



Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special one-time ad rates.

natural
awakenings

healthykids



Mindfulness for Little Ones

Teaching Kids to Be Calm and Focused

by Traci Childress

Mindfulness, simply defined, is being in the moment. Using simple tools can help us consciously notice our breath, bodies and sensations, as well as what is happening around us. As we practice noticing, we can more readily return to the moment and more immediately connect with ourselves and others. Integrating five mindfulness practices into our young children's lives is easy and yields powerful dividends.

Build Relationship with Breath

Connecting the rhythm of breathing to experiences helps children understand how to calm down. (Older children might enjoy learning the effects of breathing throughout their system.) First, ask children to notice their breath. Invite them to put a hand in front of their nose and breathe and say, "This is breath. All living things breathe." Encourage them to share their response to the experience.

Next, move to modeling breathing patterns in relation to experiences and feelings such as, "I feel so frustrated that my breath is moving fast. Look at my chest." Then model returning to calm breathing with, "I am putting my hand on my chest and reminding myself to take longer breaths."

Help children notice how their breath changes throughout the day. Games can support this increased awareness. Ask the child to lie down, place their hands on their chest

and belly and lie still. Ask them to notice their breath, and then have them stand up and jump up and down before noticing their breath again.

After hard play, tell them, "Your breath is moving so fast because you were running hard." At bedtime, soothingly note, "Your breath is getting sleepy and slow." Remember to be a witness, rather than a judge.

Play is an excellent way to discover how breathing changes. Partner with a child to try to simulate how favorite animals breathe. Invite them to try sustaining a sound, such as chanting a vowel letter, and time how long they can do it.

Notice Feelings and Sensations

Practice a regular mind/body check-in. At breakfast, inquire, "How are you feeling today?" or "Feelings check! At the moment, I am feeling tired and excited. What about you?" The idea is not to change or fix anything, just to notice, allowing a broadly defined perspective. Children might be able to describe a specific feeling or only an overall sensation like jumpy or buzzing.

Cultivate Sensory Awareness

Paying attention to sensations can bring children and adults into the moment. Integrate sensory awareness into daily life with simple questions like, "What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell?" We can bring this practice with us everywhere—into the waiting room at the dentist's office, in the car or on a plane.

Practice Moments of Quiet

Intentionally quiet moments support the development of mindfulness and empower children to consider "not doing" a valid part of everyday life. When they are given the opportunity for quiet time, they often love it.

Try asking the child to get so quiet that they can hear a particular sound in the room—their breath, the tick of a clock or the hum of a computer. Once they hear it and you do too, you can dismiss the practice session with a bell, gentle clap or another soft sound.

Send Well Wishes

The traditional Buddhist practice of *metta*, or loving kindness, meditation involves reciting phrases that we direct first to ourselves and then outward toward others. For example, think, "May I be safe. May I be well. May I be at peace," and then repeat the same phrases for someone we love, someone we don't know personally and ultimately, all beings.

When, for example, children ask why ambulances emit such loud, wailing sounds, we might explain, "Emergency rescue workers are helpers. Their sirens mean they are going to help someone. When we hear the sirens, we can wish them well by saying, 'May they be safe.'"

Traci Childress, co-founder and executive director of the Children's Community School, in Philadelphia, PA, teaches mindfulness practices and yoga. Learn more at TraciChildress.com.



Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special one-time ad rates.

natural
awakenings



Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special one-time ad rates.

natural
awakenings



Reach Your Target Market

Secure this ad spot!

Contact us for special one-time ad rates.

natural
awakenings