



# Parent Mindfulness Manual

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### What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the quality of paying attention in an open, balanced and curious way. Mindfulness can be applied to all sensory experience, thoughts, and emotions.

### What are the benefits of mindfulness?

30+ years of research has shown the benefits of mindfulness in adults to range from decreased stress and chronic pain to improved emotional and mental well-being. This plus emerging research on children offers compelling evidence to support using mindfulness in education. The application of mindfulness by students may improve academic achievement, mental health, and inter- and intra-personal relationships.<sup>1</sup> Studies find that learning mindfulness benefits students in terms of improved:

- Attention
- Emotion regulation
- Behavior in school
- Empathy and understanding of others
- Social skills
- Test anxiety and stress

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/  
http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603/full](http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603/full)

## How is mindfulness being taught at my child's school?

The Mindful Schools curriculum provides 16 sessions of mindfulness training to your school, plus additional lessons and short daily practices. Your child's classroom teacher (or trained mindfulness instructor) will instruct students in brief mindfulness lessons, ranging from 5 to 15 minutes, two to three times per week. Teachers and students are supported to continue mindfulness on their own once the program is complete.

Students learn to apply mindfulness to all daily experiences including:

- Mindful listening
- Mindful breathing
- Mindful seeing
- Mindful movement
- Heartfulness: cultivation of positive states like kindness, generosity and gratitude
- Mindfulness of thoughts
- Mindfulness of emotions
- Mindful test taking

## How can I support mindfulness at home?

Many parents who recognize the benefits of this training want to integrate mindfulness at home. In many cases, children are more responsive at school than at home, but here are some suggestions for encouraging mindfulness at home.

### Your own practice

A sure-fire way to establish mindfulness at home is for you to be mindful! Your mindful presence will impact your children. Children are constantly learning from us. They receive much more than the information we tell them, but also the way we compose ourselves and how we handle difficulties. If your mindfulness develops patience, deeper presence, and more compassion in you, then you will be impacting your children in every moment by modeling these qualities. Further, your own increased capacity for self-regulation will have a positive impact on your child's nervous system and growth.

If you don't already have a regular practice but are inclined to begin one, try creating a daily mindfulness practice on your own. Start with something that is manageable like 5 minutes every morning before you leave for work or 5 minutes every evening before bed. We often tell the students that the hardest thing about mindfulness is remembering to do it. This is as true for adults as for children! Initiating a personal practice can be challenging. Be prepared for some resistance and procrastination. Mindfulness takes discipline and practice.

A good way to encourage yourself is to practice with others. Consider taking the Mindful Schools introductory course, named, '[Mindfulness Fundamentals](#).' It is a six week online course that provides the foundation to practice and embody mindfulness. Alternatively, you might look for a local mindfulness group in your area. Being committed to a group and knowing others are committed will strengthen your intentions.

### Formal practice at home with your child

- Do mindfulness together regularly. Commit to keeping mindfulness a priority.
- Make mindfulness part of a daily routine. Do it before bed, before homework, or before "screen time."
- Be consistent in:
  - **Time:** Practice at the same time each day.
  - **Environment:** If possible create a calm, quiet space for mindfulness.
  - **Length of practice:** 1-3 minutes per day can do a lot.
- Keep it simple. Just do what's easy. A little mindful listening and a little mindful breathing each day can begin to change the tone or mood of the household.
- Get a vibratone, singing bowl, or similar chime to practice mindful listening.
- Approach this together. If mindfulness is new to you, let your child be the guide. Ask them how to do mindfulness. Much of mindfulness is empowering children to recognize their own capacity to affect their experience in a positive way. If they teach you, it will reinforce their understanding and give them a sense of ownership. You might be delighted to witness what they've absorbed!

### Informal practice at home

You can use or refer to mindfulness anytime.

- Prompting children to "notice how you are feeling right now" momentarily guides them inside. When you do this regularly they will start to notice, unprompted, more often. (Watch out for using this as a disciplinary tool instead of as a means for curiosity and inner exploration)
- If there is a particularly emotional situation, ask your child if there is anything they've learned in mindfulness that might help them at that moment. Ask them

where they feel that emotion in their body and what happens when they gently notice that emotion and take some mindful breaths.

- It's usually not helpful to suggest mindfulness at the height of a difficult moment. Wait until the situation has settled some. When your child is calmer talk about what happened. Ask how mindfulness might have helped in that moment? This increases the likelihood of them remembering to apply mindfulness next time.

## **When will I see a difference in my child?**

This is one of the most common questions parents ask, and an important one.

- We often see and hear of changes after day-one of our program. But, as with any skill or talent, mindfulness takes practice and changes will come suddenly as well as gradually. Research evidence suggests that even small 'doses' of mindfulness can have important effects on our biology and attention.<sup>2</sup>
- Mindfulness does have the potential to affect great shifts in behavior, attention, and emotional regulation. Keep in mind that when someone has difficulty in any of these areas, it is usually a deeply engrained pattern or habit. It takes time to retrain ourselves.
- A useful analogy is the Slow Food Movement or the idea that "good things take time." Mindfulness is an innate human capacity that we would ideally cultivate our entire life. We may see improvements in certain areas and recognize that other things take longer.
- Your understanding and practice of mindfulness will enhance the benefits in your child.

## **Mindfulness Lessons**

Ask your child to teach you how to do mindfulness. If you or your child needs some guidelines, you can use the suggestions below.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pnas.org/content/104/43/17152.short>

## Mindful Bodies

When preparing to do formal mindfulness practice, we assume a particular posture, called a “Mindful Body” with children.

- Become still, quiet, gentle, and considerate of those around you.
- Let your back be straight without being rigid.
- Rest your hands calmly in your lap or on the table in front of you.
- Let your eyes close.
- Let all movement slowly come to a still place, so that you are really prepared to focus your attention.
- Spend 1 minute in a mindful body.
- We can have Mindful Bodies while standing or walking as well.

## Mindful Listening

Listening can be done with a bell or with ambient external sounds. If you use a bell, singing bowls or vibratones work great.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Ring bell.
- Listen from beginning to end.
- Then listen to the sounds around you.
- Listen to sounds coming from outside the room.
- Listen to sounds coming from inside the room.
- Are you quiet enough to hear sounds in your body?
- Listen for 1-2 minutes.

## Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing can be done anytime: before bed, walking to school, waiting in line, when frustrated or excited, while thinking, even watching TV.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Place your hand on your belly (or wherever you feel your breath the clearest – maybe your chest or at your nose).

- Notice the sensations as you breath in and out.
- Try to continue noticing every breath for 1-3 minutes.
- If you find that you started thinking, simply notice it and return your attention to the next breath.

### Heartfulness – Sending Kind Thoughts

Having intentional thoughts and cultivating positive mind states are very important skills to learn. If we don't know how to be deliberate in our thinking, we can be overcome by an undercurrent of negative thinking that influences how we feel and act in our day. Try sending kind thoughts to counter this and strengthen a state of care and kindness. You can use this practice to send kind thoughts to oneself, or to another.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Imagine yourself happy, peaceful and calm.
- Silently repeat three or four kind thoughts to yourself. Examples of phrases are included below, but feel free to find words that resonate with you. Just try to keep them simple.
  - May I be safe.
  - May I be happy.
  - May I be peaceful.
- Send each kind thought a few times.
- After you've sent kind thoughts to yourself, ring the bell and then direct kind thoughts to each other. Your child would be wishing you well, and you would be wishing them well.
  - May you be safe.
  - May you be happy.
  - May you be peaceful.
- This practice is not some esoteric, metaphysical exercise – you are simply affirming the kindness and love you feel for each other.
- Always notice how you feel during and after this exercise.

## Key Terms

Here is a list of the most common words we use in teaching mindfulness. After a few lessons, students really take to this new vocabulary. We often hear stories of students spontaneously using these words in the classroom, on the playground or at home.

**Mindfulness:** Mindfulness means paying attention to your experience, or noticing things on purpose, in a curious and open way. We can be mindful of everything including sound, sight, smell, taste, touch, our thoughts and our emotions.

**Mindful Bodies:** The posture we use for practicing mindfulness. A “Mindful Body” is still, quiet, calm, relaxed yet upright. Students need not always have a Mindful Body, but when they are prompted they know exactly what needs to change in order to “get into” a Mindful Body.

**Anchor:** Our “anchor spot” is the place where we feel our breath most obviously. It’s the place that holds our attention, just like an anchor holds a boat in place\*. The three most common places people feel their breath are: 1) the belly; 2) the chest; 3) the nose. Any place is fine, as long as you can feel the breath there, choose one place and stick with it.

*\* This analogy is a little advanced for K and sometimes 1<sup>st</sup>. Your mindfulness teacher may or may not use it in those grades.*

**Mindful Breathing:** This is the foundation of most mindfulness lessons. Although we learn to be mindful of almost everything we do, mindful breathing happens in every class. Mindful breathing helps us to see where our attention is: when it’s present, and when it’s wandered away. Mindful breathing can help us calm down, help us be present, and help us remember to notice our experience, whatever it may be at any given moment.

**Heartfulness:** Heartfulness is anything that develops empathy, kindness and caring. Lessons that cultivate heartfulness include sending kind thoughts, cultivating generosity and gratitude, and developing kindness in social situations like the playground or recess.