

Parent Mindfulness Manual

Table of Contents

Parent Mindfulness Manual.....	1
What is mindfulness?	2
What are the benefits of mindfulness?	2
How is mindfulness being taught at my child’s school?	2
How can I support mindfulness at home?	3
When will I see a difference in my child?	4
Mindfulness Lessons	5
Vocabulary.....	7

Mindful Schools

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the quality of deliberate attention, of bringing purposeful awareness to one's experience. Mindfulness can be applied to sensory experience, thoughts, and emotions by using sustained attention and noticing our experience without reacting.

What are the benefits of mindfulness?

30+ years of research has shown the benefits of mindfulness in adults to range from decreased stress and chronic pain to improved emotional and mental well-being.

This research, and newly emerging research on children, offers compelling evidence to support the use of mindfulness in education. The application of mindfulness by students has the potential to improve academic achievement, mental health, and inter- and intra-personal relationships.

Anecdotal and qualitative evidence from the Mindful Schools program and other studies shows:

- Improved focus and concentration
- Decreased anxiety and stress
- Increased self-awareness
- Self soothing capacity
- Stronger impulse control
- Heightened empathy

How is mindfulness being taught at my child's school?

Mindful Schools provides 8 weeks of mindfulness training to your school. A mindfulness instructor visits all classrooms twice a week for a 15-minute lesson. Teachers and students are supported to continue mindfulness on their own once the program is complete. Students learn to apply mindfulness to all daily experiences including:

- Mindful bodies
- Mindful listening
- Mindful breathing
- Mindful seeing
- Mindful movement
- Mindfulness of thoughts
- Mindfulness of emotions
- Mindful test taking

-
- Heartfulness – sending kind thoughts, generosity and gratitude

How can I support mindfulness at home?

Many parents want to integrate mindfulness at home. We have found that responsiveness is generally much stronger at school than at home, but following are some suggestions for encouraging mindfulness at home.

Your own practice

A sure-fire way to establish mindfulness in your home is for you to be mindful! Your mindful presence will impact your children. Children are constantly learning from us, not just the information we tell them, but also the way we compose ourselves and how we handle difficulties. If your mindfulness develops patience, deeper presence, and more compassion in you, then you will be impacting your children in every moment.

If you don't already have a regular practice but are inclined, try creating a daily mindfulness practice on your own. Start with something that is manageable like 5 minutes every morning before you leave for work or 5 minutes every evening before bed. We often tell the students that the hardest thing about mindfulness is remembering to do it. This will likely be true for you. Initiating a personal practice can be challenging. Be prepared for some resistance and procrastination. Mindfulness takes discipline and practice.

A good way to encourage yourself is to practice with others. Take a Mindfulness Fundamentals Class through Mindful Schools or look for a local sitting group in your area. Being committed to a group or knowing others are committed as well will strengthen your intentions.

Formal at-home practice

- Do mindfulness together. Commit to keeping mindfulness a priority.
- Make mindfulness part of a daily routine. Do it before bed, before homework, or before "screen" time.
- Be consistent in:
 - **Time:** Practice at the same time each day.
 - **Environment:** If possible create a calm, quiet space for mindfulness.
 - **Length of practice:** 1-3 minutes/day can do a lot.
- Keep it simple. Just do what's easy. A little mindful listening and a little mindful breathing each day can begin to change the tone or mood of the household.

-
- Approach this together. If mindfulness is new to you, let your child be the guide. Ask them how to do mindfulness. Much of mindfulness is empowering children to recognize their own capacity to affect their experience in a positive way. If they teach you, it will reinforce their understanding and give them a sense of ownership. You might be delighted to witness what they've absorbed!

Informal at-home practice

You can reference mindfulness anytime.

- Prompting children to “notice how you are feeling right now” momentarily guides them inside. When you do this regularly they will start to notice, unprompted, more often.
- If there is a particularly emotional situation ask your child if there is anything they've learned in mindfulness that might help them at that moment. Ask them where they feel that emotion in their body and what happens when they gently notice that emotion and take some mindful breaths.
- Often, it's not helpful to suggest mindfulness at the height of a difficult moment. You might wait until the situation is settled. When your child is calmer talk about what happened. Ask how mindfulness might have helped in that moment? This will increase the likelihood of them remembering to apply mindfulness next time.

When will I see a difference in my child?

- We often see and hear of changes after day-one of our program. But, as with any skill or talent, mindfulness takes practice and changes will come suddenly as well as gradually.
- Mindfulness does have the potential to affect great shifts in behavior, attention, and emotional regulation. Keep in mind that when someone has difficulty in any of these areas, it is usually a deeply engrained pattern or habit. It takes time to retrain ourselves.
- A useful analogy is the Slow Food Movement or the idea that “good things take time.” Mindfulness is an innate human capacity that we would ideally cultivate our entire life. We may see improvements in certain areas and recognize that other things take longer.
- Your understanding and practice of mindfulness will enhance the benefits in your child.

Mindfulness Lessons

Ask your child to teach you how to do mindfulness. If you or your child needs some guidelines, please use the suggestions below.

Mindful Bodies

A Mindful Body is the preparation for mindful practices.

- Become still, quiet, gentle, and considerate of those around you.
- Let your back be straight without being rigid.
- Rest your hands calmly in your lap or on the table in front of you.
- Let your eyes close.
- Let all movement slowly come to a still place so that you are really prepared to focus your attention.
- Spend 1 minute in a mindful body.
- We can have Mindful Bodies while standing or walking as well.

Mindful Listening

Listening can be done with a bell or with ambient external sounds. If you use a bell, singing bowls work great.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Ring bell.
- Listen from beginning to end.
- Then listen to the sounds around you.
- Listen to sounds coming from outside the room.
- Listen to sounds coming from inside the room.
- Are you quiet enough to hear sounds in your body?
- Listen for 1-2 minutes.

Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing can be done anytime; before bed, walking to school, waiting in line, when frustrated or excited, while thinking, even watching TV.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Place your hand on your belly (or wherever you feel your breath the clearest – maybe your chest or at your nose).
- Notice the feeling/sensation as you breath in and out.
- Try to continue noticing every breath for 1-3 minutes.
- If you find that you started thinking, simply notice it and return your attention to the next breath.

Heartfulness – Sending Kind Thoughts

Having intentional thoughts is a very important skill to learn. If we don't know how to be deliberate in our thinking then we can be overcome by an undercurrent of negative thinking that influences how we feel and act in our day. Try sending kind thoughts to counter this.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Imagine yourself happy, peaceful and calm.
- Silently send the following wishes to yourself:
 - I wish happiness.
 - I wish for peace.
 - I wish for calm.
- You can add other wishes.
- Send each wish a few times.
- Another time try sending wishes to someone you know, or even someone you are mad at.
- Always notice how you feel during and after this exercise.

Vocabulary

Here is a list of the most common words we use in Mindfulness. They will all become very familiar in the first few classes. Students really respond to this new vocabulary and often we hear stories of students spontaneously using these words in the classroom, on the playground or at home.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention to your experience, or noticing things on purpose. We can be mindful of everything including sound, sight, smell, taste, touch, our thoughts and our emotions.

Mindful Bodies

A Mindful Body is a still, quiet, relaxed yet upright, calm body. Students don't always have to have a Mindful Body, but when they are prompted they know exactly what needs to change in order to "get into" a Mindful Body.

Anchor

Our Anchor spot is the place where we feel our breath most obviously. It's the place that holds our attention, just like an anchor holds a boat in place*. Three of the most common places people feel their breath is 1. their abdomen (belley), 2. their chest, 3. at their nose. But any place is fine. It works best if you choose one place and stick with it.

*This analogy is a little advanced for K and sometimes 1st. Your mindfulness teacher may or may not use it in those grades.

Mindful Breathing

Mindful Breathing is the foundation of the mindfulness lessons. Although we will learn to be mindful of almost everything we do, mindful breathing happens in every class. Mindful Breathing helps us learn where our attention (or our mind) is. Mindful Breathing can help us calm down, help us be present, and help us remember to notice our experience, whatever it is at any given moment.

Heartfulness

Heartfulness is anything that develops our empathy, kindness and caring. Lessons that cultivate heartfulness are "Sending Kind Thoughts", "Generosity", "Gratitude", and "Kindness on the Playground".