk pointing out sights and sounds along the way.

- ☺ Explore touch by choosing several objects, then comparing the difference in how they feel dry vs. wet

- ☺ Slow down by having a snack in 'slow motion' and taking notice of the taste throughout

- ☺ Explore smell by inviting your child to help you cook a meal while taking notice of each smell present

- ☺ Try 'buddy breathing' and invite your child to grab a toy/stuffed animal to place on their tummy while they lay down and take slow breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth

- ☺ Explore emotion by prompting your child to scan their body when experiencing a feeling and describe where they feel it the most.

- ☺ Try a playful guided meditation together

- ☺ use a happy moment to 'soak in the good' by pausing with your child to observe the pleasant physical and emotional feelings present

- ☺ Sit down with your child and 'color your feelings' together depicting each emotion with a new colour

- ☺ "Press the pause button' together during a tense moment (but not too tense) and check in with how each of you is feeling at that moment
- ☺ Listen to some music and see how many different instruments you can each hear

- ☺ Explore gratitude by going back and forth with your child (for as long as you can!) to name as many things possible that you are grateful for

Mindful Posing

One easy way for children to dip their toes into mindfulness is through body poses. To get your kids excited, tell them that doing fun poses can help them feel strong, brave, and happy.

Have the kids go somewhere quiet and familiar, a place they feel safe. Next, tell them to try one of the following poses:

The Superman: this pose is practiced by standing with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out to the sky, stretching the body as tall as possible.

The Wonder Woman: this pose is struck by standing tall with legs wider than hip-width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips (Karen Young, 2017).

Ask the kids how they feel after a few rounds of trying either of these poses. You may be surprised.

Spidey-Senses

This can help to teach kids how to stay present.

Instruct your kids to turn-on their "Spidey senses," or the super-focused senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch that Spiderman uses to keep tabs on the world around him. This will encourage them to pause and focus their attention on the present, opening their awareness to the information their senses bring in.

This is a classic mindfulness exercise and encourages observation and curiosity—great skills for any human to practice.

The Mindful Jar

This activity can teach children how strong emotions can take hold, and how to find peace when these strong emotions feel overwhelming.

First, get a clear jar (like a Mason jar) and fill it almost all the way with water. Next, add a big spoonful of glitter glue or glue and dry glitter to the jar. Put the lid back on the jar and shake it to make the glitter swirl.

Finally, use the following script or take inspiration from it to form your own mini-lesson:

“Imagine that the glitter is like your thoughts when you’re stressed, mad or upset. See how they whirl around and make it really hard to see clearly? That’s why it’s so easy to make silly decisions when you’re upset – because you’re not thinking clearly. Don’t worry this is normal and it happens in all of us (yep, grownups too).

[Now put the jar down in front of them.]

Now watch what happens when you’re still for a couple of moments. Keep watching. See how the glitter starts to settle and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When you’re calm for a little while, your thoughts start to settle and you start to see things much clearer. Deep breaths during this calming process can help us settle when we feel a lot of emotions” (Karen Young, 2017).

This exercise not only helps children learn about how their emotions can cloud their thoughts, but it also facilitates the practice of mindfulness while focusing on the swirling glitter in the jar.

Try having the kids focus on one emotion at a time, such as anger, and discuss how the shaken verse settling glitter is like that emotion.

Safari

The Safari exercise is a great way to help kids learn mindfulness. This activity turns an average, everyday walk into an exciting new adventure.

Tell your kids that you will be going on a safari: their goal is to notice as many birds, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and any other animals as they can. Anything that walks, crawls,

swims, or flies is of interest, and they'll need to focus all of their senses to find them, especially the little ones.

A similar exercise for adults is the mindfulness walk. This exercise provokes the same response in children that a mindful walk elicits in adults: a state of awareness and grounding in the present.

Links:

<https://www.cosmickids.com/mindfulness-activities-kids/>

<https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids>

<https://www.newhorizonholisticcentre.co.uk/>