



MINDFULNESS PROGRAM 2021

The Benefits of Mindfulness

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What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a meditation practice that begins with paying attention to breathing in order to focus on the present, instead of focusing on worries or concerns, what-ifs and may have-beens. Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, nurturing lens. When we practice mindfulness, our thoughts tune into what we're sensing in the present moment rather than rehashing the past or imagining the future.

- Mindfulness teaches kids to focus on the present. This can help them self-soothe.
- There are lots of ways to practice mindfulness, beyond breathing exercises.
- Being mindful can help kids build self-awareness and self-esteem.

Our Approach

For children, mindfulness exercises can help them to develop self-awareness, to pay better attention and to concentrate. Mindfulness can help children decrease anxiety, to calm down when upset or feeling out of control of a situation, and it can help children learn to handle overwhelming emotions more calmly. Our educators implement daily mindfulness time/experiences into the program to ensure all children have an opportunity to participate. These Mindfulness activities will be aimed at guiding the children to focus, be calm, breathe and listen to their body. Mindfulness sessions could be anywhere from 10-30 minutes depending upon the experience and interest. Some of these Mindfulness/meditation experiences include yoga, breathing exercises, sleep stories, body scans, mindful sounds, nature exploration, relaxation time, sensory bottles, bucket filling, stretching and heartbeat exercises.

‘The goal of mindfulness is to wake up to the inner workings of our mental, emotional, and physical processes’



The Benefits of Meditation

Children who learn to meditate are able to learn “core skills” necessary for emotion regulation such as proper breathing, slowing the heart-rate, identifying symptoms of anxiety or sympathetic nervous system arousal, and “centering” themselves in the here and now.

The practice of meditation can help to reduce stress and anxiety in children.

Teaching children to focus on their breath and other calming techniques can give them the tools to come back to a calm, present state anytime, day or night.

Meditation is an opportunity for a child to unplug and just feel. It gives them coping mechanisms for dealing with stressful situations, and it helps their minds and bodies unite in one calming exercise.

Research has shown that when children practice meditation on a regular basis, it can change the brain. This is called neuroplasticity. What this means is that our brains are not as fixed as once thought. Through meditation, the brain centers for emotions therefore executive functioning can be changed and help children in a variety of ways.

From a health perspective, deep breathing which is characteristic of many meditation routines is also incredibly helpful. Even for adults, breathing properly is something not many of us know how to do! So children that learn how to breathe properly will likely carry this sub-conscious habit into their teens and adulthood, which can only be beneficial.

Over the life span, meditation has a significant and positive impact, we are seeing that when children are introduced to meditation, just like learning a foreign language at a young age, the skill remains with them for life. It can easily be assumed that by learning meditation as a child, the child is set in the right direction to understand their thoughts, feelings, and their physical relationship within the body, they come to understand and experience the interconnectedness of all of them.

Harnessing this kind of awareness as a child is a preventative tool that will allow the child greater emotional and psychological resilience as they grow into a happy and well-adjusted adulthood.

Meditation calms our bodies alarm system, which allows an increase in focus on the present moment. Children who practice meditation can strengthen their immune system, lower stress, and even improve their sleeping.

Practiced meditation creates long-term neurological (brain) changes. This means children, and adults, need regular practice (preferably 5 days a week for at least 15 minutes), rather than just once a week which is unlikely to be effective. Meditation is like any other skill, repetition is needed to build it.

These changes include:

- Children feel calmer and can control their emotions better
- Children have an increased emotional capacity to deal with stressful events such as exams or personal problems
- Behaviour is improved
- Lower levels of depression and anxiety
- School attendance improves
- Improved memory

Yoga Basics

“I am strong.” Pretend to be a surfer.

To do Warrior 2 Pose: From standing position, step one foot back, placing the foot so that it is facing slightly outwards. Take your arms up in parallel to the ground, bend your front knee, and look forward. Pretend to be a surfer and use your strength to catch tricky waves.



“I am kind.” Pretend to be a tree.

To do Tree Pose: Stand on one leg, bend your knee, place the sole of your foot on the opposite inner thigh, and balance. Sway like a tree. Think of trees being kind by offering shade, creating oxygen, and providing homes to animals.



“I am brave.” Pretend to be a skier.

To do Chair Pose: Stand tall with your feet hip-width apart, bend your knees, and keep a straight spine. Hold your hands out in front of you, pretending to grasp ski poles as you fly down a ski run like a brave and fearless skier.



“I am friendly.” Pretend to be a dog.

To do Downward-Facing Dog Pose: Bend down and place your palms flat on the ground. Step your feet back to create an upside-down V shape with your buttocks high in the air. Straighten your legs, relax your head and neck, and look down between your legs. Think of being an eager and friendly dog.



“I am wise.” Pretend to be an owl.

To do Hero Pose: Drop your knees to the ground and come down to rest upright on your heels. Then pretend to be a wise owl perched on a tree. Twist your upper body one way and then the other.



CALM DOWN YOGA FOR KIDS



I am strong.

Use your strength to catch tricky waves.



I am kind.

Stretch high and spread kindness all around.



I am brave.

Be brave and fearless as you fly down the ski run.



I am friendly.

Stretch like a dog wagging its tail.



I am wise.

Be a wise owl perched on a tree branch.



Childhood 101 & Kids Yoga Stories

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Meditation Basics



- 1. Elevator down.** Imagine an elevator going down three floors. (Older children may prefer to imagine more floors.) Imagine now that the elevator is in your body. When you are sitting, imagine the top floor is from your head to your chest. The next floor is from your chest to your belly, and the third from your belly to your seat. Begin at the crown of your head. On your next exhale mentally chant “three” as you imagine the elevator lowering from your crown to your chest. Pause for an inhale. When the doors open, imagine your breath coming in and freshening up the elevator, the way opening a window brings a fresh breeze into the room. On the next exhale, mentally chant “two.” Imagine going down another flight to your belly. Continue to the ground floor, chanting “one.” Pause and feel your seat on the ground floor and enjoy landing fully.
- 2. Finger-counting breaths.** This is a useful do-anywhere exercise for the middle of the day to calm a child who is having a meltdown at a birthday party or just to re-center. Create gentle fists with your hands, and with each breath, unfurl a finger from your palm. For example, on your first exhale open your left thumb from your fist. Pause and enjoy an inhale. On your next exhale, unfurl your left index finger. Pause and enjoy an inhale. Continue until you have two open palms on your lap. Sometimes we “om” for each finger unfurled, or use a personal mantra that evokes the feeling we are looking for, like peace, love, quiet, calm or relax. When children make up the mantra, it helps them have self-awareness of what they may need, as well as how they can take charge of how they want to feel.
- 3. Deep breaths before bed.** Take a deep breath in through the nose, and on the exhale chant out loud: “three” (threee). Enjoy another deep in-breath, and on the next exhale, chant “two” (twwooo). Take a last deep breath in and exhale, chanting: “one” (onnee). Relax for a few breaths, and enjoy feeling your body sitting or lying on the floor or your bed. Repeat if desired.