

## Awareness and Presence with a Child or Children

We all live really busy lives and it is easy to find that you have rushed through the day without being fully present with your child or children at any point. Choose a time of day to experiment with bringing your full present attention to whatever is unfolding. It could be waking your children up in the morning or helping them get ready for school, or the transition when they first come home from school, or bedtime, or any other time.



The most important thing is to simply experience what is happening in the moment and to be fully present for it without having to have anything happen - just this timeless moment as it is.

If you get lost in thought, as happens to all of us at times, you can always return to the sensations of breathing to return yourself to the present moment, and then bring your attention back to your child or children. Each time you notice that your mind has gone off to one thing or another or has become distracted or preoccupied, notice where it has gone and gently bring it back to the present moment.

## Tips for Daily Mindfulness

- When you first wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed, bring your attention to your breathing. Observe five mindful breaths.
- Notice changes in your posture. Be aware of how your body and mind feel when you move from lying down to sitting, to standing, to walking. Notice each time you make a transition from one posture to another.
- Whenever you hear a phone ring, a bird sing, a train pass by, laughter, a car horn, the wind – use any sound as a bell of mindfulness. Really listen and be present and awake.
- Notice your body while you walk or stand. Take a moment to notice your posture. Pay attention to the contact of the ground under your feet. Feel the air on your face, arms and legs as you walk. Are you rushing?
- Bring awareness to listening and talking. Can you listen without agreeing or disagreeing, liking or disliking, or planning what you will say when it is your turn? When talking can you just say what you need without overstating or understating? Can you notice how your mind and body feel?
- Whenever you wait in a queue, use this time to notice standing and breathing. Feel the contact of your feet on the floor and how your body feels. Bring attention to the rise and fall of your abdomen. Are you feeling impatient?
- Focus attention on daily activities such as brushing your teeth, washing up, brushing your hair, putting on your shoes, or doing your job. Bring mindfulness to each activity.
- Before you go to sleep at night, take a few minutes and bring attention to your breathing. Observe five mindful breaths.



# Mindfulness Resources Parents



**Following the delivery of The Mindful Attention Programme in your child's school this resource aims to suggest easy ways for you and your family to try mindfulness at home. Mindfulness can be defined as a way of being aware of what is happening within us and around us with a clear focus of attention on moment-to-moment experience that enables us to be fully present in the here and now. Below is an introduction to mindful breathing, a core practice in all mindfulness programmes. Alongside this are a number of different ways that you and your family can incorporate mindfulness into your daily life.**

## Mindful Breathing

### Time Required

15 minutes daily for at least a week (though evidence suggests that mindfulness increases the more you practice it).



### How to Do It

The most basic way to do mindful breathing is simply to focus your attention on your breath, the inhale and exhale. You can do this while standing, but ideally you'll be sitting or even lying in a comfortable position. Your eyes may be open or closed, but you may find it easier to maintain your focus if you close your eyes. It can help to set aside a designated time for this exercise, but it can also help to practice it when you're feeling particularly stressed or anxious. Experts believe a regular practice of mindful breathing can make it easier to do it in difficult situations.

Sometimes, especially when trying to calm yourself in a stressful moment, it might help to start by taking an exaggerated breath: a deep inhale through your nostrils (3 seconds), hold your breath (2 seconds), and a long exhale through your mouth (4 seconds). Otherwise, simply observe each breath without trying to adjust it; it may help to focus on the rise and fall of your chest or the sensation through your nostrils. As you do so, you may find that your mind wanders, distracted by thoughts or bodily sensations. That's OK. Just notice that this is happening and gently bring your attention back to your breath.

### Why It Works

Mindfulness gives people distance from their thoughts and feelings, which can help them tolerate and work through unpleasant feelings rather than becoming overwhelmed by them. Mindful breathing in particular is helpful because it gives people an anchor--their breath--on which they can focus when they find themselves carried away by a stressful thought. Mindful breathing also helps people stay "present" in the moment, rather than being distracted by regrets in the past or worries about the future.

## Ground Surfing

This is a good practice to use for yourself or with your child. It's an easy practice to use if you are feeling anxious. Consider using it on the walk to school, walking from the car to home or the office or before walking into a meeting.

Imagine placing your full awareness into the body. It is as if your consciousness moves into your feet and you can notice each little movement and be fully engaged with it – just as if you were a surfer riding a wave in Hawaii! Only this time you are surfing on the ground, noticing every little change in how your feet contact the carpet, wood, or grass that you walk on. See how each surface affects how you surf it.

Let your body and movement become fluid and enjoy the ride as you immerse in this dance of movement. Have you ever seen someone practice tai chi, yoga, or dance? Let walking slowly (or even at normal speed) embody the same graceful movement as these practices. By moving in this way you take the body off auto-pilot and flow with each movement and moment. Enjoy the ride!



## Mindful Chores

Choose from one of the following activities. It might be useful to choose an activity that you typically resist or don't like doing.

<i>Driving</i>	<i>Homework</i>	<i>Preparing meals</i>	<i>Washing the dishes</i>
<i>Laundry</i>	<i>Shopping</i>	<i>Vacuuming</i>	<i>Studying for a test</i>

The point of this practice is not to say that you will suddenly love washing the dishes but the idea is to change your relationship to an activity. To experience it in a whole new way that lets go of your previous assumptions and dislikes.

Do the activity for 5 or 10 minutes without distraction or multi-tasking so switch off the TV and other devices and see what it is like to focus, slow down and notice every little detail that you can. Allow yourself to experience this chore or activity as if it were the very first time you have ever done it. Using the example of washing the dishes:



- Before starting, spend a few moments to reflect on the dishes and utensils and how they have helped you prepare and enjoy your meal.
- Feel the fine movements of your arms, hands and body as you lift and manipulate the dishes, notice the coolness or warmth of the water as it splashes on your hands, sense the weight, texture and shape of utensils and plates.
- Notice the smells and scents of the dishwashing liquid.
- Observe the shapes and colours of the dishes as if you have never seen them before.
- Listen to the sounds of the water and the clinking of plates and cups and other sounds in the environment.
- If you get distracted gently and with kindness return your attention to the sensing of each moment.

Reflect on what you noticed by slowing down and immersing yourself in the activity.

## Mindful Mealtimes

Your child will have tried mindful eating as part of the MAP programme. This is an easy practice to incorporate into family mealtimes. It works best when everyone is eating together at a table. Agree to eat in silence for a set period of time one or two minutes is a good start. Explain to your family that during this time you are going to pay attention as you eat. Ask them to bring awareness to seeing the food, smelling the food, tasting the food, chewing the food slowly and swallowing the food. After the period of silence invite your family to talk but ask them to try as best they can to bring the same awareness and attention to talking and listening as they have just done with their food.

Investing time to realise how good food or drink can taste, how relaxing it can be to take the time to sit and be in the moment with it is something that you can do for yourself every day. For example mindfully drinking a cup of tea or coffee.



## Digital Detox

Mindfulness helps us to be in the present moment which can be difficult when there are distractions such as mobile phones and social media. Encourage you and your family to have regular digital detoxes from your mobile phones, laptops and social media. Try to spend periods of time each day where you do not check your phones or engage with technology. You could try introducing a rule of no phones at mealtimes.



## A Mindful Hug

Hugging your child is a lovely way to connect with them. You might like to try this practice the next time you hug your child. It is nice to use at bedtimes and is also helpful as an act of reconciliation. Before hugging three deep conscious breaths to bring yourself fully into the present. Then open your arms and begin hugging. Holding each other for three in-and-out breaths. With the first breath, be aware that you are present in this very moment and you are happy. With the second breath, be aware that your child is present in this moment and you are happy. With the third breath, be aware that you are here together, right now on this earth, and feel deep gratitude and happiness for your togetherness.

