

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS WITH CHILDREN



Research is now beginning to shed light on the power of mindfulness as an intervention for a number of behavioral challenges that children face. Studies have shown that it helps children to manage many of the same challenges that adults face. There is evidence that children who practice mindfulness manage their emotions better, engage less in conflict and enjoy better relationships. This news comes at a time when children are facing higher levels of stress which may be taking a significant toll on their well-being.

So what is mindfulness exactly? It is paying attention to what is happening in this very moment. For example, a child may notice that he is anxious about making friends on his first day of school, or he may notice feeling proud for a job well done. Being aware of emotions is an important first step in emotional regulation. And once a child establishes his/her way of practicing mindfulness it will help with calming the unpleasant feelings they've become aware of.

So what are some ways to bring mindfulness into your family life?

1. Your child is more likely to engage in a regular practice if they 'own' it. They may prefer walking, breathing or listening to music and may choose to call it something other than mindfulness, such as 'my happy time'.
2. Discover creative ways to spend time being mindful. Your child may enjoy mindful coloring pages or making a calming canteen. Or they may enjoy a mindful movement activity like pretending to be their favorite superhero or a butterfly.
3. Dinner is the perfect time to practice being mindful. With technology put aside, take time to enjoy your meal together. Be mindful of the conversations and make sure they are not emotionally charged. Observe all of your senses. Be curious about where your food came from.
4. Much like your life, your child's life is full. Multi-tasking and distracted listening tell your child that you are way too busy to give them quality time. Parents that mindfulness themselves see the most positive impact on their children.
5. Pay attention to your expectations. Mindfulness does not stop a child from feeling upset or expressing it. No one will be calm all of the time. What mindfulness can do is help with noticing and accepting feelings and providing an opportunity to respond differently to them.
6. Something as simple as snuggling and just 'being in that moment' with your child can be very gratifying to them.
7. Be playful. Family yoga, freeze dance or anything else that you enjoy together can be a great way to practice mindfulness.
8. Read a book like "Visiting Feelings" by L. Rubenstein to help your child be more at ease with their feelings.

However you and your family choose to practice mindfulness, your child will benefit with greater confidence, resilience and an awareness of their inner and outer expression of emotions.

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