

Mindful Meditation – A simple guided practice for adults and children

This resource introduces you to the practice of mindful meditation and comprises four parts.

1. These introductory notes
2. A guided meditation audio designed for adults and older teenagers
3. A transcript of the audio that you may find useful to read before you use the audio and for reference afterwards
4. Suggestions on how to introduce mindfulness practice to younger children.

1) What is Mindful Meditation?

Mindful meditation is derived from Buddhist practice but can be practiced by anyone regardless of religious beliefs or otherwise.

There are many reasons to practice this type of meditation.

It has been clinically proven to reduce stress and can contribute to lowering of the blood pressure. It can help us to reduce our focus on the sort of automatic thoughts that contribute to anxiety.

How often does your attention rest in the present moment? If you think about this question for a moment you will probably realise that most of the time you are thinking either about things that have happened in the past or things that might happen in the future. Most of us spend very little time focussing on what is happening in the present moment. This means that we pass much of our lives in a sort of past/future dream state missing now.

But does this really matter?

Well it does for two important reasons.

The first is that whilst we need to learn from the past, and also plan for the time ahead, we can only actually make changes that affect our lives in the present moment.

The second is about our mental health. Lao Tzu, who lived around the 5th century BC, said this:

“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.”

– Lao Tzu

This is as true today as it was in his time.

Mindfulness practice teaches us to bring our attention to the present moment.

There are many ways to strengthen our ability to be mindful but the simplest, and first, approach is to focus on your breath.

This resource will teach you a simple practice involving mindfulness of your breath which, if practiced daily, can reduce stress and anxiety, lower blood pressure and has many other benefits to physical and mental health.

I hope that you enjoy it.



3) Audio Transcript – Guided Meditation for Adults

This track is designed to guide you through a simple mindful meditation.

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The traditional position is seated on a cushion in the lotus position.

However, it is difficult for many of us not accustomed to sitting in this way to adopt such a position, and sitting upright in a chair is fine.

Sit with your feet flat on the floor and your posture upright.

The back should be straight with the spine erect but not forced.

Pull your chin in slightly. Your ears should be level with your shoulders and your head erect.

Rest your right hand, palm up in your lap.

Rest your left hand on top of the right, again palm up.

Now slide your hands over one another so that the tips of the thumbs lightly touch one another as if holding a thin sheet of paper between them.

Your hands and thumbs should form an oval or “egg” shape.

Move your upper body, from the waist, in gentle circles gradually decreasing the size until you come to rest at your natural centre.

Now, take three deep breaths, breathing out fully on each breath.

Close your mouth and allow your tongue to rest just behind the top teeth and lightly touching the roof of your mouth.

Now breathe normally through the nose.

Allow your breathing to be natural, don't try to force or manipulate it.

We are going to use our breath as the focus of our attention.

Try to follow your breath.

You may find that your attention settles on the movement of your tummy.

Or the movement of your chest as you breath.

Or you may focus on the sensation of the air as it enters and leaves your lungs.

Some people focus on the nostril and the sensation of coolness a they breath in and warmth as they breath out.

It doesn't matter which you choose but pick one and stay with it for this session.

Count each breath starting from "one" as you breathe in, "two" as you breathe out, "three" on the next inhalation etc.

When you reach ten start again at one.

The aim is to reach ten without your attention wandering.

It sounds very simple, and it is.

But it is not easy to achieve.

If you find that your attention has wandered, gently refocus on your breath and start from one again.

If you lose count, start again from one.

Thoughts will arise as you do this.

Try not to follow them. Simply note that they are there and focus on your breath.

Think of them as clouds in a blue sky. Focus on the sky, not the clouds. Let the clouds drift past as they will.

Tips

If you find that your attention has wandered, gently refocus on your breath and start from one again.

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4) Introducing Mindfulness to Younger Children

Mindfulness practice is not just beneficial for us, it also benefits our children.

Studies have shown that mindfulness practice helps to improve children's attention, helps them to regulate their emotions, reduces anxiety and stress, and improves social skills.

So how do you help young children to practice mindfulness?

Some golden rules.

First, develop your own experience of mindfulness by following the guided practice included in this resource. If you are going to help your children to practice mindfulness you first need to be familiar with it yourself. As you become more experienced with mindfulness of breathing extend your practice into other areas such as mindful eating. Even mundane tasks like peeling vegetables can be done mindfully. Try to really focus on and experience what you are doing rather than letting your mind wander.

Keep the practice simple and active. You want your children to learn to notice what is happening at that moment; what they see, smell, hear or feel, both externally (texture) and internally (sensations and emotions).

Don't push mindful practice on your children. Children are naturally curious and when they see your practice will want to know what you are doing. That is the point to offer a simple explanation and to ask if they want to try it too.

Try some of these simple exercises.

Following Breath

Young children can follow their breathing by lying on their backs with a favourite toy on their tummy. They then focus their attention on watching as the toy moves up and down as they breathe. You could explain it as watching carefully like a cat might watch a mouse never letting their attention wander.

Noticing Nature

This can be done on a country walk or a quiet park.

Sit quietly for a few minutes and ask your child to listen to the different sounds that they can hear. It could be bird song, the breeze in the trees or grass, the sound of water or animals. How many different sounds can they count in 5 minutes. Use shorter times for younger children and don't worry too much about the length of time. Just get them used to really listening.

You can also make this multisensorial by asking your child to notice things that they have not noticed before on a familiar walk. It could be things they see, feel, hear or smell

Mindful Eating

This is said to have been one of the first approaches that the Buddha used to teach mindfulness to children. Try offering your child a segment of satsuma or a grape. Ask them to hold it in their mouth for a few moments noticing the feel, texture, shape, taste and smell. Then bite and repeat the process. Notice the way the sensations change. Try it yourself. How does this experience compare with the way you have previously eaten? Mindful eating encourages us to eat more slowly reducing



overeating by allowing us the time we need to realise we are full (another example of mindfulness). It also simply increases the pleasure we get from our food.

Mindful Listening

This is a very simplified part of Noticing Nature where you ask the child to focus on a single sound. You can use a bell, chime, tuning fork or a tone on a mobile phone. Ask the child to listen until they can no longer hear the sound. This encourages careful and attentive listening. Repeat and ask if they get better as they practice.

Weather Station

This teaches your child to become mindful of their emotions but also to be detached from them, which is another, often neglected aspect of mindfulness practice. Ask your child to say what type of weather best represents how they are feeling at that moment. They could have bright and sunny, sunny spells, cloudy, rain, windy, stormy, hurricanes, thunderstorm, or anything else that they think expresses how they feel. They could draw and colour suitable images on pieces of card and then pick out the card for their feelings. This encourages children to learn to be in touch with feelings and emotions without identifying with them. They can experience the storm but know that it is not them. In the same way they can say I feel angry but anger is not what I am.

There are many more examples of mindfulness practices and these are just a few ideas. You may be able to think of others of your own. Some will appeal to you and your children more than others and that is ok.

Keep things fun.

Keep things simple.

Enjoy.

“Po: Maybe I should just quit and go back to making noodles.

Oogway: Quit, don't quit? Noodles, don't noodles? You are too concerned about what was and what will be. There is a saying: yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why it is called the "present.”

– Kung Fu Panda

