

Mindfulness

Activities For Children and Young People

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Mindfulness Activities for Children and Young People

Introduction

Mindfulness is defined as “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145).

Training in mindfulness has the potential to enhance children’s attention and focus, and improve memory, self-acceptance, self-management skills, and self-understanding. In practicing mindfulness, one becomes aware of the current internal and external experiences, observe them carefully, accept them, and allows them to be let go of in order to attend to another present moment experience.

It focuses on physical sensations such as breathing, the taste on our tongues, and the feel of the surface under our feet. Automatic and wandering thoughts are observed before we re-focus on physical sensations in the present moment.

Thoughts are seen as passing much like a cloud in the sky. Thoughts are seen as mental thoughts, not facts. They are not judged. The aim is to develop skills to work with automatic patterns of reacting to stress and developing capacity to notice and enjoy pleasant events.

A key theme of mindfulness is to develop more unconditional kindness towards our self and others. An aim is to develop healthier and more compassionate responses to one’s experience, events in one’s life and others.

A further aim is to bring a greater awareness of thinking, feeling and behaviour patterns and to develop responses to these which have more skill and compassion. This is found to lead to an expansion of choice and capacity in how to meet and respond to life’s challenges.

Most of the literature on mindfulness focuses on adults. In comparison, very little research and writing have been done on the use of mindfulness with children. However, work with children would appear to be a natural application. Although children can have a tendency to function on automatic pilot in their daily lives, it is also true that children are often much closer to experiences of mindfulness than adults.

A lot of the research into mindfulness so far, has suggested that it is an enjoyable and beneficial skill for children to develop. It is believed to help with

- Stress
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Eating disorders
 - *Their thought processes and understanding of their experiences of the world*
 - Memory
 - Attentional control
 - *Their knowledge of how their mind works*
 - Attentional regulation and concentration
 - Self-awareness, self-control and management of emotions
 - *sense of wellbeing*
- (Fontana and Slack, 1997)

Mindfulness has been linked to academic attainment and improving results, supporting the mental health of children, building resilience and determination and also emotional and social learning. One of the key skills which it has been associated with mindfulness is **executive control and self-regulation** (e.g. management of cognitive processes such as memory, problem solving, reasoning and planning; the ability to understand and manage emotions; delayed gratification; monitoring attention; impulse control; and meta cognition (thinking about thinking which is a key skill for learning)) D. Goleman has completed research which shows that executive function skills in childhood can have a significant impact on predicting income, health and criminality in adulthood. Research suggests that those pupils with the lowest level of control benefit the most from mindfulness training, although all children from clinical and non-clinical populations are seen to experience benefits. Further benefits have included:

- ❖ Increased self-esteem,
- ❖ Increased readiness to learn/effective learning skills (e.g. increased ability to ignore distractions and irrelevant stimuli and increased metacognition)
- ❖ Increase in sleep quality and reduction in tiredness
- ❖ Decrease in negative emotions,
- ❖ Increased calm
- ❖ Increased self-acceptance and happiness
- ❖ Increase in behavioural regulation
- ❖ Enhanced ability to make decisions, manage difficulty and cope with stress
- ❖ Enhanced cognitive flexibility and creativity
- ❖ As well as increased social skills and feelings of social success and a sense of belonging.

Key Points for Teachers

Meditation should be discussed with children before beginning practice (see appendix for myths)

The person teaching should be comfortable with the exercises prior to the teaching, and have practiced mindfulness in general. We must practice what we teach. Staff should have ethical values which underpin effective delivery, and if possible should be appropriately trained and supervised and should have organisational support which allows practice to teach regularly.

Materials and teaching may need adapting to accommodate for young people with English as an additional language and based on varying levels of literacy, communication and comprehension ability. For some, visual prompts and demonstration and practical guiding may be useful. Technological aids may also be a further support for others.

Teachers should teach in ways that are universally accessible to people of all faiths and none. Teachers should equally aim to cultivate compassion as well as calm and performance. There are ideal times to use mindfulness techniques. The beginning of the day may be a useful time to practice bringing awareness to the present, perhaps using a visual meditation, in order to focus attention on beginning the school day, and to begin the day freshly.

Similarly, mindfulness might be used at other transition points during the school day, such as before or after play of PE, after lunch, and the end of the day. Mindfulness practice can also be used before important events such as tests, sporting events, and competitions. The goal is for children to learn to use mindfulness techniques whenever they need to calm themselves and refocus their energy and attention.

Working with a whole school ethos is better than 1 teacher working with 1 class. Encouraging home practice is key. Research suggests that long term change accumulates in proportion to the time spent engaged in mindfulness practice. Activities may feel uncomfortable, may be approached with scepticism and may feel effortful at first. Persistence is key and pupils should be made aware of this. Meta cognitive and perspective shifting takes time.

NB Exercise success is important to start with short and simple examples! Beginning with the more concrete attention to the external environment, then moving to the experience of the body, and finally, introducing attention to the mind and meditation exercises is a good idea.

ACTIVITIES

Listen to the bell.

An easy way for children to practice mindfulness is to focus on paying attention to what they can hear. You can use a singing bowl, a bell, and a set of chimes or a phone app that has sounds on it. Tell your children that you will make the sound, and they should listen carefully until they can no longer hear the sound (which is usually 30 seconds to a minute).



Breathing



in



out

This exercise should be introduced first by demonstrating breathing. For young children, this basic, natural function may be something to which they never paid attention before. Begin with noting how cool air enters the nose, and then warm air is exhaled. There should be no attempt to hold the breath, push it out, or change the natural rhythm—just to be aware.

Using counting helps remind the child to stay focused on the breathing, avoiding other distracting thoughts. Counting can be done in different ways. For most children, it will be helpful to count “one” as they inhale, and “one” as they exhale, then “two” inhale, “two” exhale, and so on, up to five. Then they should start back at “one.” If they find it difficult to maintain their focus, they may repeat the number, counting “one, one, one, one” as they inhale, and the same as they exhale. Again, they should be reminded not to force the breath, but to follow its natural rhythm. Remind the child that in spite of his or her efforts to stay focused on breathing, his or her mind may wander away to places he

or she has been, an activity once shared with a friend, a favourite book or other thoughts. As the child becomes aware that the mind is no longer focused on the breath, he or she should simply note the thought and return to counting the breath, beginning with "one." Children may be surprised at how much practice it takes to remain focused on their breath.

Remember to begin with a short time period, and gradually increase it once the child has experienced success. If frustrated, children should be encouraged to continue trying. Remind them not to judge the distracting thoughts and feelings. Also, encourage children to use this focus on breathing in their daily life, particularly when they are feeling anxious, overwhelmed, or angry, but also before starting homework or before going to sleep.

Practice with a Breathing Buddy



For young children, an instruction to simply "pay attention to the breath" can be hard to follow. You could ask each child to take a stuffed animal as their breathing buddy, and then lay down on their back with their buddy on their belly. They focus their attention on the rise and fall of the stuffed animal as they breathe in and out.

Make your walks mindful.

You can go on a "noticing walk." Stroll through the local area and notice things you haven't seen before. Designate one minute of the walk where you are completely silent and simply pay attention to all the sounds you can hear, the sound of your feet on the pavement, the breathing of others, the sound of the birds, the sound of distant traffic etc.

Try the Spider Man Mindfulness Meditation

This meditation teaches children to activate their "Spidey-senses" and their ability to focus on all they can see, smell, taste, and hear in the present moment.



In **Sitting Still like a Frog**,

Sitting Still Like a Frog

Mindfulness Exercises for Kids
and Their Parents



Simple mindfulness practices to help your child deal with
anxiety, improve concentration, and handle difficult emotions.

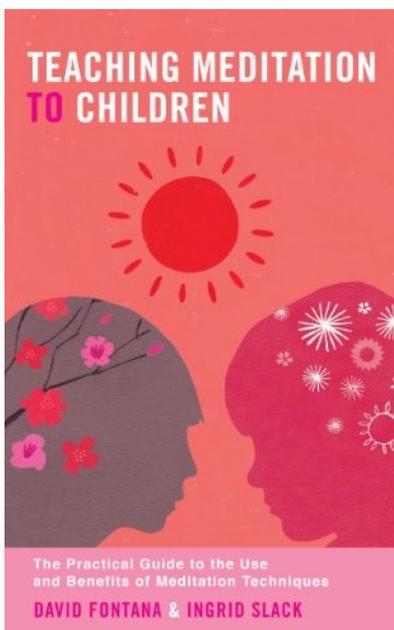
• Eline Snel •

Foreword by Jon Kabat-Zinn

Eline Snel encourages children to "summon the weather report that best describes [their] feelings at the moment." Sunny, rainy, stormy, calm, windy, tsunami? This activity allows children to observe their present state without overly identifying with their emotions. They can't change the weather outside, and we can't change our emotions or feelings either. All we can change is how we relate to them. As Snel describes it, children can recognize, "I am not the downpour, but I notice that it is raining; I am not a scaredy-cat, but I realise that sometimes I have this big scared feeling somewhere near my throat."

Awareness of an Object

This exercise is adapted from an activity presented in Fontana and Slack's book, *Teaching Meditation to Children* (2012):



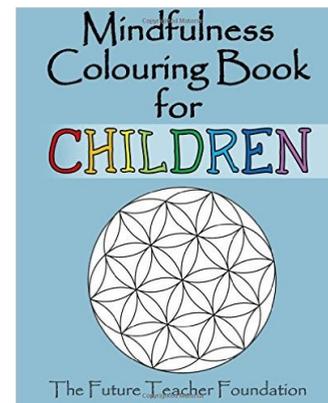
Ask the child to select an object to draw. Examples of objects might be a telephone, a shoe, scissors, or a clock. Tell the child to draw a picture of their object. Remind them that the activity is not focused on their ability to draw, as this could cause frustration in some children, and to simply do the best job they can. Then the child should spend time looking at the actual object, paying attention to smaller and smaller details.

If this exercise is done in school or some other setting, it may be a homework assignment to spend time looking at the object. Then the child should draw the object again. Compare the drawings, and ask the child to identify the details missing from the first drawing that they remembered in the second. In most cases, the second drawing will be more accurate and

life-like. Ask the child what it was like to spend time really looking at the object that might otherwise have been something they never took time to notice.

Mindfulness Colouring.

There are now a whole range of mindfulness colouring books available for adults and children that due to their intricacy need our full attention. Selecting the colours and choosing which parts of the page are all part of being mindful and present. Some children may even notice the different feel of pens and colours on the page and the texture of the paper they are colouring onto.



Make a Mind Jar

A mind jar is a bit like a snow globe - shake it up and watch the storm! But soon, if we sit and breathe and simply watch the disturbance, it settles. As do our minds.

Awareness of Self in the Environment

The second step in mindfulness training with children is to guide their awareness towards their own experience in the environment; in other words, to focus on the attention they are paying (or not paying) to themselves. You want to help the child to pay attention to both the environment and his or her actions, rather than moving through the day like a robot. These exercises should be fun. They could be presented by telling the child that he or she is a camera whose lens is focusing on all the details about his or her own experience, and playing it back as it is happening.

Or, the child could pretend to be a newspaper reporter and write down in a journal their experience of their day. In keeping a journal, ask the child to write down, step by step, what they do in the morning when they wake up. If the child is younger, he or she may tell you to write it down for them. Then, pay attention each morning, repeating the exercise and adding to what they had noted the previous day. For example, the first morning, the child may report that he or she woke up, went to the bathroom, got dressed, had breakfast, and went to school. The second day, he or she may add steps such as washing his or her face, combing hair, brushing teeth, and packing lunch. The third day, the child may add details of what was eaten for breakfast and smaller steps,

such as pouring the cereal. By the fifth day, the child should aim to include the smallest steps and details, such as opening his or her eyes, sitting up and putting feet on the floor, walking eight steps down the hallway, entering the bathroom, feeling the difference in flooring underfoot, closing the door, going to the bathroom, flushing, turning on the water at the sink, feeling the warm water under his or her hands, and so on. If child has difficulty at any point, encourage him or her by asking what the very next step is, and cue attention to details by asking how something feels or smells.

The Squish & Relax Meditation

While the children are lying down with their eyes closed, have them squish and squeeze every muscle in their bodies as tightly as they can. Tell them to squish their toes and feet, tighten the muscles in their legs all the way up to their hips, suck in their bellies, squeeze their hands into fists and raise their shoulders up to their heads. Have them hold themselves in their squished up positions for a few seconds, and then fully release and relax. This is a great, fun activity for "loosening up" the body and mind, and is a totally accessible way to get the kids to understand the art of "being present."

Smell & Tell

Pass something fragrant out to each child, such as a piece of fresh orange peel, a sprig of lavender or a jasmine flower. Ask them to close their eyes and breathe in the scent, focusing all of their attention only on the smell of that object. Scent can really be a powerful tool for anxiety-relief. Essential oils may be useful for focusing on smell alone.

The Art Of Touch

Give each child an object to touch, such as a ball, a feather, a soft toy, a stone, etc. Ask them to close their eyes and describe what the object feels like to a partner. Then have the partners' trade places. Both this exercise and the previous one are simple, but compelling, ways to teach the kids the practice of isolating their senses from one another, and tuning into distinct physical experiences.

Attending the Senses: The Raisin Meditation

This next exercise is actually the first meditation practiced by participants in Kabat-Zinn's program. It is simple to do, and does not even require adaptation in order for it to be appropriate for children. It involves being aware of an object in the environment—in this case, a raisin—and then being aware of one's own experience of that object.

It is an excellent early practice with mindfulness, with clear instructions focused on awareness and non-judgmental experience. It can be done with an individual child, or with a large group or class.

Each child should be provided with three raisins. The exercise could be practiced again with another small food such as popcorn, but should not be repeated too much at the risk of becoming repetitive and uninteresting to the child, thus losing the purpose of the mindfulness.

This meditation can best be done by reading aloud to the children the following script in a slow, calm voice:

Bring your attention to the raisin, observing it carefully as if you had never seen one before. Pick up one raisin and feel its texture between your fingers and notice its colours. Be aware of any thoughts you might be having about the raisin. Note any thoughts or feelings of liking or disliking raisins if they come up while you are looking at it. Then lift the raisin to your nose and smell it for a while and finally, with awareness, bring it to your lips, being aware of the arm moving the hand to position it correctly and of your mouth salivating as the mind and body anticipate eating. Take the raisin into your mouth and chew it slowly, experiencing the actual taste of the raisin. Hold it in your mouth. When you feel ready to swallow, watch the impulse to swallow as it comes up, so that even that is experienced consciously. When you are ready, pick up the second raisin and repeat this process, with a new raisin, as if it is now the first raisin you have ever seen [Kabat-Zinn, 1990, p. 27].

The Heartbeat Exercise

Have the children jump up and down in place for one minute. Then have them sit back down and place their hands on their hearts. Tell them to close their eyes and feel their heartbeats, their breath, and see what else they notice about their bodies.

“Giant Strides” is a sample activity from *The Qigong Workbook for Anxiety*.

This seated exercise will rouse your energy, calm your mind, and improve your well-being.

Some seats make us slump so our back is curled and our chest compressed. Try to sit up as best you can, but don't strain yourself too much.

Slowly lift one foot off the ground. As you raise your foot, stretch your toes up toward you as fully as possible. Breathe in as you raise your foot. Then slowly lower your foot as you breathe out.

Breathe in as you raise the other foot, again raising your toes up toward you as fully as possible.

Lift your feet eight times. Wait ten seconds. Then repeat the sequence two more times.

Imagine you're taking huge strides over hills and mountains, like a giant. The movement is slow and powerful, your immense body covering miles with every step.

Remain sitting comfortably in your seat, with your back as upright as possible.

Raise the heel of one of your feet, keeping the ball of your foot firmly on the floor. Then press the ball of your foot down into the floor.

Breathe out as you press the ball of your foot down for a couple of seconds. Then relax, release the pressure on the ball of your foot, and breathe in. Lower your heel.

Then repeat with your other foot. Press and relax eight times, first one foot, then the other. Wait ten seconds. Then repeat the sequence two more times.

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"Trying on Different Shapes" is a sample activity from the book *A Path with Heart: The Inner Journey to Teaching Mastery* by Pete Reilly and is reproduced here with the author's permission.

Can the shape of our body affect our mood, emotions, and ability to act? Let's experiment with assuming a few body shapes to find out.

Start by standing with your feet apart, arms at your sides, with your palms facing in toward your thighs. Take as long as you need to center yourself. When you feel fully present, bring your attention to your hands. Keep your awareness on them as you slowly raise them in front of you, and as you do turn your palms upward. What subtle changes to your mood or emotions do you notice?

Go back to your original position. Settle yourself again. Now, round your shoulders forward. Drop your head so your chin is on your chest. How does this shape make you feel? After a few moments, pull your shoulders back while you raise your head to its normal position. Notice the difference in your mood and outlook?

Let's try another shape: While standing, lift your chin so that your head is thrown back. A whole new feeling is present. Return your chin to its familiar position. Feel that?

There are many ways to illustrate the power—sometimes quite subtle—that our body shape has on our mood. Try hardening your eyes by tightening the muscles around them, and staring hard. After a few moments let your eyes soften. A very subtle change in your mood takes place.

It's also like that with your chin and lips. Tighten them as much as you can. Now, let them soften. Feel it?

As you've experienced in these simple exercises, changing our shape, in its many parts, can change our mood, our awareness, and what actions we're able to take.

From *A Path with Heart: The Inner Journey to Teaching Mastery*, by Pete Reilly. © Irimi Horizons Publishing, 2015. www.apathwithheart.net

“Pebble Meditation” is a sample activity from the book *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness in and out of the Classroom*, and is reprinted here with permission from publisher Parallax Press.

When I share “pebble meditation” with children in the classroom, I sometimes refer to it as “pebble reflection.” Some of my students also started calling the activity “peace rocks.”

Through mindful breathing and visualization, the qualities of freshness, solidity, clarity, and freedom are cultivated using the images of a flower, a mountain, still water, and a spacious blue sky. The pebbles help us make what can be abstract concepts into something more concrete.

Each student is given a small bag and four pebbles. (You could also have students bring their own pebbles and/or make their own bags.)



For the first pebble, the image is a flower and the quality is freshness. Thich Nhat Hanh often talks about how we are all beautiful flowers in a garden of humanity.



For the second pebble, the image is a mountain and the quality we are exploring is solidity. The mountain knows it's solid no matter what is going on around it.



For the third pebble, the image we are working with is still water in a lake, and the quality we are focusing on is clarity. When we are calm, we can make better decisions.



The image for the fourth pebble is the spacious blue sky, and the quality is freedom, feeling free from worry or anxiety.

The purpose of this lesson is to teach students practical strategies to help them cultivate peacefulness within so they can be peaceful in the world.

Adapted from *Teach, Breathe, Learn: Mindfulness in and out of the Classroom* by Meena Srinivasan. Reprinted with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, California.
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“Relaxed Abdominal Breath” is a sample activity from the book *Yoga Sparks* and is reprinted here with permission from [New Harbinger Publications, Inc.](#)

Shallow breathing (“chest breathing”) can result in a vicious cycle: We breathe shallowly because we’re under stress, which makes the body feel it’s not getting enough air. This causes more stress, prompting faster, shallower breathing.

In contrast, breathing by relaxing the abdomen helps slow and deepen the breath. This triggers calming changes in the body and mind. That’s why relaxed abdominal breathing (“belly breathing”) is one of nature’s best anti-stress medicines.

1. Lie down, if possible, or stand tall. If you’re lying down, feel free to bend your knees or put a rolled towel under your knees if that’s more comfortable.
2. Breathe in and out through your nose and take a moment to notice the sensations of your breath coming into and leaving your body.
3. Place your palms on your lower belly, resting them comfortably below your navel. Relax your abdomen.
4. When you’re ready, inhale and notice how your belly rounds and your hands gently rise. Observe how your navel moves away from your spine.
5. As you exhale, notice how your belly releases inward and your hands gently fall. Observe how your navel moves toward your spine.
6. Continue for a few more slow, full breaths, watching this gentle rise and fall. Avoid pushing your belly out or straining. Be patient and relaxed. Your body knows how to do this.

It’s fine to breathe through your mouth if you must, but because the nose has little hairs that warm and filter the air, nose breathing is preferable.

Adapted from *Yoga Sparks* by Carol Krucoff, E-RYT. © New Harbinger Publications, 2014. Reprinted with permission. www.newharbinger.com

“Tense and Let Go: Yoga Nidra” is a sample activity from the book *Little Flower Yoga for Kids* and is reprinted here with permission from [NewHarbinger Publications, Inc.](#)

In *yoga nidra*, the practitioner is at rest yet still consciously awake. This version makes the practice accessible and engaging for children.

1. Lie on your back.
2. Spend a few moments paying attention to your breath.
3. Scrunch your toes as tight as you can, hold them for a second or two, then let them rest. Now tense both feet, and when you let them relax, imagine they are very heavy.
4. Squeeze all the muscles in your legs. You might find your legs lift off the ground a tiny bit. After a few seconds, let your legs relax, and feel them settle comfortably into the ground.
5. Pull your belly button in for a few seconds, then let your belly get very soft. Relax your back into the floor.
6. Scrunch your shoulders up to your ears, then relax them down.
7. Make your hands into fists, and squeeze all the muscles in your arms. Like your legs, your arms may come off the ground a little. Now rest your arms by your sides with your palms facing up.
8. Close your eyes tightly, scrunch up your nose, and squeeze your lips together. Hold your face like this for a few seconds, and then let it relax. Take a big breath in then let out a deep sigh through your mouth.
9. Now pay attention to your whole body. If any part isn't relaxed, tense it up, then let go, until you've relaxed each part of you.

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"Time to Breathe" is a mindfulness practice that was developed by [Mindfulness Without Borders](#) and is reproduced here with their permission.

A first step to developing more mindfulness in your daily life is learning new ways to pay attention and connect to experiences in the moment. One easy way to bring your awareness to the present moment is developing a consistent breathing practice. We call this core mindfulness practice "time to breathe."

To get started, schedule specific times in the day that you can stop, take time to breathe and observe how that works for you. Ideally, practice breathing mindfully for 3-5 minutes a day.

- Sit in a comfortable position. Allow both soles of your feet to connect to the floor.
- Rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop.
- Gently close your eyes or look for a reference point somewhere on the floor where you can return your eyes when they get distracted.
- Let your spine grow tall and noble like the trunk of a tall tree.

- Take a moment to notice how your body feels as you bring your attention to the flow of your breath. You don't need to breathe in a special way. Your body knows how to breathe.
- Simply notice each breath coming into the body with an in-breath, and leaving the body with an out-breath.
- If you notice your mind is caught up in thoughts, concerns, emotions or body sensations, know that this is normal.
- Notice what is distracting you and gently let it go without judgment, by redirecting your attention back to the breath.
- Keep escorting your attention back to the experience of breathing.
- When you are ready, slowly bring your attention back to your surroundings and let how you feel now guide you.

Time to Breathe is sometimes called Tuza, which means "to slow down and chill" in one of the local dialects in Rwanda, where Mindfulness Without Borders first developed some of their mindfulness activities.

Rainbow walk

Take a walk, and look for something red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. Keep going through the colours, in order, until the end of your walk.

You can do this anywhere, at any time of year. Obviously, it will be easier to spot a lot of different colours in a garden in the spring. But in the winter, you could notice some bright red berries, or a red ski hat, or even a stop sign.

Here are some suggestions for individual practice:

- Bring a camera and take a photo of at least one image with each colour;
- Bring a sketchbook--even if you're not an artist, this will help you really focus on what you're looking at ([as Churchill said about painting](#));
- Write in your journal about the things you noticed and how they made you feel.

And here are some suggestions for group practice:

- Provide a worksheet for students to note and/or sketch something they saw in each of the colours;
- After the walk, discuss what different members of the group noticed--were different people focused on different things? (For example, one person may have noticed mostly flowers, while another person may have noticed mostly cars or clothing)

Mindful Meditation

For each of these 3 meditation exercises, children should be sitting comfortably, with their back straight, in a position that they can hold without effort, in order to eliminate distractions from their body. They may close their eyes, but if that is difficult, their eyes may remain softly open with their gaze downward. As in other mindfulness exercises, soft instrumental music may be played in the background as long as it does not distract children from their focus.

1) **Attending to the Thinking Process**

When you listen to the voice in your head, listen to it impartially. That is to say, to not judge. You'll soon realize: there is the voice and here I am listening to it, watching it. – Tolle, *The Power of Being*, “The Power of Being Present” Once the child has practiced keeping awareness on the present moment by focusing on their breath, the next step is to bring awareness to their thoughts and feelings. Mindfulness training enables children to understand that they are the producers of their thoughts, and that thoughts come and go and influence their feelings and actions. One exercise to enhance awareness of how they are the producers of their own thoughts is the following: Close your eyes and say to yourself, I wonder what my next thought is going to be. Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out the mouse hole? Try it now.

2) **Meditation on the Bubble**

When you listen to a thought, you are aware not only of the thought but also of yourself as the witness of the thought, (Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Being*, “Portals to the Now”)

To further focus on awareness of the thinking process as well as on letting go and not engaging thoughts, the meditation of the bubble is a useful mindfulness technique (LeShan, 1974). The purpose of this practice is to slow down, observe thoughts, and release them or let go without judgment. Begin the meditation by reading the following script slowly and in a calm voice. Then, allow the child to continue the meditation for a few minutes in silence, setting his or her own pace. This meditation can also be adapted to feature thoughts on clouds drifting across the sky.

Begin by sitting in a comfortable position, with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Softly close your eyes. Imagine bubbles slowly rising up in front of you. Each bubble contains a thought, feeling, or perception.

See the first bubble rise up. What is inside? See the thought, observe it, and watch it slowly float away. Try not to judge, evaluate, or think about it more deeply. Once it has floated out of sight, watch the next bubble appear.

What is inside? Observe it, and watch it slowly float away. If your mind goes blank, then watch the bubble rise up with “blank” inside and slowly float away.

3) **Visualization Meditation: Finding a safe haven**

If you are more relaxed, I think your brain functions more effectively.

– Dalai Lama, 1999

This final meditation features visualization to encourage creativity and imagination. It will help children to focus their attention after they have practiced awareness of the present moment by focusing on their breath, and then released their thoughts and feelings through the meditation on the bubble. This final meditation may be particularly helpful for children who are anxious, since it is related to visualization for relaxation.

Begin by sitting in a comfortable position, with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Softly close your eyes. Allow the picture in your mind to become blank. You are going to imagine a place that feels comfortable, safe, and relaxing. Think of your place. It might be the beach, a lake, or even your own bed. Imagine it slowly appearing before you, becoming more and more clear. Look to your left. What do you see? Look to your right. What is over there? Look closer. Breathe in. What do you smell? Walk around your place. Look closer at certain things. Stay focused on your place. How are you feeling? If you find your thoughts wandering, observe them, and then focus on bringing the image of your place back into focus in front of you. (Allow some time.) When you are ready, put your hand in front of your eyes. Open your eyes. Slowly spread your fingers to allow light in. When you are ready, slowly remove your hand.

Children may also choose to draw the scene they imagined. This drawing can be saved to remind them of their safe, relaxing place.

Mindful Eating Exercises

Time: About Five- Seven Minutes (2 -3 times per week)

Prepare for Exercise – (two minutes) Abdominal or Diaphragmatic Breathing: Use the following script to guide yourself and your child through this exercise to prepare for a mindful eating practice.

Let your body rest comfortably in the chair. Notice your legs and feet. Relax them. Let any tension move out of them.

Close your eyes

Notice your shoulders, arms, and hands. Let the tension out of them. Relax your hands, your arms, let your shoulders sink into a relaxed state. Place a hand on your belly so you can feel the air come in and go out.

Now focus on your breath. Slowly breathe air into your body.

First in through your nose or mouth

Let it fill up your chest.

Then fill up your belly (full diaphragm) and feel your belly rise as your lungs fill with air

When your belly is full, slowly exhale: first empty the air from you belly, feel the belly get smaller.

Continue to slowly move the air out through your mouth.

Repeat the full breathing process one more time. Then slowly open eyes and prepare to begin the mindful eating activity.

Mindful Eating Practice (3- 4 minutes)

Place the selected food on a plate in front of your child (remember the raisin example). Take your child through the script below, varying it as you feel appropriate.

“Look at the (food’s name). What is its shape? What size is it? What color is the (food)? What smell do you notice? What sensation do you notice in your mouth as you look at the (food)? What’s the feeling in your stomach? Pick up the food slowly. Hold the (food) in your fingers and look at it in your grasp. What does the (food) feel like in your hand: its texture, temperature?

Bring the (food) slowly to your lips. Before putting the food to your mouth, pause and be aware of what you are experiencing in your mouth. Slowly open and place the (food) on your tongue for a moment without biting into it. Feel what you mouth wants to do with this (food). Take a few moments before you bite into it. Feel its texture on your tongue and in your mouth. What do you taste?

Now bite into it noticing what you taste and what it feels like. As you continue to taste, try not to swallow the (food) right away. Does the taste and feeling change as you are chewing? Feel the food going down as you swallow. Refocus on your mouth. Notice your stomach and what it may be feeling. Notice what you are feeling? Now you have finished your exercise.”

Mindfulness and the Art of Chocolate Eating!

This should take around 3-4 minutes.

You will need small bars of chocolate enough for each member of the class.

Alternatively the students can take a piece of chocolate from a large bar, a strawberry etc.

Please read each instruction one at a time before moving on to the next stage

Approach the exercise with an open mind and a gentle curiosity.

There are no rights or wrongs, just individual experiences.

Consider the wrapped chocolate -

Does the wrapper make a sound? What colour is it? What does it say? Where did it come from?

Open the chocolate, slowly -

Do you feel a sense of anticipation, or an urge to immediately put the chocolate in your mouth? What physical sensations do you have? What emotions are you feeling? Just note them.

Look at the chocolate-

Consider its texture, colour, weight...

Smell the chocolate - does the smell trigger any other senses?

Where do you feel your sense of smell?

Eat the Chocolate-

Place the chocolate in your mouth but DO NOT EAT!!

How does it feel as it melts?

Where in your mouth can you taste it?

What is the consistency?

What is happening with your mouth, teeth, tongue, lips as it melts?

Move the chocolate around your mouth

Does the area of taste change?

Does the taste itself change?

What is happening to the chocolate?

How do you feel?

Swallow the chocolate, focusing on the sensation.

Is there a lingering taste?

How do you feel physically and emotionally?

Take a little while to consider the experience.

Now continue to the conclusion....

Group Discussion

How was this different from your general chocolate-eating experiences?

More intense? Frustrating? More pleasurable?

Were you more aware of your emotions during the exercise?

Would this change your future experience of eating chocolate?

Why?

Other useful links

Mindspace has lots of online resources and apps

<http://www.meditationinschools.org/resources/>

<http://www.mindfulteachers.org/p/free-resources-and-lesson-plans.html>

<http://annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/>

<http://www.freemindfulness.org/download>

<http://mindfulnessinschools.org/>

<http://www.mindfulschools.org/>

<https://www.innerexplorer.org/>

<http://learning2breathe.org/>

<http://wakeupschools.org/>

<http://bfet.co.uk/>

<http://www.mindwithheart.org.uk/>

<https://youthmindfulness.org/>

<http://www.breathworks-mindfulness.org.uk/>

<http://www.mindfulnessassociation.org/>

<http://www.london-meditation.co.uk/>

Appendix

Five Senses Mindfulness Log					
	Sight	Sound	Taste	Smell	Touch
Examples:	<i>watched some kids sledding</i>	<i>listened to my favorite song</i>	<i>sipped a cup of hot chocolate</i>	<i>sniffed pine needles</i>	<i>petted my friend's cat</i>
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

created by Catharine Hannay for MindfulTeachers.org

FIVE SENSES SNACK	Outside (the peel or package)	Inside (after opening, cutting, or peeling)
What do you SEE? color(s) shape texture		
What do you FEEL? with your fingers on your tongue inside your body		
What do you HEAR? as you open, cut, or peel as you take a bite as you chew		
What do you SMELL? before you open, cut, or peel as you open, cut, or peel after you open, cut, or peel		
What do you TASTE? Is it bitter? Sweet? Salty? Sour? Does the taste change as you bite, chew and swallow?	-----	

created by Catharine Hannay for MindfulTeachers.org

Teaching Children about Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation can be described to children as focusing on the present moment while being aware of their internal sensations, thoughts, and feelings. It should be explained to children that practice in this case is not like practicing a musical instrument for a concert, but rather practice on a regular basis “aimed at cultivating a continuity of awareness in all activities of daily living” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). After they begin to learn mindfulness techniques, children can practice being more aware as they walk around, noting sounds, sights, smells, and their own movement.

People and especially children usually have a lot of questions about meditations and misperceptions. They may have questions about it, or misperceptions.

Gunaratana (1991) presents a list of myths about meditation, discussing the truth about each one.

Myth 1: meditation is that it is for saints and holy men.

Truth: While saints and holy men, particularly in some religions, practice meditation, a lot of people meditate.

Myth 2: meditation means going into a trance.

Truth: Rather than going into a trance, mindfulness meditation actually involves being highly aware of the present sensations, thoughts, and feelings.

Myth 3: Meditation is just used for relaxation.

Truth: It is true that meditation produces a physiological state of deep relaxation, with slower metabolic rate and heartbeat (LeShan, 1974). But meditation is much more than relaxation, as it involves focus and awareness.

One specific caution in teaching mindfulness to children is that for some, there may be a heightened experience of anxiety as a result of the exercises. Some individuals report feeling more anxious after practicing meditation. This may happen because people are uncomfortable paying attention to themselves. Children may need informing about this potential response in advance. For a child who has this sort of negative response to mindfulness, encourage him or her to keep trying and, at the same time, try to determine what part of the experience is causing the anxiety. It may be that the child does not like observing negative thoughts. In this case, it will help to practice letting go. Another possibility is that the child feels he or she cannot let go and has a feeling of

being tightly wound to “hold it together,” and a fear that letting go would increase anxiety. In this case, it will be helpful to encourage using mindfulness to increase focus and control on the present moment. If, after practice, the child still has a very negative experience, exercises such as meditation may not be right for that child. However, the activities such as awareness of the environment may feel more ‘safe’. As in many interventions, customizing the right techniques and applications for each individual is important.