

Mindfulness for Children

By Summer Stanley

Far more than just a buzzword, “mindfulness” is a great way for children to transform how they react to stressful situations. Forming the right habits at a young age makes it easier to be mindful as an adult.

At its simplest, mindfulness is a technique for learning how to pay attention to the details in the present moment. The benefits are numerous—including improved social skills, enhanced focus, fewer attention problems, and deeper relationships with others.

As a parent or teacher, it’s important to have your own mindfulness practice. Children learn a lot from watching others, so they are more likely to succeed in their own practice if they see you benefiting from and enjoying yours.

A popular mindfulness exercise known as **STOP** can be helpful:

- **Stop.** Just take a momentary pause, no matter what you’re doing.
- **Take a breath.** Feel the sensation of your own breathing, which brings you back to the present moment.
- **Observe.** Acknowledge what is happening, for good or bad, inside you or outside you.
- **Proceed.** Having briefly checked in with the present moment, continue with whatever it was you were doing.

There are lots of ways to make becoming “mindful” a process that’s easy and fun:

- Take advantage of children’s love of superheroes by asking them to be like everyone’s favorite arachnoid character (focus on everything they can smell, hear, and taste with their super senses).
- Go on a mindfulness walk and pay special attention to the sounds of nature.
- Eat mindfully. Teach your kids to slowly savor a piece of candy or chocolate—the focus they learn will carry over into other areas of their lives.
- Make a mindfulness jar. Fill a jar with water and add glitter. Explain to your children that the glitter represents your thoughts when you are stressed or anxious. Shake the jar—the “thoughts” scatter and swirl. Take a few moments to let the glitter settle, and the “thoughts” calm down so you can see more clearly.
- Pose mindfully. Instead of sitting or walking, ask your kids to strike a “power pose”—stand with feet just wider than hips, fists clenched, and arms stretched as high as possible over the head, or with clenched fists placed on the hips. The poses should make them feel strong and happy.

Meditation apps like Calm and Headspace can also help. Teachers around the country have been using these apps in their classrooms to lessen their students’ anxiety and improve their performance.

Calm co-founder Alex Tew said, “I think mindfulness is incredibly important for all ages, but if we can teach the kids to meditate, that’s an amazing, actually world-changing opportunity.”

For more information, visit <https://www.nytimes.com/guides/well/mindfulness-for-children>.