

News from Psychological Services

MINDFULNESS



What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is the act of being intensely aware of what you’re sensing and feeling at every moment – without interpretation or judgment.” Being *Mindful* means paying full attention to something; it is the opposite of rushing and multi-tasking. Being mindful means you are slowing down to really notice and be aware of what you are doing. You are focused, but in a relaxed and easy way. Research has shown that mindfulness can improve physical health, relieve stress, depression and anxiety. A recent study suggests that mindfulness education — lessons

on techniques to calm the mind and body — can reduce the negative effects of stress and increase students’ ability to stay engaged, helping them stay on track academically and avoid behavior problems.

Today, children (and adults!) are faced with an unprecedented amount of stress and anxiety. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 25% of 13 to 18 years old will experience an anxiety disorder. Additionally, a student revealed that in 2015, 16.1 million Americans reported experiencing major depression during the previous

year. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, these early stress levels that are becoming more and more prevalent in children can negatively impact learning, memory, behavior, and both physical and mental health. Studies have shown benefits against an array of conditions, such as depression, chronic pain, and anxiety, for patients engaging in a mindfulness meditation program, with effects similar to other existing treatments.



Did you know?

Evidence suggests that mindfulness interventions improve attention, self-control, emotional resilience, recovery from addiction, memory, and immune response. In randomized controlled trials, teachers who learned mindfulness interventions reported greater efficacy in doing their jobs, had more emotionally supportive classrooms, and had better classroom organization, based on independent observations. -*Mindful Schools*, 2018

MINDFULNESS IN THE CLASSROOM

Mindfulness practices are steadily finding their way into educational settings across the world. The first major effort to use mindfulness in schools began in the United Kingdom in 2007 with a series of fixed lesson plans delivered in classrooms across the country. Since then, mindfulness practices in educational settings have gained more interest over the years. While the implementation of these school-based mindfulness programs is becoming more popular, empirical research proving the benefits of these programs is beginning to emerge and more research will be needed over the coming decades.

According to the Director of the Association of Mindfulness in Education, incorporating mindfulness into education has been linked to improving academic and social and emotional learning. Additionally, researchers believe that mindfulness strengthens some underlying development processes-such as focus, resilience, and self-soothing-all skills that will help students in the future. Mindfulness also can be a power tool that helps children calm themselves, focus their attention, and interact with others positively. These are all critical skills for functioning well in school and in life. Some practitioners believe the best way to implement mindfulness is in an integrated way with social and emotional learning. Many experts believe that the best way to implement mindfulness involves a teacher having his or her own mindfulness practice or at least an understanding of the practice.

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Be the Pond | Cosmic Kids Zen Den - Mindfulness for kids



This video is called “Be the Pond”. This video encourages students to imagine their bodies as a pond with many fish swimming around the pond. Each experienced emotion can be a fish in the pond swimming around. We want students to just notice the fish swimming and be the pond. This is a good way to teach the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness is simply the focus on the “here and now”. This activity encourages students to just notice their thoughts, actions, and emotions, body state, etc. without having an agenda for getting taken over by them. This practice is the key to mindfulness.

Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness Activities for Kids

- **Blowing bubbles and pinwheels-** Encourage the child to take a deep breath and exhale as they blow to create a bubble or spin the pinwheel. As they do so, ask them to pay attention to the bubbles as they are created and float away and to the motion of the pinwheel.
- **Playing with balloons-**Encourage the child to keep a balloon from touching the floor with slow and steady movements.
- **Texture bag-** Place several small objects with a variety of textures/mediums in a bag. Have the child reach in and touch an object, describing what they feel.
- **Mindful Jar-** Fill a clear jar with water. Add glitter glue or glue and dry glitter to the jar. Seal and shake well. As the glitter swirls, have the child imagine that the glitter is like his or her thoughts when stressed and upset. Once the glitter starts to settle, explain that this is what happens when we take a few minutes to be still and settle down.
- **Guided Videos-** Practice mindful breathing with guided videos. [Breathing Video for Kids](#)
- **Body Scan-**Have the child lie down, close his or her eyes and tightly squeeze their muscles as much as they can (ex. make hands into fists, make arms and legs as hard as a rock, squish their toes and feet, scrunch face). After several seconds, have them slowly release the tension and relax.
- **Heartbeat Exercise-** Have the child do a cardio activity for one minute (ex. Jumping jacks). Afterward, ask him or her to sit down, close eyes, and place a hand over the heart. Ask him or her to pay attention to his or her heartbeat and breath.
- **Mindful Eating-**Have a snack and describe the smell, texture and taste of the food.
- **Sky Gazing-**Find fun shapes and figures in the clouds. At night, look at the stars together.
- **Kindness-**Have the child think of 5 people to send positive thoughts and kind wishes to.



Mindfulness Activities for Middle and High School Students

- **Mindfulness Apps**-Utilize technology with mindfulness apps such as Stop, Breathe, Think, Ten Percent Happier, or Smiling Mind.
- **Five Things**-Sit down with a teen or group of teens and share five things you see, feel, smell, or hear, noticing what is around them.
- **Listen to Music**-Play calm music, and name how many different instruments can be heard. This helps focus thoughts on one task in the present.
- **Heartbeat Counting**-For one minute, have the teen hold a hand over their heart and observe how their heartbeat and breathing feels. Encourage them to pay attention to the rhythm of his or her own body.
- **Deep Breathing**-Breathe in and out slowly and deeply while noticing things one hears or feels.
- **Mindfulness Walking**-Have a teen take a walk around the neighborhood, the school track, etc. while listening for as many sounds as they can hear. Encourage the child to pay attention to how his or her body moves as he or she walks slowly. Have them pay attention to how they naturally stay balanced. Encourage them to breathe in and out in time with their steps.
- **Sorting Thoughts**-Help teens refocus their thoughts on the reality of a situation by thinking about why they feel stressed or anxious. Have them sort the thoughts into categories of things that are facts/true, and things that are opinions, feelings, or worries. This will help decide how much energy various thoughts warrant.
- **Good Things**-Have teens share good things that are happening in their lives. It can be small, everyday things that they are grateful for. Utilize a gratitude journal to help focus on what is going well.
- **Drawing Emotions**-Take a few minutes for the teen to draw how they feel. It may be easier to draw about their feelings than to talk about them.
- **Technology Breaks**-Take technology breaks. Have the teen reflect on how they feel during these breaks.
- **Emotional Validation**-Affirm the feelings and emotions the teen is experiencing and give them permission to do so without feeling shame or guilt.
- **Mindful Words**-For at least one minute, have a child think of a word that they perceive as calm or soothing (love, snow, calm, etc.). Tell them to think about the word and say it in their mind. Each time the child takes a breath or if the mind begins to wander, have them focus on the word in his or her mind.
- **Mindful Driving**-This is a good activity to encourage safe driving, which requires paying attention. Before starting the car, encourage the teen to take a moment and bring attention to how the body feels in the driver's seat. Is the seat comfortable? Does it feel soft, firm, cool, or warm? Have the teen take a slow breath as he or she settles into the seat, adjusting the seat if needed and taking slow, deep breaths. Take notice of people or cars around. As the teen drives, take notice of situations that require breaking or accelerating.

Fun

MINDFULNESS ACTIVITIES

for children

by Big Life Journal





"JUST ONE BREATH" BREATHING ACTIVITY

- Find a relaxing place, sit comfortably, and set a timer for one minute.
- Breathe deeply in and out while paying attention to any sensations you notice or sounds you hear.
- Take another slow deep breath, imagine the air moving down into the lungs and back up.
- Take one more deep breath and hold for a moment, then release it.





CREATE A GLITTER JAR

- Finding a jar or plastic bottle and allow your child to decorate it however they like.
- Fill the bottle up 3/4 of the way with water. Next, add clear glue, food coloring, and glitter then shake.
- Seal the lid and you are ready to go.





HEARTBEAT EXERCISE

- Ask your child to stand up and either jump up and down or do jumping jacks for one minute.
- At the end of that minute, have them place their hand on their heart and pay attention to how their heartbeat and their breathing feels.





GOING ON A SAFARI

- Go outside on an exciting adventure, try picking up a small rock or touching a plant or flower.
- Notice the bugs or the birds. Take a moment to kneel down and touch the earth.
- Walk mindfully paying close attention to everything. Make sure you walk in silence because you want to notice all those little details.





TENSE AND RELEASE MUSCLE RELAXATION

- Starting at the feet, gently squeeze the muscles in the feet by tightening them, then slowly releasing.
- Next, squeeze the large muscles in the calves for 5 seconds, then gently release. Working your way up the body, squeeze the thigh muscles for 5 seconds then gently release.
- Continue moving up the body for more relaxation.



Big Life Journal - biglifejournal.com

Mindfulness During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Experts suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on our emotional and mental health. We are living in a time of extreme uncertainty. Uncertainty about the future, as well as uncertainty about our safety and security. One thing we do know, is that worrying will not change the outcome of this pandemic. As the ancient Chinese philosopher and writer Lao Tzu said, "If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace, you are living in the present." By learning to live in the present moment, we learn to cope with uncertainty and can thereby learn skills to navigate our uncertain world. Although the negative emotions that many of us are experiencing right now are normal feelings in response to an abnormal situation, mindfulness can help us acknowledge these feelings as natural reactions, without being overburdened by these strong emotions. Mindfulness also fosters a sense of compassion in ourselves and in others and helps us to see the areas that we do have control. This in turn helps us know the best way to move forward.

Right now many of us are juggling more tasks and responsibilities than we were prior to the pandemic. As a result, you may feel that you don't have one spare moment to devote to mindfulness. However, you will likely find that by carving out some time for mindfulness practice with yourself and your students, you will have more focus and energy to tackle your to-do list. Below are some tips to work in mindfulness practice during this stressful time:

- Set an intention to practice daily. Repetition makes for good habit formation.
- Start with just 5-10 minutes. You can increase that time as you become more practiced.
- Let go of expectations. The goal is to "quiet the mind," not silence it. Your mind will wander, and that's okay! When your mind wanders, simply notice it, and then return your attention to the present moment.
- We are all washing our hands multiple times per day. Use this time as a mindful practice by focusing on your breath and relaxing your mind and body. Pay attention to the different senses you experience while washing your hands and slowly repeat calming and positive phrases in your mind while washing your hands. Check out this site for mindful handwashing scripts: <https://blissfulkids.com/three-mindful-ways-to-wash-hands/> and this site to download a free mindful handwashing poster to hang up by your sink: <https://www.tenpercent.com/handwashing-meditation-poster>


Below are some mindfulness activities to try with yourself or with your students during our time of social distancing and coping with the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Take a walk outside and look for something red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. If you locate all of the colors, start over again at red and keep going through the rainbow. Can't get outside? Walk around your house or room and look for these colors in order to bring your awareness to your surroundings.
- Pause to take 3 deep breaths to reduce stress and invite calm.
- Eat one bite of a meal or snack and pay close attention to what you are eating. What do you feel....is it crunchy or soft? What do you taste....is it sweet or savory? Use the [Five Senses Snacking Google Doc](#) as a guide.
- Go around the room or table and have each person share one thing they are grateful for, or a pleasant moment from the day. Actively listen to what each person shares and avoid any judgment or criticism of what is said.
- Do some mindful stretching with a few simple yoga postures. [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#) is a good resource, or check out these [printable yoga pose cards](#).

- Starting at your toes, pick one muscle and squeeze it tight. Count to five. Release, and notice how your body changes. Repeat this exercise moving up your body.
- Try belly breathing. Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Slowly breathe in from your stomach (expand like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (deflate). Find free tips and visuals for belly breathing and other deep breathing exercises [here](#) and [here](#).
- Color something in a coloring book or draw your own design. Focus on the colors and designs while you do so.
- Listen to a favorite song. Pay attention to the voice or a specific instrument.
- Practice using the STOP acronym when you notice you're getting anxious or one of your students is getting anxious:
 - S - Stop what you're doing and take a moment to be still
 - T - Take a few deep breaths and just be aware that you're breathing
 - O - Observe any sensations in your body, thoughts in your mind, emotions in your heart
 - P - Pause to come back to your breath, then proceed with your day with greater calm


There are many great YouTube videos and online resources dedicated to using mindfulness to help children (and adults!) cope with stress and anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Check out some of these resources below:

- [COVID-19 Meditation with Children \(Bubble Blowing\)](#)
- [Guided Meditation for Children - Calming Fear & Anxiety During the Coronavirus](#)
- [5 Tools & Breathing Exercises for Kids' Anxiety During COVID-19](#)
- [The Awake Network](#) has compiled a comprehensive list of free mindfulness teachings, practices, and other resources for social distancing and the pandemic.
- Ten Percent Happier has put together a [Coronavarius Sanity Guide](#) of guided meditations, podcasts, and blog posts to cope with the stress of COVID-19.
- [Mindup.org](#) is a great free resource for parents and teachers to implement mindfulness practices with children, and many of these are applicable to our current situation.
- [UCLA Health](#) has posted a page of COVID-19 mindfulness resources.




4 MINDFULNESS PRACTICES TO Navigate Coronavirus Panic

BY KELLY BARRON




1. MINDFULLY WASH YOUR HANDS

Feel the warmth of the water as it flows over your palms. Notice whether washing your hands this way is a pleasurable act of self-compassion.




3. GO ON A MEDIA DIET

It's important not to unnecessarily trigger fear. Check the news once or twice a day and stick to official sources.



2. FACE OFF

Refraining from touching your face not only helps you avoid the coronavirus, it also can carry over to quell other habits.



4. EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY

Take a breath. Feel your feet on the floor and kindly say to yourself: "Right now, this is the only moment I'm living in."

MINDFULNESS PRACTICES DURING COVID-19



EARLY MORNING COMPASSION

Before you get out of bed:

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Take 10 breaths, with thoughts below:
 - **Inhale** - "May I accept things the way they are"
 - **Exhale** - "May I be at peace"
 - **Inhale** - "May I accept things the way they are"
 - **Exhale** - "May I be at peace"

CALMING MINDFUL CORNER

Have each family member identify a Mindful Corner:

- This a place for alone time (i.e. no one can bother you while there!)
- When you sit in your Mindful Corner, practice **Square Breathing** (10 times, or set a timer!)
- Imagine a square:
 - **Inhale** as you go across the top of the square
 - **Hold** your breath as you go down the right side
 - **Exhale** as you go across the bottom
 - **Hold** your breath as you go up the left side



COMMUNITY MINDFULNESS

Practice mindfulness as a family (or FaceTime a community member or another family):

- Dinner time (or right before everyone heads to bed)
- Set a timer for 5 mins and sit quietly with eyes open or closed
- Listen to the sounds in the room, feel your belly move with your breath, or simply let your mind wander
- When the timer goes off, congratulate yourself
- Talk about the experience!

Mindfulness during trying times

- **Practice compassion** - if you feel edgy, so do your housemates; have empathy for what they are feeling
- **Have patience** - it is hard for everyone to be in close quarters, so we have to remind ourselves to be patient
- **Reach out** - there are others out there who need you. Reach out to a family member or friend who might be lonely
- **Pay it forward** - many in our community are not working or have struggling businesses. Try to help out where you can (e.g., tip bigger!)

Designed by: Megan Fox
Content created by: Kathryn Morris, Ashleigh Langheim, and Jenilee Fleetwood
Edited by: Gretchen Stumpf

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