

Mindful Parenting:

- **Establish your own practice.** You would have trouble teaching your children ballet if you had never danced. To authentically teach mindfulness to your children, you need to practice it yourself.
- **Check your expectations.** A core principle of mindfulness is *letting go of expectations*, and this certainly applies to teaching mindfulness to kids. Are you expecting mindfulness to eliminate tantrums? to make your active child calm? to make your house quiet? If so, you are likely to be disappointed. While feeling calm or being quiet are nice side-effects of mindfulness, they are not the ultimate purpose.
- The purpose of teaching mindfulness to our children is to give them skills to develop their **awareness of their inner and outer experiences**, to recognize their **thoughts as “just thoughts,”** to understand **how emotions manifest in their bodies**, to recognize when their **attention has wandered**, and to provide **tools for impulse control**. It is not a panacea, and it will not completely get rid of what is, frankly, normal kid behavior, like tantrums and loudness and whining and exuberance and arguing...
- **Don't force it.** If your kids aren't interested in your lesson or activity, drop it. This is a good time for *you* to practice non-attachment to outcomes!
- **Don't make mindfulness a punishment.** This shouldn't be, “You hit your sister! Go sit in the mindful corner!”

Ways to Teach Mindfulness to Kids

Keep it simple. With older kids, you can share the widely-used definition from Jon Kabat-Zinn. But those are a lot of big words for little kids. Instead say Mindfulness is **noticing** our thoughts, what our body feels like, what our ears are hearing, and anything else that is around us and happening **right now**.

Listen to the bell. An easy way for children to practice mindfulness is to focus on paying attention to what they can hear. You can use a singing bowl, a bell, a set of chimes, or a phone app that has sounds on it. Tell your children that you will make the sound, and they should listen carefully until they can no longer hear the sound.

Create a mindful bedtime ritual. Bedtime is a great time to introduce mindfulness to kids- a short body-scan meditation before bed. It is a calming way to return to the body at the end of the day.

Practice with a breathing buddy. For young children, an instruction to simply “pay attention to the breath” can be hard to follow. Instead try a “breathing buddy” exercise: each student grabs a stuffed animal, and then lies down on their back with their buddy on their belly. They focus their attention on the rise and fall of the stuffed animal as they breathe in and out.

Make your walks mindful. Designate one minute of the walk where you are completely silent and simply pay attention to all the sounds you can hear, this is called a “notice walk”

Establish a gratitude practice. Gratitude is a fundamental component of mindfulness, teaching our children to appreciate the *abundance* in their lives, as opposed to focusing on all the toys and goodies that they crave.

Check your personal weather report. Encourages children to “summon the weather report that best describes [their] feelings at the moment.” Sunny, rainy, stormy, calm, windy, tsunami? This activity allows children **to observe their present state without overly identifying with their emotions**. They can’t change the weather outside, and we can’t change our emotions or feelings either. *All we can change is how we relate to them.*

Practice mindful eating. The exercise of mindfully eating a raisin or a piece of chocolate is a staple of mindfulness education, and is a great activity for kids.