

Using Mindfulness



Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment. It is the process of being aware of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations happening inside you, *and* tuning in to what is happening around you.

It is easier to be mindful in your everyday life when you practice regularly. The good news is that you can practice *anytime!* The more *you* do, the faster it becomes a habit, and the more easily your stress response calms down! Apps and websites provide easy ways to try different kinds of mindfulness practices—you can even practice with your child or a friend! Other ways to practice include paying close attention to details while playing with your child, walking, driving home, or exercising. Research shows that mindfulness can help reduce all kinds of stress, including the stress of parenting.



Mindfulness exercises can help turn the stress response down! Doing mindfulness everyday can improve your and your child's physical and emotional health.



Children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) may have difficulty getting themselves back to a relaxed state once they become stressed. Belly breathing is one easy strategy you can teach to your children, and *also* try yourself:

- Have your child sit or lie down.
- Have your child place one hand over the belly, the other hand over the chest.
- Model how to inhale through the nose and feel the belly rise.
- Exhale through the mouth and feel the belly lower.
- Continue modeling this deep breathing until your child understands.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Make it fun by pretending to blow out a candle or that you're blowing up a balloon as they inhale and exhale. You can also have your child hold a stuffed animal on his belly and watch it move up and down while they breathe deeply. These "breathing buddies" can help children see and feel what deep breathing looks like, so that both their brains and bodies remember. This will help make mindfulness and breath relaxation exercises a *healthy habit for life!*

Breathing practices can be a nice addition to your child's bedtime routine. Prompt your child to try breathing deeply when she feels stressed or worried. Set a good example by doing it yourself, and model how to take deep breaths when *you* are stressed. For example, you might say, "I am so frustrated by this traffic. But I can't change it! Please help me calm my body and mind by taking three deep breaths with me." Afterward, talk to your child about how it felt. This might be "Wow, I was very upset, but then I took three deep breath and I feel *much* better now!"

SOURCES

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2017). Just breathe: The importance of meditation breaks for kids. Retrieved from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Just-Breathe-The-Importance-of-Meditation-Breaks-for-Kids.aspx>

Burke Harris, N. (2018). *The deepest well: Healing the long-term effects of childhood adversity*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Khoury, B., Sharma, M., Rush, S. E., & Fournier, C. (2015). Mindfulness-based stress reduction for healthy individuals: A meta-analysis. *J Psychosom Res*, 78(6), 519-528. doi:10.1016/j.jpsychores.2015.03.009

Murray, D. W., Rosanbalm, K., & Christopoulos, C. (2016). Self-regulation and toxic stress Report 4: Implications for programs and practice. OPRE Report # 2016-97. Retrieved from Washington, DC: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/acf_report_4_final_rev_11182016_b5082.pdf

