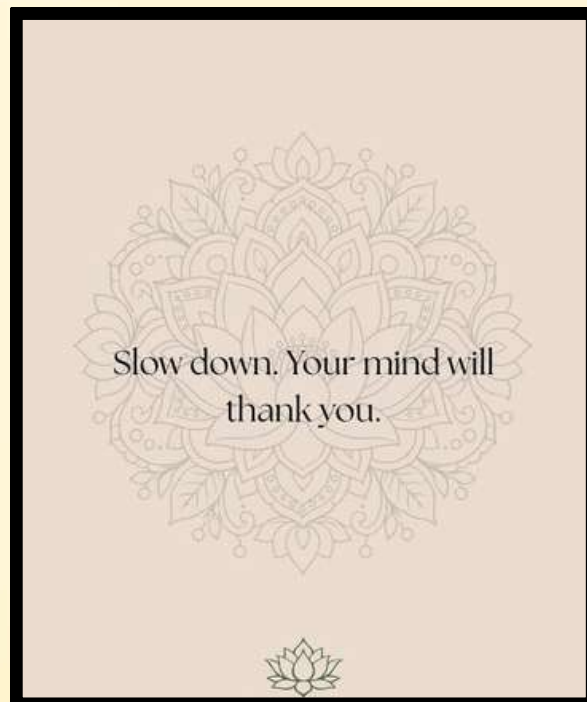


Pause, Breathe, Be Present

Developing Focus, Calmness and Self-Awareness Through Mindfulness



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"The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it." — Thich Nhat Hanh

In a world filled with constant information, academic expectations, digital distractions and busy schedules, the ability to pause and be present has become an increasingly important life skill. Children and adults alike often move from one task to another, thinking about what has already happened or what needs to happen next. In the midst of this busyness, we may sometimes forget to simply notice where we are and how we are feeling.

Mindfulness offers us an opportunity to slow down, become aware of the present moment and respond to our experiences with greater intention. It is not about stopping our thoughts or making every moment calm; rather, it is about becoming more aware of our thoughts, emotions, body and surroundings and learning to respond rather than react automatically.

Understanding Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of paying intentional attention to the present moment without immediately judging what we notice. For children, however, mindfulness does not need to involve sitting quietly for twenty or thirty minutes or following a formal meditation practice. It can be much simpler and more natural.

A child may practise mindfulness by taking a deep breath before beginning a task, listening carefully to a sound, noticing how their body feels, paying attention to the taste of their food or simply asking themselves, “How am I feeling right now?” In student-friendly words, mindfulness can be understood as slowing down, noticing how I feel and focusing on what I am doing right now. Through these small moments of awareness, learners gradually develop the ability to pause, notice and respond thoughtfully.

Why Does Mindfulness Matter?

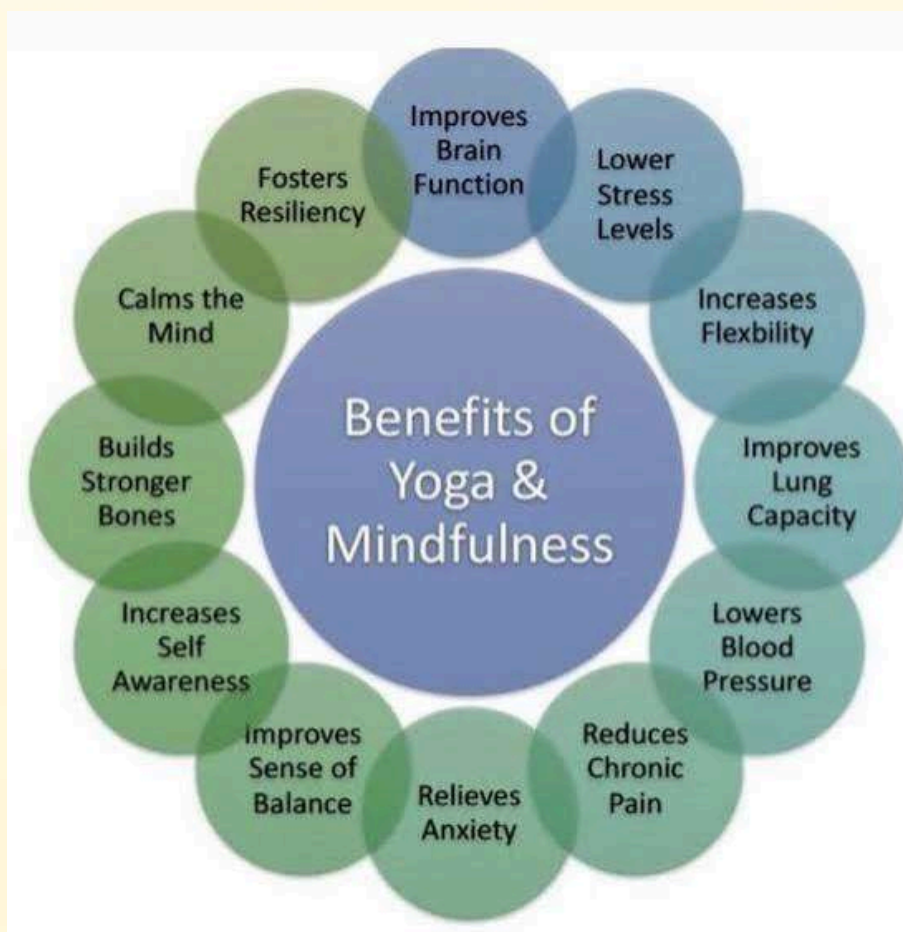
Mindfulness is often associated with feeling calm, but its purpose extends beyond relaxation. It can support the development of focus, self-awareness, emotional regulation and self-management. When children learn to notice what is happening within them, they can begin to recognise emotions such as frustration, worry or excitement before those emotions immediately influence their behaviour.

For example, instead of responding to a difficult task by saying, “I can't do this!”, a child may gradually learn to recognise, “I am feeling frustrated. Let me take a breath and try again.” That small pause creates space for a more thoughtful response.

Mindfulness can also support concentration and listening. Children naturally have wandering minds, and expecting them to remain focused continuously is unrealistic. An important part of developing mindfulness is learning to notice when attention has wandered and gently bring it back. This makes mindfulness particularly relevant in a learning environment, where students are constantly required to listen, observe, process information, make decisions and manage distractions.

Research in this area continues to develop. A systematic review and meta-analysis of mindfulness interventions for parents has explored their effects on parenting stress and psychological outcomes for young people, while other systematic reviews have examined mindful parenting programmes and their potential contribution to the wellbeing of both parents and children. Research on mindfulness and self-regulation also suggests that developing self-regulation skills can support children's academic, social and emotional development. At the same time, mindfulness should be viewed as one supportive strategy rather than a solution to every emotional or behavioural difficulty. Evidence varies depending on the type of intervention, age group and outcome being studied, making it important to approach mindfulness in an age-appropriate and realistic way.



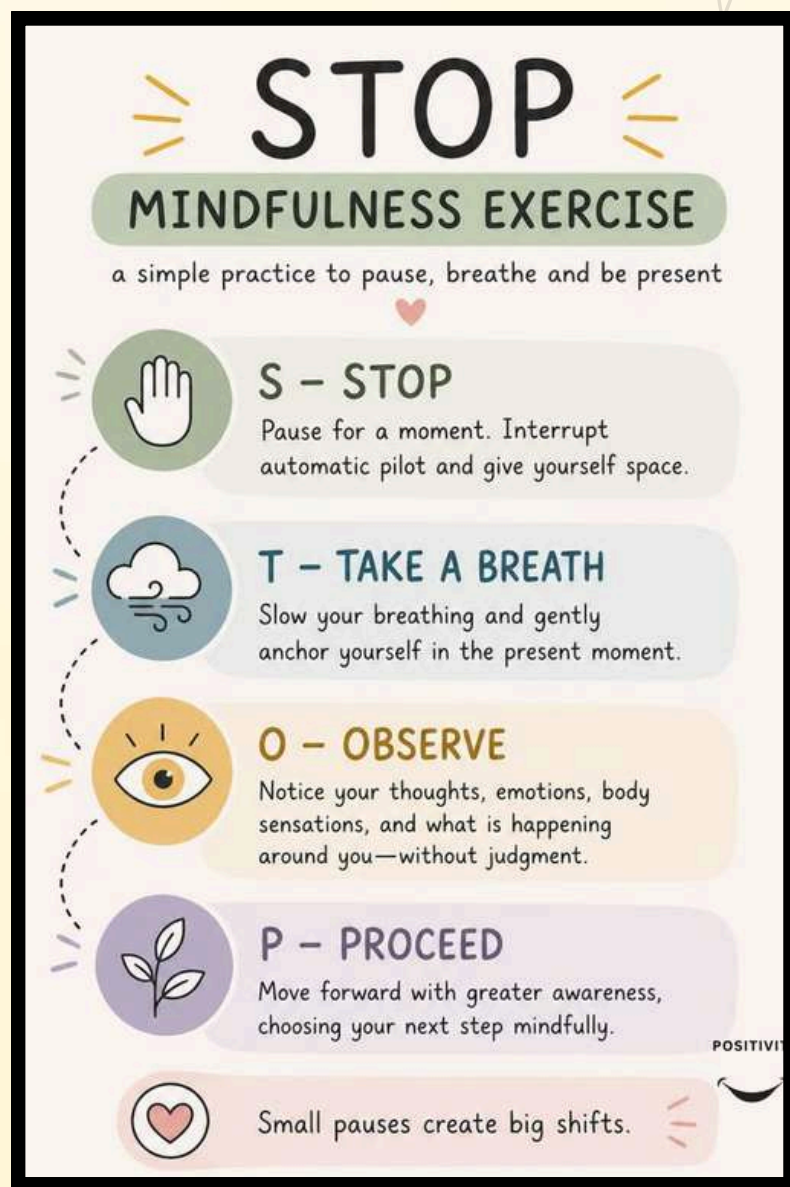


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Mindfulness and Our Learners

For children and young people, pausing to notice their thoughts and emotions can be especially valuable. School days bring challenges such as learning, mistakes, friendships, disagreements and changing expectations, which can sometimes feel overwhelming. Mindfulness offers simple strategies to manage these everyday moments. A few mindful breaths can settle attention, mindful listening can improve focus, and grounding activities can help when students feel distracted or overwhelmed. Pausing during disagreements can also help them recognise their emotions before responding.

The aim is not for children to always be calm, but to help them understand that attention can be practised, emotions can be noticed and difficult moments can be managed in healthy ways. Over time, mindfulness can become a natural part of everyday learning and relationships.

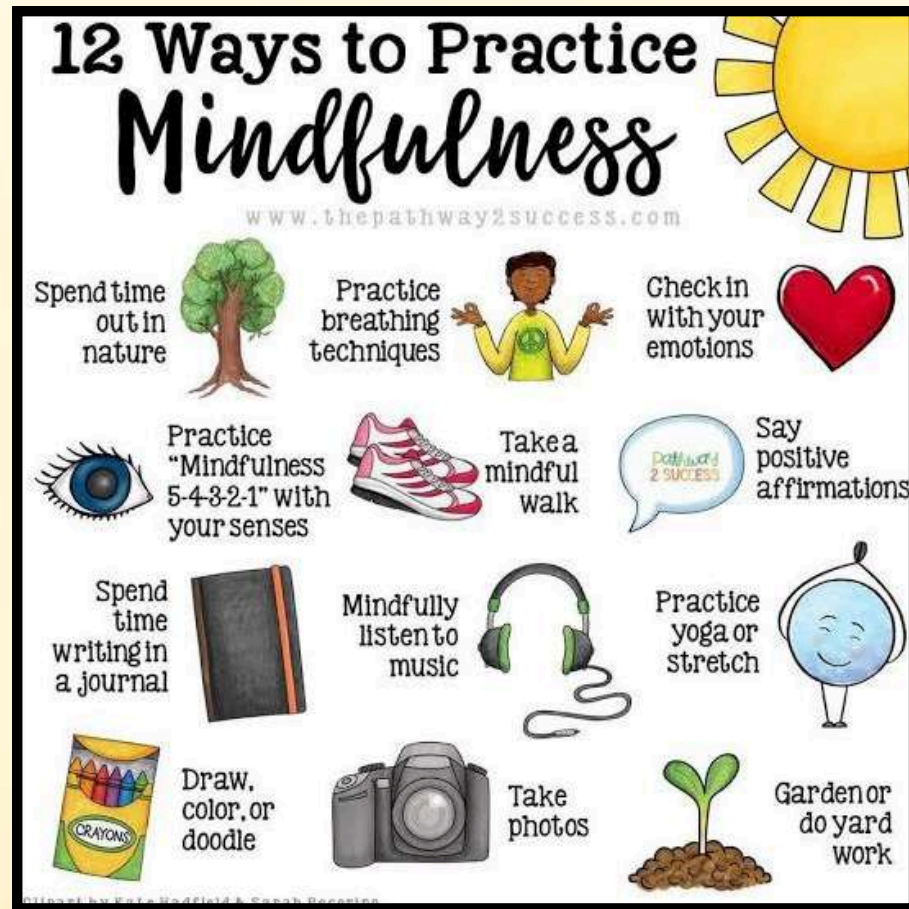


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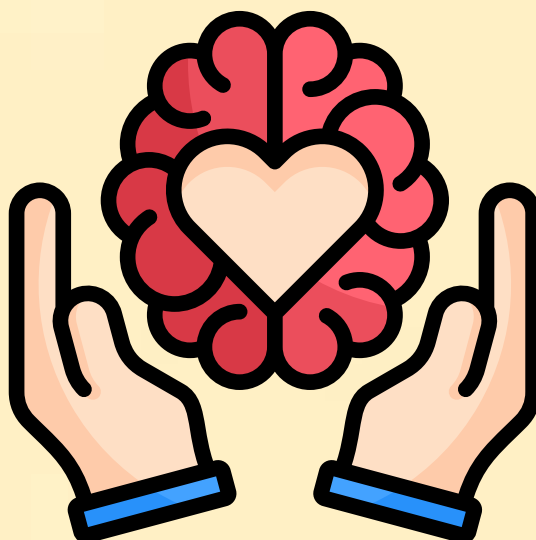
Making Mindfulness Meaningful for Children

Mindfulness is most meaningful for children when it is short, practical, playful and connected to experiences they already understand. Simple activities such as Breathe Together, where children take three slow breaths, can introduce them to the connection between breathing and awareness. Mindful Listening can involve sitting quietly for a minute and identifying the sounds nearby. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding can encourage children to notice five things they can see, four they can touch, three they can hear, two they can smell and one they can taste. Finger-tracing breathing allows children to trace up a finger while breathing in and down while breathing out. Mindful walking encourages them to notice their footsteps, breathing and surroundings, while mindful eating can help them pay attention to the colour, smell, texture and taste of food.

Children can also be encouraged to notice their thoughts without immediately judging them. For example, when a child thinks, "I can't do this," an adult can help them reframe the thought as, "I am finding this difficult right now. What is one small step I can take?" This approach does not dismiss the child's feelings; instead, it acknowledges the feeling while encouraging a more helpful response.



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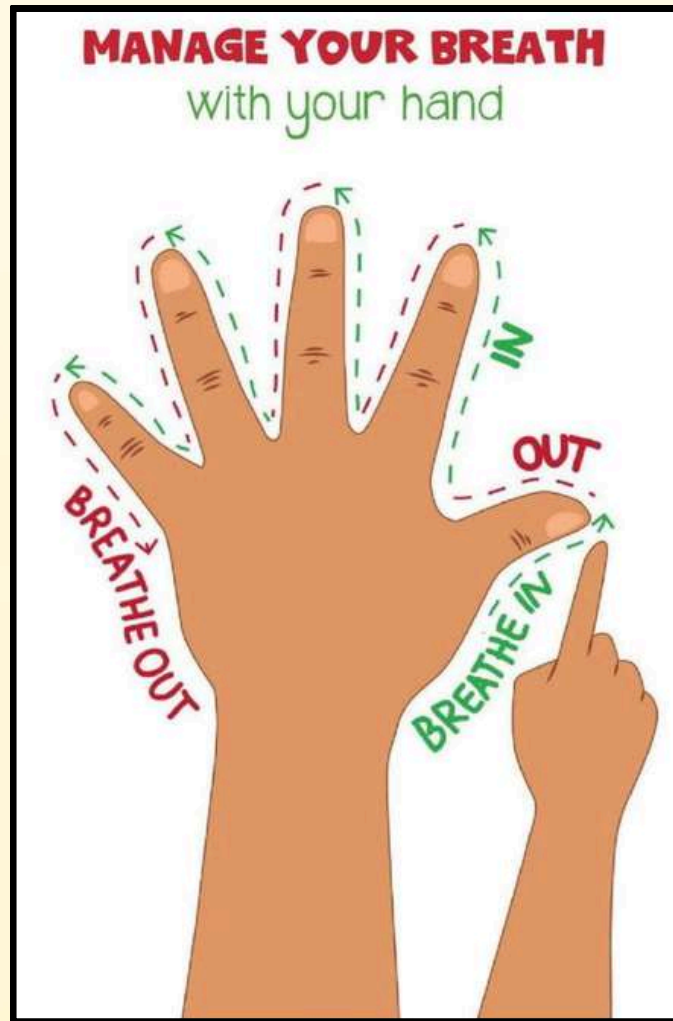
Mindfulness in Action at DYPIS

At DYPIS, mindfulness and focus are explored through developmentally appropriate experiences across the different sections of the school. Our intention is to help learners discover that focus, awareness and self-regulation are skills that can be practised in ways that are engaging and meaningful.

Our EYP learners participated in a sound awareness activity, closing their eyes and turning towards sounds coming from different directions. Through these experiences, our youngest learners discovered that focusing can be fun while using their eyes, ears and bodies to stay attentive and aware.



Our PYP learners explored mindfulness and self-regulation through mindful breathing, sensory awareness and movement-based activities.



<https://sites.udel.edu/4h-prevention/2022/10/04/october-post/>





Finger-Tracing Breathing

Learners traced their fingers while breathing in and out. They enjoyed following the movement and learnt an easy technique they can use whenever they need to calm themselves.

Sound Detective

With their eyes closed, learners listened carefully to a particular sound around them, including unwanted sounds coming from different directions. Focusing and continuing to stay focused was the aim of this activity. They enjoyed identifying familiar sounds while developing mindful listening and attention.



Breathe and Relax

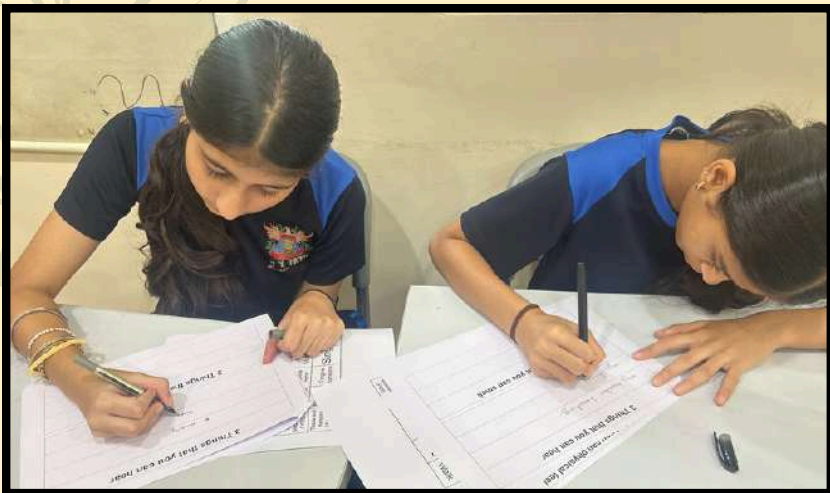
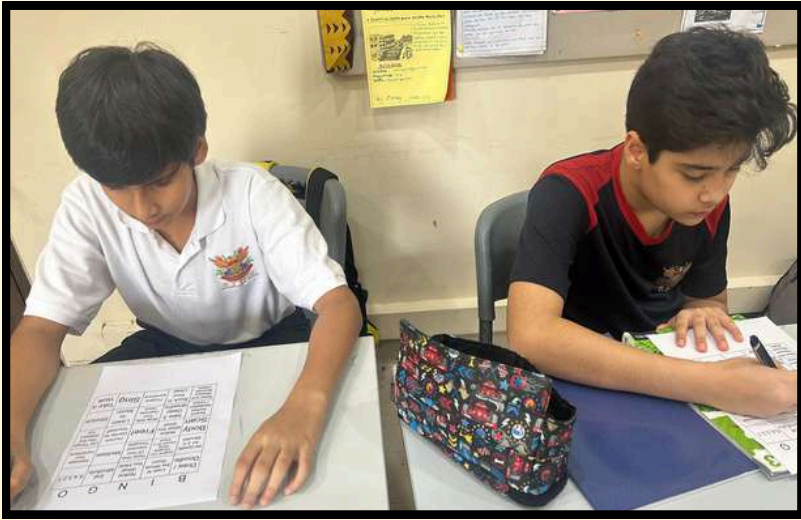
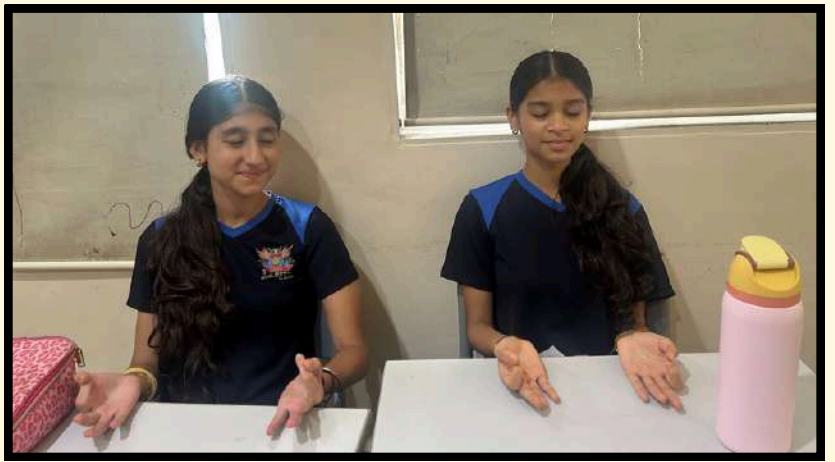
Learners practised slow, mindful breathing and discovered how taking a few deep breaths can help them feel calm and ready to focus.

Through grounding techniques, mindful breathing, sensory awareness, and movement-based activities, they learnt to become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, bodies, and surroundings.

Overall, these experiences helped learners develop self-management skills and greater independence, while discovering simple strategies to stay calm, focused, and ready to learn.

Our Secondary learners explored mindfulness through practical and observation-based scavenger hunts, they also practised visual attention and concentration. Mindfulness Bingo brought several of these strategies together through an interactive activity involving deep breathing, mindful listening, grounding, positive self-talk and mindful pauses. These experiences helped learners understand that mindfulness does not need to be complicated. Simple strategies can help us pause, refocus and become more aware of ourselves and our surroundings.

B I N G O				
Draw / Doodle	Look At the Whole Room	Notice What You Hear	Eat Mindfully	5,4,3,2,1
Sit Quietly for 2-3 Minutes	Imagine Your Thoughts Being Carried On a Cloud	Think One Of Your Happiest Thoughts	Meditate	Massage Your Hand/Neck
Body Scan	Notice What You Smell	Free!	Humm Gently to Yourself	List Things You Are Grateful For
Search Guided Meditation / YOGA	Take 3 Deep Breaths	Write With Your Opposite Hand	Listen to Music	Stretch
Tease and Release Muscles (PMR)	Rock in Your Chair	Forgive someone	Sing	Take a Walk



Taking Mindfulness Beyond the Classroom

Mindfulness becomes even more meaningful when children see the same principles reflected at home. Children learn not only through activities but also by observing how the adults around them respond to everyday situations. Mindful parenting does not mean being perfectly calm all the time. It means becoming more aware of our own thoughts, emotions and reactions and creating opportunities to respond with intention.

Parents can practise mindfulness in everyday interactions by putting away their phones and listening attentively when their child speaks, acknowledging emotions rather than immediately dismissing them, pausing before responding to challenging behaviour and modelling healthy emotional regulation. A parent might say, "I am feeling frustrated, so I am going to take a few breaths before I respond." Such a simple statement demonstrates to children that difficult emotions are natural and that we can choose how we respond to them.

Mindfulness can also become part of ordinary family routines. Families can take three slow breaths together before homework, practise mindful listening during a quiet moment, share one thing they are grateful for at bedtime or take a short walk while consciously noticing the sights and sounds around them. A small "Mindful Moment" space at home with a cushion, book or calming object can give a child a place to pause and reset when needed. These practices do not need to take a lot of time. The goal is to make mindfulness a natural part of everyday life rather than another task on a busy schedule.



A Few Mindful Takeaways for Parents:

- Pause before reacting. When a situation feels frustrating, take three slow breaths before responding.
- Listen mindfully. Put away distractions, make eye contact and allow your child to finish speaking before offering advice.
- Name emotions. Instead of telling a child to “calm down”, acknowledge what they may be feeling and help them identify it.
- Breathe together. When emotions are high, try three slow breaths as a shared activity.
- Create small moments of awareness. Use mealtimes, walks, bedtime or the journey to school as opportunities to notice sights, sounds, feelings and surroundings.
- Model what you want children to learn. Let children see you pause, breathe, acknowledge emotions and make thoughtful choices.
- Most importantly, remember that mindfulness is not about becoming a perfect parent, teacher or learner. It is about becoming a more aware one.

The goal of mindfulness is not to create a world where children never feel angry, worried, distracted or overwhelmed. Those emotions are a natural part of being human. Instead, mindfulness gives children a language and a set of simple strategies to help them recognise what is happening within them and decide what they can do next. When we teach children to pause, breathe, notice and respond, we are giving them more than a classroom strategy. We are helping them develop skills they can carry into their relationships, learning, challenges and everyday lives.



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