

Mindfulness for Kids

From the editors of
mindful





Dear Friend,

You frequently hear people say during the pandemic that “We’re all in this together. Everyone is going through the same thing.” That is true to a point. If you’re a healthcare worker or in a nursing home or a truck driver or grocery clerk, your experience may be very different. And it also may be very different if you are a parent.

Children have been home 24/7, missing their friends, missing school, missing outdoor activities, sports, and hobbies. Some have missed important milestones: a big birthday with friends, graduation, prom, college visit, class trip. Parents have not had it easy either, having to juggle online work, or the strains that come from not working or working too much, with helping to oversee kids’ home study and helping them understand the importance of complying with public health guidelines.

At Mindful, we hear from readers who are parents all the time. We are listening to what you need, and we feel we’re in a good position to draw on our large and growing team of expert contributors, who can help you prioritize caring for yourself and finding not only “healthy ways of coping with stress and anxiety,” but also healthy ways of finding deep resilience and peace lying beneath the stress and anxiety on the surface.

We hope to help you find peace and balance in the following tips and practices for families, parents, and children.

Barry Boyce,
Founding Editor

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Designed and edited by the staff of *Mindful*.

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inspiration



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Tips for Mindful Families

Here are seven ways mindfulness can strengthen your relationships, increase your well-being, and bring the family together. By [Elisha Goldstein](#) and [Stefanie Goldstein](#)

As the world gets more complex, it's more important than ever to build the strength of presence within ourselves and in our families. Our culture is sensing this need and that is why we see an increasing number of people in all sectors of life exploring ways to become more grounded. This yearning is making its way into our homes as many of us have searched for practices and experiences to slow down and bring more connection into our family life as well.

Here are seven things that mindful families do differently to help inspire you and your family to live a loving, connected life. An embedded and essential component woven into each of these is the quality of our presence with one another. It is the foundation for everything.

Embrace Imperfection

No matter how many books we read, we will never be perfect parents. Because we are both psychologists and mindfulness teachers it is often assumed that we must be perfect parents. We still get triggered, overreact, and say and do things that we wished we hadn't. While we have gotten better about this over time, the wisest and most important thing we have learned is to accept our imperfections as parents.

Let's be clear—you are going to make mistakes, you are going to hurt your children's feelings, and you are not going to be able to show up in all the ways you want to or the ways your children want you to, but none of that makes you a bad parent—it only makes you a human one. When you can move into a place of acceptance of this you are able to shift into a greater ease and grace within yourself. When we beat ourselves up over our mistakes and imperfections we create more pain, fear, and disconnection.

When we can practice loving, radical self-compassion and self-acceptance we are transformed and we are modeling for and teaching our children to be able to do the same for themselves and each other.

Listen with Curiosity

There are so many things, as parents, that we're juggling moment-to-moment in our lives that it has become a rare experience to stop and truly listen to one another. We are often distracted—trying to do too many things at once, flipping through our phone with a false sense of urgency or rushing to snap judgments. All of this can lead us to lose our cool with our kids or our partner creating disconnection and misunderstandings.

As we pause and listen to each other more in our lives, we can engage the experiences in our family with a growth mindset. We can see the struggles and triumphs as opportunities for learning and growth. Instead of judging each other, we can get better at recognizing when we don't understand where the other person is coming from, lean in with curiosity and say, "tell me more." Or we might try and stand in their shoes to understand their perspective.

Communicate Courageously

Let's be honest, being vulnerable is hard, which is why we sometimes find ourselves avoiding tough conversations with each other. While in the moment it might feel easier to sidestep talking about something painful or uncomfortable, what is left unspoken can turn into a slow poison. Over time this builds resentments, distrust, harmful behaviors, and disconnection. The truth is, being clear and honest with each other about what you need and how you feel is ultimately an act of kindness that creates trust and connection.

This means showing up with our partners and kids with an open heart and an open mind. It builds on listening with curiosity and creates space for everyone to feel comfortable to share how they feel and what they need.

Practice Appreciation and Gratitude

Being a parent is one of the most thankless jobs around and it's not uncommon that within a family people can take each other for granted. Here's where small shifts can go a long way.

While words of affirmation may or may not be your primary love language, we all want to be seen and appreciated and there's a surprisingly simple way of doing this—intentionally practicing being appreciative and expressing gratitude to one another. There are so many opportunities for appreciation, like acknowledging our kids or our partner for emptying the dishwasher or being ready on time. If we engage in small acts of appreciation, it can shift the culture of the house from demanding and frustrated to cooperative and grateful.

Forgive Ourselves and Each Other

Every family has its hard moments. There are times when we don't feel listened to, appreciated, or seen, and there are other times when people are cranky or "hangry" and say things they don't mean or wish they could take back.

In practicing mindfulness we come to understand that our mistakes aren't signs of failing at being a human. Instead, they are opportunities for learning about the inevitable pitfalls of life.

Practice Support and Generosity

One of the core values of mindfulness is generosity. The spirit of generosity means giving and sharing things of value. As our kids look to us to see how to

be in the world, the beautiful thing about practicing generosity is that our acts not only have a positive impact on ourselves and the recipient but also have ripple effects for generations to come in making the world a kinder place.

Our kids are always watching us, learning how to be in the world and modeling our behaviors. So it's important that we model this way of being in the world and include them in these acts as often as possible.

Play and Have Fun!

We all can get so stuck in the day-to-day grind that we actually forget to have fun! Raising children is probably the most important job you will ever be tasked with and the pressure of raising good humans can be weighty. So much so that we can fall into a pattern of taking things too seriously and being so overly focused on chores, homework, or activities that we lose the enjoyment of being together.

We plan everything else so why not be more purposeful when planning out the week to make sure to include experiences of play? When the family plays together, there's also often more laughter which creates a joyful experience of connection and healing. These moments are often the ones that are cherished and remembered for years to come.

Remember, whatever way you choose to bring these seven tips into your life, you will not be perfect. When you stray from your intention, forgive yourself. In that moment you can discover something vital: You can always choose to begin again.

Elisha Goldstein Ph.D. and **Stefanie Goldstein Ph.D.**, are parents with nearly 20 years' experience as psychologists and mindfulness teachers.



PHOTO BY BRIAN GORDILLO / UNSPLASH

Creating Space to Respond

Putting space between you and your reactions allows you to respond with kindness—both to your children and yourself.

By [Mitch Abblett](#)

In any moment as parents, we can choose to react or let it go. I've witnessed moments of mindfulness when parents I was working with held their tongues instead of lashing out, and when colleagues leaned in toward angry parents, and distasteful situations calling for avoidance.

Growing up, it was that moment when my Assistant Scoutmaster gave up a Saturday afternoon to sit and watch blue-jays and finches flit about the branches in the woods behind my house, and with enthusiasm and presence helped me earn my coveted “bird study” merit badge. His setting aside of his own concerns to prize what looked to be valuable in me rippled forward in such a way that I wrote to him many years later to tell him about the impact his simple act of giving had on me. “I am now a clinical psychologist working with at-risk kids,” I told him. “And you taught me a lot about what it means to help a kid hang in with something that matters.”

When Mr. Mullet let go of his own agenda for that Saturday—the errands, the lawn in need of mowing, his own children’s needs—I got my first taste of greater awareness and it gave me an opportunity to see possibility in myself. When we’re not stuck in autopilot patterns of doing and behaving, we can more readily give to others, which brings its own joy.

Spend a quiet moment or two thinking about your relationship with your child. What is the one thing that comes to mind that you value about them? Don’t focus on what they “should” do or be, but instead, notice what is already there, even if it’s faint. What is the “spark” that you could breathe life into? Here are some tips for appreciating your children and creating space to respond.

Give direct praise

Ask yourself: How can I let my child know that I see this valuable thing in him or her? Maybe it would be a direct comment where you let them know that you’ve noticed something really cool about them. Maybe it’s a gesture where you thank them for showing this side of themselves.

Parent with patience

Let them know about the “thing” you see in them, but be patient if they don’t respond readily. Particularly for kids with low self-esteem, this positive input might feel discrepant with how they tend to view themselves. They might reject what you’re doing or saying altogether. Don’t give up! They may be used to people doing so, which only confirms the script they’ve been acting out. Show them with consistent prizing that a new script is possible for them.

Let go of your own ego

You’re the adult and they’re the kid. Find your thank you’s and congratulations for being a great mentor elsewhere. In fact, it’s better if you learn to trust that the message (if given enthusiastically and authentically) will resonate even if they don’t acknowledge it openly. This is not something they need to be polite about. When you’re planting seeds, it doesn’t make sense to get mad when it doesn’t immediately bear you fruit.

The key is to pause, take a breath, and connect with what’s truly behind your child’s actions. You can still set limits on their disrespect or lashing out, but you can also try acknowledging that you understand that something very real (for them) is driving how they feel.

Dr. Mitch Abblett is a clinical psychologist and the Executive Director of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy.

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Fostering Gratitude in Kids

Researchers have identified four parts of gratitude that help kids practice gratefulness and feel happier in the long run.

By [Maryam Abdullah](#)

Living your life with gratitude helps you notice the little wins—like the bus showing up right on time, a stranger holding the door for you, or the sun shining through your window when you wake up in the morning. Each of these small moments strings together to create a web of well-being that, over time, strengthens your ability to notice the good.

Most of us know it's important to express thanks to the people who help us, or silently acknowledge the things we are grateful for in life. If you have young children, you probably spend a lot of time reminding them to say “please” and “thank you.” But the importance of gratitude goes beyond good manners—research shows children who practice gratitude are happier, more optimistic, and more likely to build strong relationships. Grateful kids are also less likely to experience depression or jealousy, and more likely to do well in school, according to the American Psychological Society.

Research has also linked gratitude with a wide range of other benefits, including strengthening your immune system, improving sleep patterns, and experiencing more joy and pleasure, being more helpful and generous, and feeling less lonely and isolated. Here are four research-backed areas of gratitude that help children practice gratefulness using the “notice-think-feel-do” questions.

Notice

The more you can encourage your kids to bring their attention to what they feel grateful for, the more they'll notice to feel grateful for. This helps children see the amount of thought that goes into a gift. For example, if they're given a sports jersey you could say, “Notice how it's your favorite player's name?” or “Notice how it's in your favorite color?”

Think

Help children understand why they received the gift by asking, “Why do you think you received this gift?” Maybe it’s for a birthday, or holiday—or just because someone loves them.

Feel

Give children the space to process their emotions by asking, “How does this gift make you feel?” Common answers could be happy, excited, or loved.

Do

Remind children to express thanks by asking, “Is there a way you want to show how you feel?” It could be by making a card, giving the gift-giver a hug, or simply remembering to say thank you.

Often, we make gratitude sound like it’s all about us. And we often hear that gratitude is the single most important ingredient to living a successful and fulfilled life—or that when we are grateful, fear disappears and abundance appears. Kids may not always be able to answer all of these questions, but practicing them will reinforce the habit of expressing gratitude and appreciation over time.

Maryam Abdullah, Ph.D., is the Parenting Program Director of the Greater Good Science Center.

PHOTO BY MONICA GOZALO / UNSPLASH



The Inner Critical Critter

Kids need ease and fun when it comes to difficult tasks like negative self-talk. Here's a playful way to help your child explore self-critical thoughts. By [Hazel Harrison](#)

Have you ever heard your child say something like: “I’m not good at this,” or “I’m so stupid,” or “It’s all my fault,” or even “I shouldn’t have even tried.” Perhaps some kids don’t say these things out loud, but maybe they refrain from doing certain activities or speaking up in school because they’ve already convinced themselves that they’re not good enough. Over time, these behaviors can grow into what we all have come to know as the inner critic.

For kids, however, I like to refer to the inner critic as “The Critical Critter” to take some of the weight off. Exploring self-critical thoughts can often feel like heavy, exhausting work, so using a playful approach can help children bring a certain amount of lightness to balance out the heavy work of noticing unhelpful habits and challenging them or approaching them differently.

The character of the inner critic as “Critter” helps children understand when they are being too hard on themselves and also the crucial lesson that thoughts are not facts. Just because we think we’re rubbish at something doesn’t make it true.

So, how do you start a conversation with your children about the self-defeating, self-critical thoughts that we all have running on repeat in the back of our minds? Here is how I help children (and parents) understand the inner critic.

Introducing the Critical Critter

I often talk about how the brain is like a house, with an upstairs and a downstairs. This idea comes in part from Dr. Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson’s book *The Whole-Brain Child* and it’s a really simple way to help kids think about what’s going on inside their head.

Having introduced the idea of the brain house, I tell children that we’re going to add in a rather scary, hairy, and un-fairy-like creature. You know your child, so make sure this makes sense to them. Some children may need lots of reassurance that this is just pretend—“there aren’t really characters living in our brain”—whilst others may relish the opportunity to run wild with imagination.

The Critical Critter in the Brain House

The Critical Critter lives in the upstairs brain house with the thinkers, problem solvers, planners, emotion regulators, creatives, flexible and empathic types in the neocortex. To begin with, we may not notice that the Critter has moved in. It may start out with a quiet voice, occasionally speaking up with critical self-talk. But, the more we listen to its words, the bigger it grows. The Critical Critter is fed on a diet of negative self-talk and unkind, unsupportive words from others. Each time we chew on harsh and unjustified criticism, it's like giving the critter another burger to munch on. One day, we discover the Big C has unpacked all its luggage, and grown large enough to throw its weight around. The Big C has turned into a big bully, squashing any hopes of self-compassion or kindness from the upstairs "thinking" characters. And, not content with that, this dastardly doubter is also lurking downstairs in our feeling brain (the limbic system), telling Fearful Fred that he's right to panic and flip his lid because everything is going to go wrong. And when it does, insists the Critter, Fearful Fred will be to blame because he's useless. We. Are. Useless.

Notice the Critical Critter in Action

Think of some examples to share with your child about what else the Critical Critter does. Choose examples that aren't too stressful because if you make your kids feel too anxious they may end up feeding their Critter right then and there!

Here's examples I might use: At age seven, our inner critic bursts into fits of self-incriminating giggles when we trip during a race. Aged 16, it hides under the exam desk and repeatedly whispers "You're gonna fail at this!" When it's time to leave school and think about a career, the Critter starts a chorus of, "You'll never do it; you're not going to make it; you'll never amount to anything."

In short, the Critical Critter makes us default to feeling bad about ourselves, feeling ill-equipped, emotionally and mentally, to handle adversity or even to

simply try new things. Learning how to quiet the Critter can help children cultivate resilience and self-compassion.

How Kids Can Shrink the Critical Critter

If your child's Critter has grown bigger, scarier, and hairier recently, it's time to put it on a crash diet. Here's how you can help your child notice the Critter at work and put an end to its constant unhelpful chatter:

Name the Critter

This may sound a bit silly, but it gives your child the space to separate the words and actions of the Critter from their own and notice when the inner critic is at work. This gives them a better chance of taming harsh words (and catastrophizing thoughts) that eventually build into habits of rumination. It doesn't matter what they call the Critter, just as long as it makes sense to them.

Answer Back

You may spend a lot of time encouraging your child not to answer back, but when it comes to the Critter, they need to boss them back. When you notice the Critter sneakily chanting to them "This'll never work, you've always been useless at this," encourage them to answer back. They can use sentences like: "That's enough out of you, Critter—I'm doing my best." or "I can't hear you Critter, I'm too busy being amazing over here." or "Maybe it didn't work this time, Critter, but I'm giving it another go." Regularly practicing this exercise will help them to take responsibility for their actions whilst also building self-compassion.

Call for Backup

If your child is trying to master something new, maybe a difficult math concept or a new skateboard trick, these are often the times when the Critter will pop up. Critters tend to say things like “you’re terrible at this,” or “you may as well stop right now.” Encourage them to prove the Critter wrong by seeking the advice and support of people who have done it before. If they surround themselves with people who say “you can do it,” then it’ll be harder for the Critter to keep yelling at them to give up. And soon, it will stop shouting “you can’t,” and sit quietly in a corner.

Create a Positive Moments Practice

Being under attack from the Critter is tough and, for some kids, can feel relentless. It can make kids question themselves and their abilities. To cope with this relentless criticism, it’s important that kids find things about themselves that they like. Each day, help your child find time to notice the things—no matter how small they are—that went well because of them. Ask them what went well today and help them to find the positive moments in their day. Encouraging a regular gratitude practice is a great way to build resilience, self-compassion, and to keep the Critter quiet!

Dr. Hazel Harrison works as a clinical psychologist and is passionate about finding creative ways to share the science of psychology.



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Self-Worth in Teens

Teens are experiencing increased levels of anxiety and perfectionism. Encouraging them to develop their strengths can help boost their self-esteem. By [Amy L. Eva](#)

No one wants to hang out with me. I'm a failure at school. All my other friends seem happy. What's wrong with me?

These kinds of negative thoughts are becoming more common in our homes and schools. Teens are experiencing increased anxiety, and studies indicate that college students in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States are becoming more perfectionistic over time, measuring themselves against unrealistic standards.

Why is this happening? We can't say for sure—but we do know there are steps teens can take to improve their mental health.

A 2018 study of early adolescents suggests that self-concept (your perception of self) plays a central role in emotional well-being. According to the study, a supportive classroom environment and positive social relationships also affect teen well-being—but the impact is indirect. Positive self-concept seems to be the key variable in the well-being equation.

So, how can we influence how students think about themselves? This may feel like a tall order; yet there is a lot of research out there that provides clues for supporting the teens in your life. Here are four ways to help tweens and teens move toward a more positive self-concept.

Get Physical

Although you may have heard this before, kids really can benefit from regular exercise. A recent review of 38 international studies indicates that physical activity alone can improve self-esteem and self-concept in children and adolescents.

Apparently, the exercise setting also matters. Students who participated in supervised activities in schools or gymnasiums reported more significant growth in self-esteem than those who exercised at home and in other settings.

Adolescents' self-concept is most strongly linked to their sense of physical attractiveness and body image, an area where many people struggle. So,

encourage more regular exercise programs during and after school, and support team sports, strength training, running, yoga, and swimming—not just for their effects on the body but on the mind, as well. Getting out and engaging in some form of exercise can make us feel stronger, healthier, and more empowered.

Focus on Self-Compassion Instead of Self-Esteem

Because self-esteem is a global evaluation of your overall worth, it has its dangers. What am I achieving? Am I good enough? How do I compare with my peers?

What would happen if we could stop judging ourselves? Researcher Kristen Neff claims that self-compassion—treating yourself with kindness, openness, and acceptance—is a healthy alternative to the incessant striving and performance orientation often tied up with self-esteem.

In her study of adolescents and young adults, she found that participants with higher self-compassion demonstrated greater well-being. Why? They were okay with their flaws, acknowledged that they struggled just like those around them (“Everybody makes mistakes; you are not alone”), and treated themselves with the same kindness they would extend to a friend (“It’s okay; you did your best”).

Capitalize on Specific Skills

If you keep your eye out for teens’ talents and interests, you can support them in cultivating their strengths. Your son may think he is a terrible athlete, but he lights up when he works on school science projects. Then there’s that quiet, disheveled ninth-grade girl who sits in the back of the class. She may feel socially awkward, but she wows with her poetry.

Researcher Susan Harter has studied adolescent self-esteem and self-concept for years. She claims that self-concept is domain-specific. Our overall

self-esteem or sense of worth tends to be rooted in eight distinct areas: athletic competence, scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, social acceptance, close friendship, romantic appeal, job satisfaction, and physical attractiveness.

Talk to the teens in your life. What are their personal values and priorities? Share surveys with them like the VIA (which identifies character strengths like bravery, honesty, and leadership) or have them take a multiple intelligences quiz.

It may not be easy to shift teens' global sense of self-worth, but we can certainly highlight and encourage areas of interest and particular skill sets so that they feel more confident, capable, and inspired.

Help Others

When teens reach out to others, they are more likely to feel better about themselves. A 2017 study of 681 U.S. adolescents (ages 11-14) examined their kind and helpful behavior over a four-year period. Researchers found that adolescents who were kind had higher self-esteem, but those who directed their generosity toward strangers tended to grow in self-esteem.

We can actively support service learning projects in our schools and our teens' interests in advocacy. When teens regularly contribute to a larger cause, they learn to think beyond themselves, which may help empower them.

As many teens struggle with anxiety and perfectionism, our urge may be to jump in and fix their problems, whatever we perceive them to be. But a better approach, one that will hopefully help reverse these worrying trends, is to cheer them on as they develop the mental habits and strengths that will support them throughout their lives.

Amy L. Eva, Ph.D., is the education content specialist at the Greater Good Science Center. This article originally appeared on Greater Good, one of Mindful's partners.

practices



A Practice for Families

Explore this kindness practice that parents and kids can do together—offering good wishes and compassion to others.

By **Christopher Willard**

This is an informal mindfulness practice that you can do with your family. It's the basis of most compassion and empathy training. You can do this practice on birthdays, or when other opportunities to make wishes come around. You can also use this practice to wind down before bed.



Follow along as Christopher Willard guides this practice for families.

mindful.org/kindness-practice

A Kindness Practice for the Whole Family

1

To begin, find a comfortable sitting position. You can even place a hand on the heart. Allow your eyes to close or lower your gaze toward the floor.

2

Bring to mind someone who you respect and look up to, and who really loves you in return. Notice how you feel as you bring this person to mind.

3

Make a kind wish and send it their way. What would make them happy?

4

Next, bring to mind someone else you love and care about: A family member, a friend, a beloved colleague. Just bring this person to mind, sending this person a kind wish.

5

We'll move from here to a more neutral person. Perhaps someone you don't know very well: A parent you see occasionally in the pick-up line, a person who delivers your mail, or makes your coffee in the morning. Just bring this person to mind and imagine yourself sending them some kind of kind wish.

6

Lastly, bring to mind someone who has frustrated you lately, someone who is a little difficult. Send this last person a kind wish—something nice for them in their life.

7

Check in with your mind and body as you conclude this practice. Allow your eyes to open if they've been closed. Notice if there's any shift.

Chris Willard, PsyD, is a psychologist and educational consultant specialized in mindfulness for adolescents and young adults.



A Practice for Parents

Try this mindfulness practice the next time that mean inner voice pops up and starts making parenting harder than it needs to be. By **Mitch Abblett**

When pain, whether physical or emotional, shows up, it's helpful to have built the capacity to mindfully notice it, allow it to just be there, and watch as it changes and typically eases on its own. It's when you push and poke at it, trying to force pain to leave, that it often hangs around and grows into the mind's best bad-tempered friend, suffering.



Learn more about self-compassion for parents.
mindful.org/mindful-parenting

You can learn to rest in the experience of pain and not add to it with the mind's angst and agendas. The mindfulness term for this is acceptance. And by acceptance, I don't mean resignation—the sense of giving up and being defeated by the pain of parenting. No, it's an active, empowered choice to lie back and let pain move through you. What you need to do is to take a “N.A.P.” with the pain that shows up in your daily life as a parent.

A Mindfulness Practice for Stressed-Out Parents

N

Notice and observe the painful sensations in your body and any accompanying thoughts as they show up.

A

Allow it all to be just as it is, without trying to change anything.

P

Rest into the moment until your painful thoughts and feelings pass through and away from you.

The next time you find yourself having difficulty with your children, give this acceptance practice a try. I'd advise starting with more do-able situations—the “low hanging fruit” within easy reach of your skills for attention and spacious awareness.

With practice, you'll be able to take a “N.A.P.” even amid the louder, more intense or historically angst-ridden episodes. Be patient with yourself. No one is immune, and we're all walking this path toward more mindfulness in relating to our kids. That's why it's called practice, not perfection.

Dr. Mitch Abblett is a clinical psychologist and is the Executive Director of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy.



Body Scan for Kids

A body scan for children to help bring calmness, attention, and appreciation to hectic daytime routines and marathon bedtime rituals. By **Mark Bertin**

A calming body scan is a great way to help kids bring attention to the present moment—especially when emotions or thoughts are overwhelming. As a parent, you might choose to do this practice with your child, or feel free to use the meditation as part of bedtime or any other routines throughout the day.



Follow along as Mark Bertin guides this calming body scan.
mindful.org/kids-body-scan

1

Lie down on your back.

Let your legs and your arms relax and fall to the sides. Settle yourself in a comfortable position and close your eyes.

2

Start by taking two or three gentle, large breaths.

Pay attention to how that feels. Your belly rises and falls. Air moves in and out of your body. If you like, place a hand on your belly and feel it move with each breath.

3

Now we're going to pay attention to the other parts of the body.

Start with your feet. They might feel warm or cold, wet or dry, relaxed or restless. It's also okay if you feel nothing at all. If you can, relax your feet now. If that's hard to do, that's fine. Take a moment and notice how that feels too.

4

For these few minutes, let yourself be still.

There's nothing to do. Pay attention as best you can. You might feel a blanket or socks on your feet, or you might feel them pressing against the bed or the floor. When your mind gets busy, gently bring your attention back to your feet again.

5

Now move your attention to your lower legs, noticing whatever is there.

Do they feel heavy, light, warm, cold, or something else? Let go of frustration and trying to do anything. Just do your best and give yourself a few moments of rest. Next, move your attention next to your knees and relax them. Feel the front, back, and sides of your knees.

6

After a few more breaths, move your attention to your upper legs.

Whatever you feel, or don't feel, is fine. Notice your legs and let them relax. If you feel restless or wiggly, that's okay too. That happens.

7

Now move your attention to your belly.

It always moves when you breathe, rising and falling, like waves on the sea. You might feel something on the inside, like full or hungry. You might notice the touch of your clothing or a blanket. You might even feel emotions in your belly, like happy or sad or upset.

8

Next, bring your attention to your chest.

Notice it rising and falling as you breathe. If you feel that it's hard to focus, that's normal. Gently practice coming back again and again to how your chest feels when you breathe.

9

Now turn your attention to your hands.

There is no need to move them or do anything with them. They may be touching the bed, or the floor, or somewhere on your body. Relax them if you can, and if not, simply pay attention to your hands for another moment.

10

Move your attention up into your arms.

Maybe notice if you can find a moment of stillness inside you, like the pause at the end of each breath.

11

Next, move your attention around to your back.

How does it feel against the bed or the floor? Notice how it rocks with each breath. When your mind gets busy or angry or scared, you can always come back to how your body feels in this way for a moment.

12

Now move attention to your neck and shoulders, letting go and relaxing them.

If your mind wanders, that's fine. No one can pay attention all the time. Just keep returning to noticing your body whenever you find yourself thinking of something else.

13

And now feel your face and head.

What expression do you have right now? What would it feel like to smile? What else do you notice in your face, your head, and in your mind?

14

Finally, spend a few moments, paying attention to your whole body.

If it is easier, continue to pay attention to your breath. If it's time for sleep, let that happen, remaining still and continuing to pay attention to your breath or feelings in your body. And if it's time to wake up, open your eyes and sit for a few moments before deciding when to move again.

Dr. Mark Bertin is a developmental behavioral pediatrician.

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Mindful Parenting for ADHD.



Breath Counting for Teens

Discover a breathing practice that teaches teens and tweens the basics of mindful awareness by counting each inhale and exhale. By **Mark Bertin**

Breath-counting is a foundational mindfulness practice—research from the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin Madison (with adult participants) suggests breath-counting can decrease mind wandering and negative thought loops and improve mood.



Encourage your teen to learn the basics of mindful awareness with this guided meditation. mindful.org/breath-counting

Consider doing this practice with your child on a regular basis or integrating it into bedtime. Incorporate short practices of this kind into any transition, such as setting up activities like homework. Set aside short-term expectations, and as a family, support all the traits mindfulness encourages in everyday life, such as increased resilience under stress, emotional awareness, and even compassion.

A Breath-Counting Meditation for Teens and Tweens

1

Lie down and let your body rest.

Notice whatever you're thinking right now, however you feel right now.

2

When you're ready, take three deep breaths while paying attention to the rising and falling of your belly. We're not trying to do anything special except just notice the sensation—what it feels like.

3

Place your hand on your belly.

As best as you're able, pay attention to the rocking of your hand with each breath.

4

Recognize that your mind will go off somewhere else, over and over again, or you might feel restless—all of that's normal, all of that's totally fine. Each time you notice your attention is gone somewhere else, come back again to your hand rising and falling on your belly.

5

If you'd like, count your breaths, sticking to small groups.

Perhaps you could count up to five and then start again at one.

6

Each time you lose track, simply start over.

Note any tendency to get frustrated—there’s no need to, the distractions will happen. Breathe in, one, breathe out, one, breathe in, two, breathe out, two, continuing at your own pace... and coming back again to breathing in and breathing out.

7

Wherever your mind’s gone, allow those thoughts to be for just now.

Allow them to show up and then continue on. Thoughts are normal. Everyone has thoughts continually throughout the day, throughout this type of practice.

8

Come back gently, and over and over again to the feeling of breathing, right now.

Allow thoughts and feelings to show up because they will and then each time come back again.

9

Breathe in, one, breathe out, one, breathe in, two, breathe out, two, and then again coming back to the next breath—not trying to fix anything or change anything at that moment, or at this next moment.

10

At some other time during the day, there might be something to act on, but right now, simply lie here, guiding your attention to the rocking of your hand, to the sensation of breathing.

11

And when you’re ready, if you’d like, open your eyes, or continue to lie still.

Dr. Mark Bertin is a developmental behavioral pediatrician and author.

This article was adapted from *Mindful Parenting for ADHD*.



A Practice for Preschoolers

One way to teach preschool children the basics of mindfulness is by drawing on the elements of nature. **Scott Rogers**

This approach to sharing mindfulness draws on the elements of nature. Often, we reflect on the beauty and serenity of the natural world out there, and overlook our own beautiful nature. This exercise introduces children to ways of seeing the strength and beauty of nature within themselves, offering a short practice to help relax and observe their experience.



Help your preschooler explore mindfulness with a guided meditation that connects them to nature.
mindful.org/meditation-for-preschoolers

A Practice That Connects Kids to Nature

1

Let's lower or close our eyes and sit tall like a tree. We extend our hands and stretch our fingers, like branches. Let's squeeze our fingers together and then let go and feel them wiggle, like they're blowing in the wind.

2

Let's be like the wind and take two slow breaths. Breathing in and breathing out, blowing out the wind.

3

As the sun shines on the wind, we feel our body breathing. Can you feel your belly moving up and down? Can you feel the air flowing in and out of your body? And with the sun up high in the sky, brightening and warming the whole world, you too can warm the world—with your kindness.

4

Think of someone who can use a little kindness—like your sister or brother, a friend, or your teacher. And as you think of them, wish for them, “May you be happy,”

5

You deserve happiness too. So now wish for yourself, “May I be happy,” and smile like the sun.

6

And as you smile like the sun, feel your body sitting tall like a tree and feel your breath blowing like the wind.

7

And then gently open your eyes and look around.

Scott Rogers is founder and director of the University of Miami School of Law's Mindfulness in Law Program. This exercise is based on the SoBe Mindful method.



bonus

How to Make a Glitter Jar

A snow globe or glitter jar is one of the most powerful visual metaphors for the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; it illustrates how mindfulness—the cultivation of stillness in the face of swirling chaos of life—affects us.

To make your own glitter jar with your kids, you can use a mason jar, a spice jar, or even a plastic water bottle. Be sure to use glitter that sinks rather than floats. Adding some glycerin to the water slows down the fall of the glitter. You can make a more eco-friendly version by using different-colored beads, a mix of food coloring and oil, or even pieces of LEGO you already have around the house.

Fill the jar to the top with water. Have your children pick three colors of glitter: one to represent thoughts, one to represent feelings, and one to represent behaviors. Drop a few pinches of each color glitter into the water and seal the jar with its lid or duct tape.

How to Use a Glitter Jar for Mindfulness

There are many variations of this practice, depending on what you want to emphasize. One variation includes using a few plastic beads to represent behaviors and watching until the behaviors separate from thoughts and feelings. Kids can also try to focus on just one color, or one piece of glitter until it settles, or all of them.

A script to use with your own child's glitter jar can go something like this:

- The jar is like our mind, and each color of glitter represents something different in our mind.
- Let's put in red for thoughts, gold for feelings, and silver for urges to do things. (Pour in a little bit of glitter with each comment.)
- Now we seal up the jar. (Put the lid on the jar and seal it.) Then we start our day.
- We wake up, and things are pretty settled. We can see that clearly. (Show how all the glitter has settled on the bottom of the jar.)
- But pretty soon, things start swirling around. Maybe we are running late (swirl the jar). Our big sister eats the last pancake for breakfast, and it leads to a fight (shake the jar). We hear scary things on the news in the car ride to school (swirl the jar). We get to school and find out we aced the test (shake the jar).
- Now it's only a few minutes into the school day, and we can't see clearly because all of our thoughts and feelings and urges are getting in the way.
- So what is the one thing we can do to get the glitter to settle and see clearly again?
- Be still! And what happens when we are still? We can see clearly again.
- There is also no way to rush being still. We can't push all the glitter down to the bottom. We just have to watch and wait. No amount of effort will make it settle sooner.
- When things become clear, we'll know the wise next thing to do. In fact, that's one definition of wisdom: seeing things as they are and choosing how to act.
- While we wait, does the glitter go away? No, it stays at the bottom. Our thoughts and feelings and urges are still in our minds, but they are no longer in our way, clouding our vision.

Christopher Willard, PsyD, is a psychologist and educational consultant. This article was adapted from *Growing Up Mindful*.