**Mindfulness Techniques**

Mindfulness is the ability to maintain full awareness of thoughts, feelings, body sensations, and external surroundings by tuning into our senses in the present moment. Exploratory studies have shown that the implementation of mindfulness techniques can combat stress and anxiety among professionals within the social work field by promoting self-efficacy and increasing self-awareness. [[1]](#footnote-1) Research suggests that using age‐appropriate activities to exercise a child’s reflection on their moment‐to‐moment experiences and behaviors can help to promote the development of self‐regulation. Anxiety and stress in children can be lessened when a child is able to self-regulate on their own. Mindfulness activities assist in promoting self-reflection through problem solving and play.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This resource list includes the following information:

* Tips on how to keep children engaged in mindfulness activities
* Parent/Caregiver tips for keeping children engaged
* Mindfulness activities for children/toddlers
* Muscle relaxation techniques
* Get kids moving with exercise
* Mindfulness activities for adults
* Grounding techniques for emotional regulation

**Tips on How to Keep Children Engaged[[3]](#footnote-3)**

1. If kids are full of energy – wait until they are less energetic and willing to give mindfulness a try.
2. Explain what mindfulness is and what it is not. Example: Mindfulness means paying full attention to something and slowing down – It is not rushing around or doing many things at once.
3. Make sure to explain with words the child understands.
4. Offer to do it with the child.
5. End the practice of mindfulness by doing something they enjoy to make it a more positive experience.

**Other Tips to Keep In Mind With Children[[4]](#footnote-4)**

1. Keep the purpose of mindfulness practice in mind. Be sure to engage in mindful practice with children in positive situations, and never use it as a disciplinary tool.
2. Make sure you practice mindfulness yourself!
3. Set a daily routine for practicing mindfulness to make sure you incorporate it.
4. Prepare the environment for successful practice; move the furniture around or have everyone switch positions.
5. Involve students in the process; perhaps designate a different child each day to alert the class when it’s time to practice mindfulness or help set up any tools or props.
6. Share your own experiences with the kids; this will help them understand how mindfulness is applied and practiced in everyday life. Feel free to share how you redirect yourself when you feel distracted during a mindfulness session.
7. Encourage the children to share their experiences as well, whether they were good experiences with mindfulness or experiences in which they got distracted. Maybe each session can end with a few students sharing how it went for them.
8. Practice every day. The more you embed mindfulness into the daily routine, the easier it is to engage.

**Mindfulness Activities For Children**

* **Mindful Breathing:** Mindful breathing is a staple of practicing mindfulness. It is the foundation of many other exercises.
	+ This video guides children through a breathing meditation by instructing them to imagine a sailboat that rises and falls as they breathe; with each inhale and exhale, the boat moves gently on top of the water.
	+ Kids also get an opportunity to visualize their breath with a color and focus on the experience of their breath moving through their nostrils. Lastly, the video ends with the exercise of the children imagining (with their eyes closed) that they used to be a fish and paying attention to how it would feel to breathe through their lungs for the first time. **[[5]](#footnote-5)**

To help kids learn how to engage in mindful breathing, you can use a video like the one below: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/CvF9AEe-ozc?feature=oembed>



* **Body Scan (Muscle Relaxation):** The body scan is a key practice in mindfulness, and an easy one to teach to children. This simple exercise gets kids to be more aware of their bodies and helps them find a way to be present in the moment. **[[6]](#footnote-6)**
	+ Have your kids lie down on their back on a comfortable surface and close their eyes;
	+ Then tell them to squeeze every muscle in their body as tight as they can. Tell them to squish their toes and feet, squeeze their hands into fists, and make their legs and arms as hard as stone;
	+ After a few seconds, have them release all their muscles and relax for a few minutes;
	+ Encourage them to think about how their body is feeling throughout the activity.
* **Heartbeat Exercise:** Paying attention to one’s heartbeat has a role in many mindfulness exercises and activities. This exercise teaches children to notice their heartbeat and use it as a tool to help their focus. These skills will come in handy as they start engaging in more advanced mindfulness activities.
	+ To begin, tell your kids to jump up and down in place or do jumping jacks for one minute.
	+ When they have finished, have them sit down and put a hand over their heart. Instruct them to close their eyes and pay attention only to their heartbeat and, perhaps, their breath as well (Roman, 2015).
* **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.

\*For more information on mindful posing:

<https://cathykoman.com/2017/01/25/power-pose-for-kids/>

<https://blogs.psychcentral.com/stress-better/2015/03/boost-your-childs-confidence-in-2-minutes-illustrated/>

<https://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-games-for-kids-be-a-superhero/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-superheroes/201107/why-you-may-want-stand-superhero>

* **Spidey-Senses:** While on the subject of superheroes, this can be a related “next step” 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 (Karen Young, 2017).
	+ 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. **[[7]](#footnote-7)**
	+ 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 glitter verses 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 (Karen Young, 2017).
	+ 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.
* **Labeling Feelings:** Help your child create their own Feelings Words Book where they can label and understand different feelings.
1. Talk with your child about times when he has experienced different emotions such as feeling happy, sad, frustrated, or scared. Talk about ways that you help other people feel better, and help your child notice how his behavior affects others. Think about ways that together you can help make people feel good such as creating a card or giving them a hug.
2. Create a book of feeling words and together draw a person next to each word whose face shows that feeling. Remind your child that you can often tell how someone is feeling by looking at their face and body clues such as a smile, hunched shoulders, or furrowed eyebrows.
3. Go through the book together and think of stories for each emotion word. Ask, “Why do you think this person is happy?” and “Why do you think this person is feeling sad. What could you do to make them feel better?”
4. You can also draw or cut out faces from magazines, paste them on to small pieces of paper, and write the name of an emotion next to each image. Put the pictures in a bag and have your child select one picture to act out! Guess what the feeling is, then switch!

Information from PBS Kids for Parents – Create Your Own Feelings Word Book: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/crafts-and-experiments/create-your-own-feeling-words-book>

**Mindfulness Activities for Toddlers through Kindergarten**

1. Teach kids to recognize and identify their own emotions. Children 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?
2. 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 kids feel their feelings without fear of judgment. Focus instead on teaching them tools to listen to their emotions.
3. Teach kids mindful breathing strategies. As we noted above, 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.
* **Cookie Breathing:** A deep-breathing exercise usually intended for children that helps them calm themselves during times of stress. Essentially, it’s just about breathing in deeply and slowly. The idea is that you imagine a cookie in order to help you remember how to properly do the breathing exercise.
	+ Cookie breathing asks the person doing the exercise to imagine holding a warm cookie in their hand. First, you breathe in slowly through your nose — usually to a count of three — as if you’re smelling the aroma of a freshly cooked cookie. Then, you imagine the cookie is still too hot to eat, and blow your breath out your mouth as if to cool it.
	+ Cookie Breathing Game Instructions for Ages 4-12: <http://www.lianalowenstein.com/featTechCookieBreathingGame.pdf>
* **Belly Breathing:** Another deep-breathing exercise for children that can be used as a coping skill during times of intense emotions or to combat stress. This is a calming exercise that both children and parents can use to practice relaxing and feeling grounded, and one that children as young as 3 can practice.
1. It’s best to start practicing belly breathing when you and your child are already relaxed. This way, your child can build awareness of what being calm feels like. Once your child has the feeling of belly breathing mastered (have her practice it daily), she can apply it to stressful moments.
2. Start by having your child breathe normally. Ask if your child notices anything about it. What parts of the body move as she breathes? What does it feel like?
3. Now have your child lie on her back, relax her muscles and place her hands on her belly.
4. With her mouth closed, have her breathe in for four seconds or until she feels her whole chest fill with air, all the way down to her belly.
5. Have your child hold in the air for four seconds.
6. Have your child slowly blow the air out until it’s all gone. If your child is having difficulty breathing slowly, have her exhale through a straw. You can tell your child to pretend she’s snorkeling.
7. Repeat until the body feels relaxed. Ask your child if they notice anything different from before. What does it feel like?
8. Include belly breathing as a regular part of your child’s routine, such as bedtime. With practice, it can become a familiar strategy that your child can use at any age.

Information from PBS Kids for Parents – Practice Mindfulness with Belly Breathing: <https://www.pbs.org/parents/crafts-and-experiments/practice-mindfulness-with-belly-breathing>

**Muscle Relaxation For Children**

* **Spaghetti/Robot-Ragdoll**
1. First, have your child imagine that they are piece of uncooked spaghetti; Tightening both fists and arms, squeezing their leg and stomach muscles – Have them make their whole body as stiff as possible, so that they can’t bend.
2. Have them keep their whole body tense until you count to five… Then relax.
3. Now encourage your child to pretend they are a cooked spaghetti noodle; Uncooked spaghetti noodles are loose and floppy, and your child will release all of the tension in their body.
4. Relaxing the shoulders and stomach, take a deep breath, and let your body be as loose and floppy as a cooked spaghetti noodle.

Robot-Ragdoll has the same concept as Spaghetti – only your child will pretend to be a robot and a ragdoll instead of spaghetti!

**Get Kids Moving**

* **Shake Break:** Sometimes children just need a break from sitting for too long – A “Shake Break” encourage kids to stand up and shake it out!

Try out this YouTube Shake Break song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oOaPVq07g8>



* **Kids Yoga Poses:** Encourage children to get up and move with yoga poses. Yoga can encourage self-expression and exercise while we are all stuck inside.
	+ See a list of 58 yoga poses for kids here! - <https://www.kidsyogastories.com/kids-yoga-poses/>

**Mindfulness Activities for Adults**

* **Headspace:** A collection of meditation, sleep, and movement exercises designed to help you keep a strong and healthy mind in the midst of this global health crisis. Includes meditations, mindful exercises, mindful living tips, and more. Meditations for children are also available. <https://www.headspace.com/mi>
* **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing specific muscle groups and then relaxing them. It is termed “progressive” because you relax all major muscle groups, starting at the head and working your way down to your feet, relaxing them one at a time. This is a particularly effective technique for anxiety, stomach issues, or muscle pain. Use an audio recording to guide you through the steps at <https://eddinscounseling.com/progressive-muscle-relaxation/>.

**Grounding Techniques for Emotional Regulation**

Grounding techniques are a set of tools used to assist you to stay in the present moment during episodes of intense anxiety or other overwhelming emotions. Here are some examples of grounding techniques:[[8]](#footnote-8)

* Run cool water over your hands. Hold onto ice cubes if the urge is intense.
* Place a cool washcloth on your head/face. (Store a hand towel with lavender essential oil in your refrigerator).
* Place an ice pack over your eyes for 30 seconds or put your face in cold water for 30 seconds.
* Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can.
* Touch various objects around you: a pen, keys, your clothing, or the wall.
* Dig your heels into the floor-literally “grounding” them! Notice the tension centered in your heels as you do this. Remind yourself you are connected to the ground.
* Carry a grounding object in your pocket, which you can touch whenever you feel triggered.
* Notice your body: the weight of your body in the chair; wiggle your toes in your socks; the feel of your chair against your back…
* Stretch. Roll your head around.
* Clench and release your fists.
* Walk slowly; notice each footstep, saying “left or “right”… in detail to yourself.
* Focus on your breathing, notice each inhale and exhale. Continue for 10 slow, deep breaths.
* Eat something, describing the flavors to yourself.
* Scan the room and notice five things you see in detail.
* Listen for five things that you can hear. The clock ticking, the a/c humming, your own breathing, etc.
* Focus on five things you can feel in contact with your body (ie., your clothes, your back against the chair, your feet on the floor, your hair touching your neck, your watch on your wrist.
* Do the above 3 things simultaneously.
* Describe an everyday activity in great detail. For example cooking a meal, getting ready in the morning:
	+ First I defrost the turkey in the microwave. While it’s defrosting, I pull out a soup pot and place it on the stove. Then I begin to chop up the vegetables. When the turkey’s ready, I place it in the pot and begin to brown it….
* Count to 10 or say the alphabet.  Very s…… l….. o….. w….. .l…… y..
* Describe your environment in detail, using all your senses – for example, “The walls are blue, there are five green chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall….” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers and temperature.  You can do this anywhere,
* Jump up and down (**great one for kids**!) [[9]](#footnote-9)
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