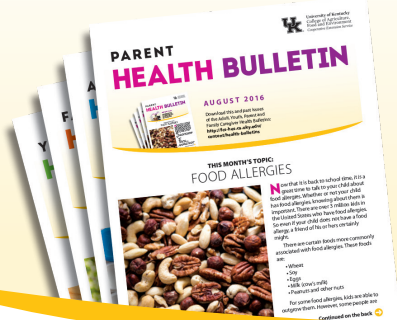




PARENT HEALTH BULLETIN



JANUARY 2018

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: TEACHING MINDFULNESS TO KIDS



You have probably heard the term “mindfulness.” It seems to be the new buzzword. But what is it? Mindfulness is a type of meditation practice that begins with paying attention to breathing in order to focus on the here and now — not what might have been or what you are worried could be. The final goal of mindfulness is to give you enough distance from problems, challenges, thoughts and emotions to be able to observe them without immediately reacting to them. Instead, you should be able to respond appropriately.

Mindfulness is a clinically proven tool to support well-being and mental health by reducing stress and allowing life to be lived to the fullest. The practice of mindfulness is not just for adults. In the last few years, research on mindfulness has emerged as a way to treat children and adolescents with conditions ranging from ADHD to anxiety, autism spectrum disorders, depression and stress. Schools across the United States are using mindfulness practices and curriculums to help students succeed. In addition, the benefits are proving to be tremendous.

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Benefits of mindfulness

- Research shows that practicing mindfulness increases connectivity in the frontal lobe of the brain, which improves attention spans, memory processing, problem solving and decision-making. All are very important skills for learning.
- Mindfulness increases children's ability to understand their emotions — especially difficult emotions such as fear and anger — through breathing and other methods.

How to introduce your child to mindfulness

Children can be introduced to the principles of mindfulness from a young age. The best way to introduce them to mindfulness is to model mindfulness as a parent and do it with them. Here are ways you can get the whole family involved:

- Just before leaving for school in the morning, before opening the front door, stand together and take three mindful breaths.
- Go for a walk with your child and pay attention to what you both notice around you, what you see, hear, smell and touch.
- Take time to listen to calming or soothing music. Sit or lay down in a comfortable position with your child and ask them to bring attention to the sensations of sound and feelings of the music.
- Everyone can draw, paint, color or write. Everyone can be mindful. Use a pencil, pen, paint, marker or crayon to express yourself with your child on a piece of paper. There is no right or wrong drawing because it is free expression. Help your child find your concentration and inner peace through experiencing creativity.
- Before bed, share something that you are grateful for that happened that day, something that made you happy. Have your child do the same. Then continue with some mindful breathing. Have your child lie down on their bed and place their hands on their belly. Have them take deep breaths and feel their tummy rise as they breathe in and fall as they breathe out. This is how they can begin to pay attention to their breathing.



Mindfulness books for children

- *Moody Cow Meditates* by Kerry Lee MacLean.
- *The Lemonade Hurricane: A story of mindfulness and meditation* by Licia Morelli.
- *The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers.
- *Listening to my Body* by Gabi Garcia.
- *Master of Mindfulness: How to be your own superhero in times of stress* by Laurie Grossman, Angelina Alvarez and Mr. Musumeci's 5th-grade class.

Mindfulness apps that are free to download for iOS and Android

- Smiling Mind
- Sleep Meditations for Kids
- Breathe, Think, Do Sesame
- DreamyKid
- Headspace
- Stop, Breathe, and Think Kids
- Relax Melodies
- Breathing Bubbles

SOURCES:

- <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/mindfulness>
- <https://www.mindful.org/tips-for-teaching-mindfulness-to-kids>
- http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/mindfulness_has_many_benefits_for_children
- <https://childmind.org/article/the-power-of-mindfulness>

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HEALTH BULLETIN

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