



St. Nicholas School Canterbury



Canterbury District
STLS & Outreach

ADVICE SHEET

Mindfulness for Young Children

‘Mindfulness programs can improve decision-making skills **and** teach **children with autism** to focus attention **and** react less impulsively through breathing exercises that will allow them to reduce anxiety’ Rutgers University 3 Jun 2020’.

However, all children benefit from engaging in it.

How we might introduce Mindfulness to young children:

- Teach children to recognize and identify their own emotions. They need to associate the word or term for an emotion with the actual experience of feeling that emotion. Encourage them to think about how each emotion feels in their body. Does anger feel like they’ve got steam coming out of their ears? Does love make them feel like their heart is going to burst open? You labelling them in the moment for them is helpful too.
- Validate their emotions. Children often respond with frustration or sadness when told that their pain, however trivial it seems to us, is “not a big deal.” When teaching mindfulness, let children feel their feelings without fear of judgment. Focus instead on teaching them tools to listen to their emotions. Also, comment when you see kindness happening in the setting.
- Try mindful breathing strategies. Mindful breathing is a building block in all mindfulness practices. Children benefit from focusing on their breathing when confronted with emotions that are hard to manage.

Three techniques to teach mindful breathing:

1. Noticing the breath: this involves simply paying attention to what breathing actually feels like. Having a hand on your heart or tummy at the same time also can help.

2. Five-finger starfish meditation: this breathing technique has children holding up one hand in a starfish position (fingers spread wide) while they gently trace up and down each finger with the other hand, focusing on regular breathing at the same time. You may have to help them with this.

3. Counting the breath: this technique is what it sounds like: have your children pause and count their breaths. One breath in is “1”, the next breath out is “2,” etc. You can have them count to 10 if they’re very young, or slightly higher depending on their abilities.



St. Nicholas School Canterbury



**Canterbury District
STLS & Outreach**

You may also want to try leading them in a guided meditation, many examples of these can be found on the internet.

Guide children every step of the way, but also practice what you preach. It is so important to actually “do as you say.” And do it alongside them. Children are intuitive and human nature encourages mimicry so it will become very natural to them.

Whole setting approaches:

1. Describing emotions

Sit in a circle with the children and ask them to describe different emotions. How does it feel when they are angry, happy or worried? You could prompt them by suggesting that they visualise their emotions as colours, or types of weather.

2. Listening circle

Take a small group of children on a trip to a local park or nature reserve or just even outside in your garden. Sit down in a circle and ask the children to listen out for different sounds. Instead of calling out, ask them to put their hands up when they want to share the sound that they can hear.

3. Looking at clouds

Keep an eye on the weather for this activity, as ideally you need partial cloud cover and a good breeze. Get the children to lie down outside and look up at the clouds (taking care not to look directly at the sun). Ask them to look out for shapes and notice how the clouds change as they move along.

4. Bubble balloon game

Blow up some [balloons](#) and play the don't-touch-the-floor game, but focusing on gentle movements. Pretend that the balloons are bubbles that might pop, so you can only tap them delicately. **NB** Snow globes or jam jars filled with a mixture of water, glycerine and glitter are also good to use with individuals or groups.

5. Texture bag

Put a selection of objects with different shapes and textures into a bag. Get the children to take turns putting their hands in, feeling one of the objects and describing it to the others (without looking at it) in as much detail as possible.

6. Guided relaxation/visualisation

Get the children to lie down on the floor, on comfortable mats. Take them through a guided relaxation exercise (e.g. focusing on all of their muscles in turn) or guided visualisation story (e.g. imagining they are lying on a beach). There are plenty of these available to download online.

7. Yoga

Do some research and try some [yoga](#) with the children – there are lots of fun moves for pre-schoolers to practise, for example animal poses. If you're not confident enough to lead this yourself you could always get a local instructor in (preferably one who is experienced in working with children).