



Mindfulness for children



What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a whole body-mind state of awareness that involves ‘tuning in’ to the present moment, with openness and curiosity, instead of ‘tuning out’ from experience. Mindfulness is a state of being fully awake to life – being aware and undistracted in the present moment. It is about focusing attention on the present, rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future- which is often our brain’s default mode.

Mindful awareness is something that we all possess and that can be strengthened through practice. Mindfulness can be developed through formal sitting meditation practices, or through informal everyday mindfulness activities that use the senses to anchor the attention: such as mindful walking, listening to music, eating or conversation. Mindfulness is a clinically proven tool to support wellbeing and mental health by reducing stress and allowing life to be experienced more fully.

Why practise being mindful?

The way we interact with our kids has a huge impact on the way they think about themselves and their levels of personal resilience. Ellen Langer and team, a world-renowned mindfulness researcher found that children not only prefer to interact with mindful adults, but actually devalue themselves following interactions with mindless adults (Langer, Cohen & Djikic, 2010).

The benefits of mindfulness with children

- Research shows that mindfulness training increases connectivity in the frontal lobe of the brain, which is linked to improved attention, memory processing and [decision making](#) abilities.
- Mindfulness training involves tuning in to internal and external experiences with [curiosity](#) resulting in increased self-awareness, social awareness, and self-confidence.
- Mindfulness training increases children’s ability to [self-regulate](#) their emotions, especially difficult emotions such as [fear](#) and [anger](#), through breathing and other grounding techniques.

- Mindfulness has been shown to improve empathy or the ability to understand what another person is thinking or feeling, which improves children's awareness of others and helps them to [build positive relationships](#).

Mindfulness and childhood mental health

- Mindfulness training has been shown to reduce the severity of [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and [ADHD](#) in children.
- Mindfulness builds [resilience](#) by giving children skills to help them to cope better with stress, as well as engage more fully with themselves and the world.

Mindfulness for parents

The best thing parents can do to help their children become more mindful is to commit to some regular mindfulness practises themselves! The more present and mindful you are with your children, the more happy, mindful and resilient they will be. Mindfulness training can assist parents to remain in the present moment and engage more fully when interacting with their children. Research shows that parents and carers who practice being mindful around their children contribute to improving their child's sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Mindful play: Dedicate a window of time each week to mindfully play with your child or children. Turn off all other distractions such as TV, and put your mobile away and on silent. Try to give them your full attention during this time and if your mind wanders off to all the things you should be doing, that's fine – that's just what minds do! Use your child as an anchor to come back to every time your mind wanders away.

Mindful cooking: Cooking together can be a great way to spend quality time. Help your child notice the colours, smell and taste of the ingredients as you add them to the meal, and the touch of the different items as you cook.

Mindful dinnertime: Create a time for your family to appreciate and savour their food at the start of a meal by spending the first few minutes of dinner in silence, just eating and enjoying the food. It's a surprisingly nice activity to do with the whole family, and done regularly, can become a lovely ritual.

Mindful teeth brushing: Getting kids to brush their teeth can be a challenge, so why not make it a challenge, by inviting them to try to do it mindfully with you? Invite them to pay attention to the feel of the brush in their mouth and the sensation and taste of the toothpaste. Ask them three things they noticed that was different about their brushing tonight than from the previous night.

Mindful learning environments

Teachers and early childhood educators can influence student wellbeing and learning by understanding, embodying and embedding principles of mindfulness into their learning environments.

Teachers and early childhood educators who are encouraged to develop mindful awareness in their own life will positively influence their whole community.

A mindful partnership- KidsMatter has joined forces with Smiling Mind, a free program that helps develop Mindfulness Meditation skills in children. Read more about [the collaboration between KidsMatter and Smiling Mind](#).