

Mindfulness for Parents and Children

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Here are some key components of mindfulness.

- Being present in the moment (disconnect from screen, the craziness of life, and your own racing thoughts by tuning into your own calm center)
- Giving your full attention (truly listening)
- Being intentional about your choices and behaviors
- Attitude – non-judgmental acceptance, compassionate, forgiveness of self and others
- Emotional Awareness and Self-regulation – non-reactive; thinking before acting

Benefits of mindfulness (for you or your child) include: reduced stress and anxiety, increased sense of well-being, more awareness of own needs which leads to better self care, better concentration which leads to more learning, less emotional reactivity and less aggression, more connection with others.

Here are some exercises for you and/or your child to increase mindfulness.

Being Present in the Moment

- Take a listening walk – walk together in silence and listen for sounds you typically overlook
- Really taste what you're eating – notice the textures, the temperatures, the flavors.
- Focus on your breath. Pay attention as you breathe in and feel it fill your lungs, and then as you release it and let it all flow out.
- Focus on an object you usually ignore. Find something in your house you don't pay any attention to normally. Explore it with all your senses for a minute. Really notice it.
- Sit outside in silence, with no communication (not even gestures) between you. Look at the sky, at the trees, at the grass...
- Do a "body scan." Sit or lie down with your child. Take turns naming a part of your body out loud and saying how that part feels "my stomach is rumbling", "my eyes are tired", "my shoulder is itchy."
- Hug and three big breaths. As you hug, take three big deep breaths together.

Inevitably, your mind will run away at some point. When you notice you've lost your focus on the present moment, just return your awareness to what your senses are experiencing.

Mindfulness Exercises

Practicing Self-Compassion, from zerotothree.org: When you're feeling self-critical: Take a deep breath and slowly exhale. Acknowledge and name the emotion you're feeling. Notice how your body feels. Is there tightness or discomfort anywhere? Place your hands on your heart. Take a deep breath and slow exhale. Intentionally bring kindness to yourself and feel it fill you. (If this is hard, imagine how you'd comfort a dear friend, and give yourself that same nurturing compassion.)

STOP. From psychcentral.

- **S**tand up and breathe. Feel your connection to the earth.
- **T**une in to your body. Notice physical sensations or emotions. Release unpleasant sensations, or feelings on the exhale. Notice any pleasant ones and let them fill you up on the inhale.
- **O**bserve. Lift your eyes and take in your surroundings. Observe something in your environment that is pleasant and be grateful for it and its beauty.
- **P**ossibility. Ask yourself what is possible or what is new or what is a forward step.

Five Minutes of Mindfulness from Psychology Today

Relax and get into a comfortable position. Take slow, relaxing breaths. Engage each of your five senses, one at a time, for a minute each. No judgments about whether anything is good or bad. If you notice your attention wandering, just bring it back and re-focus.

Hearing: Just notice the sounds around you. Are you noticing more sounds than you were before?

Smell: Notice the smells in your environment. Close your eyes to help you notice subtle scents.

Sight: Notice the colors, shapes and textures in your environment. How many shades of blue are there? Are any colors missing from your environment?

Taste: If you don't have food or drink, just notice your tongue in your mouth, your saliva, your breath. Run your tongue over your teeth and cheeks. What do you notice?

Touch: Notice the sensation where your hands are resting. Notice the pressure of your feet on the floor. Touch the things within reach. Stand and move.

How do you feel now? Are you present in the moment?

If you're being reactive. From psychcentral and elsewhere.

If you're emotionally reacting (or over-reacting) to your child's behavior:

- Pause and take one to three big breaths.
- Say "step back." (You don't have to physically step back, you can just do it in your mind.)
- Say "clear head."
- Say "calm body."
- Breathe again. Say "relax," "melt" or "ease."

Try seeing things from your child's perspective.

Try a gratitude scavenger hunt.

Make a list (or search for one online) and go on a hunt. Include ideas like: find a color you love. Find something that smells good. Something that makes you smile. Something new you've never noticed before. Something that someone you know would love. Something that makes a sound you love. Find something you like about any person you encounter.

Make a mindfulness bottle. Take a plastic water bottle. Fill it 2/3 with water, add in a little water-based glue (to thicken it up) and some glitter, some sequins. Teach your child to shake it to make the glitter and sequins swirl, then watch quietly and breathe as they settle down. Explain how sometimes our feelings get all stirred up but if we can sit and breathe for a while, they settle down. Learn more: <https://www.developgoodhabits.com/mindfulness-jar/>

Try square breathing. You'll use your finger to trace a square in the air in front of you. As you breathe in, draw a line up. Hold your breath as you draw the top of the square. As you breathe out, bring the line down. Then rest as you draw the top of the square. Repeat.

Floor Time / Child Directed Play

Spend some time each day giving your child your complete undivided attention during play. Sit on the floor, in front of them. Let them lead the play, and follow along. Copy what they do. Match their level – if they're calm and quiet, be calm and quiet. If they're boisterous and silly, join them there. Don't feel like you have to teach them or direct them on to a new activity. Just be with them in play. If you feel like you need to talk, narrate what they are doing to show you're paying attention and care.

Learn more about Floor Time: <https://gooddayswithkids.com/2019/01/15/floortime/>