

Mindfulness: Benefits for the Whole Family

What is Mindfulness?

There are many definitions of mindfulness. Mindfulness is simply the practice of training our brain to non-judgementally be aware of our feelings, our bodies, and our environment in the present moment. Mindfulness has its roots in Eastern World meditative practices, but has been adapted to our Western medical system.

Mindfulness is something that we can practice. It's like exercise for the brain. We focus our attention on the present moment, and if our attention goes somewhere else, we just bring it back to the present moment without judgement. We can practice mindfulness formally (e.g. meditation, mindful movement [i.e. stretching, yoga, tai chi], mindful walking, mindful eating, body scans, loving kindness) or informally (being mindful as we go about daily activities). The more we practice mindfulness, the more we have mindful moments and live in a state of mindfulness. Over time, we develop a mindfulness trait (way of being).



source: www.mindfulschools.org

Here is one example of a mindful activity you can practice: *“Plant both feet on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Take deep breathes while you look around and notice 3 new things . . . what do you see . . . what do you hear . . . what do you smell?”*

Why Mindfulness?

Research into mindfulness has skyrocketed over the last 15 years. Mindfulness supports healthy brain development, physical and emotional wellness, and helps to ‘immunize’ children against the pressures of the modern world (watch Dr. John Kabat-Zinn, “The Benefits of Meditation” – Youtube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjXXvtGEZQQ>

Without mindfulness, we tend to react impulsively (without thinking) to situations. Learning to bring our attention to the present, helps us develop greater self-awareness and emotional regulation abilities. When we focus our brain in the present, it activates certain brain regions connected to self-regulation and executive functioning.

Mindfulness can support caregivers/parents to decrease stress and caregiver fatigue, and can support emotional regulation, self-kindness, and empathy. In children and teens, mindfulness has been shown to improve focus & attention, executive function, self-regulation, and can promote empathy and optimism (<http://leftbrainbuddha.com/why-we-need-mindfulness-in-schools/>)

What do Kids Think about Mindfulness?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-YEZnrySrtQ>

What do Teens Think about Mindfulness?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk7lBwuhXWM>

How to Get Started?

There are many ways you can develop a mindfulness practice for yourself and your children. You can find mindful activities online, in activity books, and on flashcard decks. Here are some free resources that can help you get started:

- TeachStarter:
<https://www.teachstarter.com/au/teaching-resource/mindfulness-activity-task-cards/>
- TherapistAid:
<https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/mindfulness-for-children>

Apps that provide guided practices are another great way to get started. Popular apps include: Stop, Breathe & Think; Smiling Mind; Breathe, Think, Do; Headspace, Calm, 10% Happier

Where & When to do Mindfulness?

You can practice mindfulness anywhere, such as in your home, while driving, or out for a nature walk. Consider making mindfulness a part of your daily routine, such as in the morning, evening, or before bedtime. The main thing is to remember that it's a practice- something we learn to do over time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqoxYKtEWEc>

Remember to start small, practice it yourself (for your own wellbeing and so you can model it for your kids) and to keep your family mindfulness practice simple, short, and fun!

Online Resources:

- <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/research/>
- <http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/>
- www.blissfulkids.com
- www.mindfulnessforteens.com
- www.mindful.org
- www.self-compassion.org

Books:

- Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda
- Listening to My Body
- Peaceful Piggy Meditation
- Listening to My Heart
- Moody Cow Meditates
- The Mindful Teen
- Mindfulness for Teen Anxiety
- The Awakened Family
- The Mindful Child
- Self-Compassion by Kristen Neff

Other:

CYFAMH Intake – Edmonton Zone: 780-342-2701

Youth Addiction Services Edmonton: 780-422-7383

Mobile Response Team (for children/youth):
780-427-4491

CMHA Edmonton Distress Line:
780-482-HELP (4357)

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868