

25 FUN Mindfulness Activities for Children and Teens

Mindfulness can boost the quality of our lives in numerous ways.

“In today’s rush, we all think too much—seek too much—want too much—and forget about the joy of just being.” – Eckhart Tolle

What does mindfulness do to spark “the joy of being” that Tolle references? How can kids start benefiting from its practice?

This article delves into both of these questions and includes plenty of specific activities for you to start using today. Mindfulness can nurture inner peace, improve the quality of exercise, enhance self-confidence, and facilitate more meaningful relationships with others.

Research confirms that for children, mindfulness can:

- Mitigate the effects of bullying (Zhou, Liu, Niu, Sun, & Fan, 2016);
- Enhance focus in children with ADHD (Zhang et al., 2016);
- Reduce attention problems (Crescentini, Capurso, Furlan, & Fabbro, 2016);
- Improves mental health and wellbeing;
- Improves social skills when well taught and practiced in children and adolescents.

It’s important for caregivers and educators to provide age-appropriate mindfulness practices for children. For example, fostering mindfulness in preschoolers with tools like pictures, objects, food, simple movements, and music, can help them develop an ability to focus attention at a great level.

In a study by Flook et al., (2015), they did an activity called “Belly Buddies” in which kids listened to music while being asked to notice the sensation of small tone on their stomachs rising and falling as they breathe. Simple activities like these can have long-lasting developmental benefits when practiced regularly.

The kids became more attune with their bodies, as well as the simple pleasure of focusing on their breathe and music.

4 Fun Mindfulness Activities and Exercises for Children

Let’s start with these simple ways to attune children with their bodies. At a young age, humans naturally curious about the strength and flexibility of their bodies. It’s a great age to introduce body-mind awareness as a valuable way to take care of themselves.

Mindful Posing: One easy way for children to dip their toes into mindfulness is through body poses. To get your kids excited, tell them that doing fun poses can help them feel strong, brave, and happy.

Have the kids go somewhere quiet and familiar, a place they feel safe. Next, tell them to try one of the following poses:

1. The Superman: this pose is practiced by standing with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out to the sky, stretching the body as tall as possible.
2. The Wonder Woman: this pose is struck by standing tall with legs wider than hip-width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips (Karen Young, 2017).

Ask the kids how they feel after a few rounds of trying either of these poses. You may be surprised.

Spidey-Senses: While on the subject of superheroes, this can be a related “next step” to teach kids how to stay present.

Instruct your kids to turn-on their “Spidey senses,” or the super-focused senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch that Spiderman uses to keep tabs on the world around him. This will encourage them to pause and focus their attention on the present, opening their awareness to the information their senses bring in (Karen Young, 2017).

This is a classic mindfulness exercise and encourages observation and curiosity—great skills for any human to practice.

The Mindful Jar: This activity can teach children how strong emotions can take hold, and how to find peace when these strong emotions feel overwhelming.

- First, get a clear jar (like a Mason jar) and fill it almost all the way with water. Next, add a big spoonful of glitter glue or glue and dry glitter to the jar. Put the lid back on the jar and shake it to make the glitter swirl.
- Finally, use the following script or take inspiration from it to form your own mini-lesson:

“Imagine that the glitter is like your thoughts when you’re stressed, mad or upset. See how they whirl around and make it really hard to see clearly? That’s why it’s so easy to make silly decisions when you’re upset – because you’re not thinking clearly. Don’t worry this is normal and it happens in all of us (yep, grownups too).”

[Now put the jar down in front of them.]

Now watch what happens when you're still for a couple of moments. Keep watching. See how the glitter starts to settle and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When you're calm for a little while, your thoughts start to settle and you start to see things much clearer. Deep breaths during this calming process can help us settle when we feel a lot of emotions" (Karen Young, 2017).

This exercise not only helps children learn about how their emotions can cloud their thoughts, but it also facilitates the practice of mindfulness while focusing on the swirling glitter in the jar.

Try having the kids focus on one emotion at a time, such as anger, and discuss how the shaken versus settling glitter is like that emotion.

Safari: The Safari exercise is a great way to help kids learn mindfulness. This activity turns an average, everyday walk into an exciting new adventure.

Tell your kids that you will be going on a safari: their goal is to notice as many birds, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and any other animals as they can. Anything that walks, crawls, swims, or flies is of interest, and they'll need to focus all of their senses to find them, especially the little ones (Karen Young, 2017).

A similar exercise for adults is the mindfulness walk. This exercise provokes the same response in children that a mindful walk elicits in adults: a state of awareness and grounding in the present.

15 Tips for Teaching Mindfulness to Kids and Teenagers: When you are trying to teach your kids or young clients about mindfulness and its benefit, we recommend you begin with a few guidelines:

1. Make sure they are ready to give mindfulness a try; if they are full of energy and itching to run and play, it may not be the best time for practicing mindfulness for the first time.
2. Explain what mindfulness is and what it is not; give examples of what seems similar to mindfulness but is not (i.e., introspection or chasing thoughts down the "rabbit hole" versus listening to our bodies).
3. Say it in an age-appropriate way, with words they will understand.
4. Offer to practice mindfulness with them; sometimes having a model makes all the difference.
5. Assure them that it's okay to get off track, and how to gently guide themselves back to mindfulness when they realize they lost focus.

6. Finish the practice by doing something they enjoy with them to ensure they have a positive experience.

7 Tips To Help Children Practice Mindfulness Successfully:



Use it for positive situations only



Practice mindfulness yourself



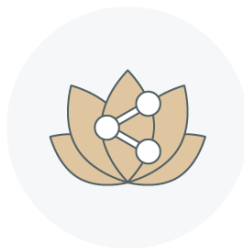
Create a daily routine for the children



Prepare the environment



Involve the children in the decision-making process



Share your experience of mindfulness



Encourage the children to share their experiences



PositivePsychology.com

Megan Cowan, co-founder, and co-director at the Mindful Schools program in Oakland, also has some tips on how to teach mindfulness to kids (2010):

1. Keep the purpose of mindfulness practice in mind. Be sure to engage in mindful practice with children in positive situations, and never use it as a disciplinary tool.
2. Make sure you **practice mindfulness** yourself!
3. Set a daily routine for practicing mindfulness to make sure you incorporate it.
4. Prepare the environment for successful practice; move the furniture around or have everyone switch positions.

5. Involve students in the process; perhaps designate a different child each day to alert the class when it's time to practice mindfulness or help set up any tools or props.
6. Share your own experiences with the kids; this will help them understand how mindfulness is applied and practiced in everyday life. Feel free to share how you redirect yourself when you feel distracted during a mindfulness session.
7. Encourage the children to share their experiences as well, whether they were good experiences with mindfulness or experiences in which they got distracted. Maybe each session can end with a few students sharing how it went for them.
8. Practice every day. The more you embed mindfulness into the daily routine, the easier it is to engage.

Relay the following instructions to your kids:

- “Please get into your mindful bodies—still and quiet, sitting upright, eyes closed.”
- “Now place all your attention on the sound you are about to hear. Listen until the sound is completely gone.”
- Ring a “mindfulness bell,” or have a student ring the bell. Use a bell with a sustained sound or a rainstick to encourage mindful listening.
- “Please raise your hand when you can no longer hear the sound.”
- When most or all have raised their hands, you can say, “Now slowly, mindfully, move your hand to your stomach or chest, and just feel your breathing.”
- You can help students stay focused during the breathing with reminders like, “Just breathing in ... just breathing out ...”
- Ring the bell to end.

For more in-depth tips and ideas on teaching mindfulness to children, check out the book **Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children** by Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village Community.

The website from editor and children’s book author **Annaka Harris** also provides some great ideas for exercises that teach mindfulness to children.

8 Mindfulness Games, YouTube Videos, and Apps to Support Your Teachings: Technology offers learning and development for these practices. To ensure that you are using technology to your advantage when it comes to teaching children mindfulness, give some of these resources a try.

Mindfulness for Children: Meditations for Kids This is an application that can be downloaded through the Android app store, iTunes, Google Music, or the Apple app store. Multiple versions are available. There are a few versions that must be purchased and one free version, which offers fewer conveniences than the paid versions.

This app is centered around guided meditation. It is designed to help children relax before bed. Nature sounds and instructions start the sessions. The app can guide the user through a body scan, visualizations, and breathing exercises.

Reviews for this app have been positive and the developers report that parents have seen a reduction in ADHD symptoms by using this app.

Smiling Minds App: Another application that is popular for children as young as seven is the Smiling Mind app. This app is available through the Apple app store as well as the Google Play store. It is free to download and use.

This app offers similar features to the Mindfulness for Children app, including a body scan activity. There are dozens of modules with hundreds of sessions available, each customized for well-being, education, and the workplace (for adults).

Still Quiet Place: If you'd like to use a video to help your kids learn how to practice mindfulness, the "Mindfulness Exercises for Kids: Still Quiet Place Video" is a great resource. This animated video can help students learn how to go to a "still quiet place."

Check out the video, and scroll down to the link below the video to see more activities from GoZen.com.

Mindfulness Games for Kids: Several interactive games are available on the [Kids Activities Blog](#). Here are just a few:

1. Blowing bubbles. Have your kids focus on taking in a deep, slow breath, and exhaling steadily to fill the bubble. Encourage them to pay close attention to the bubbles as they form, detach, and pop or float away.
2. Pinwheels. Use the same tactics from blowing bubbles to encourage mindful attention on the pinwheels.
3. Playing with balloons. Tell your kids that the aim of this game is to keep the balloon off the ground, but have them move slowly and gently. You can tell them to pretend the balloon is very fragile if that helps.
4. Texture bag. Place several small, interestingly shaped or textured objects in a bag. Have each child reach in and touch an object, one at a time, and describe what they are touching. Make sure they don't take the object out of the bag, forcing them to use only their sense of touch to explore the object.
5. Blindfolded taste tests. Use a blindfold for each child and have them experience eating a small food, like a raisin or a cranberry, as if it was their first time eating it.

If you want to know about more games you can play with children to teach them about mindfulness, check out the book **Mindful Games: Sharing Mindfulness and Meditation with Children, Teens, and Families** by Susan Kaiser Greenland.**3 Mindfulness Training Classes For Children with Anxiety**

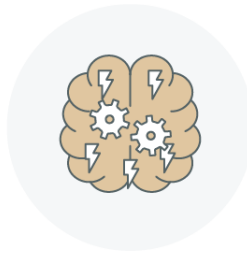
Mindfulness For Children Improves Their Levels Of Happiness:



IMPROVES MENTAL
WELLBEING



COMBATS
ANXIETY



HELPS TO
MANAGE STRESS



INCREASES
FEELINGS OF CALM



PositivePsychology.com

Mindfulness practice can be an especially important component of a child's life if they suffer from anxiety. Learning about mindfulness and how to engage in mindfulness can help a child realize that worrying is normal, and there are useful coping methods when we are worrying too much.

Aside from the Mindful Schools program mentioned earlier, there are classes and programs designed especially for children, and even a few that are structured for children with anxiety.

1. The "Wellness Works in Schools" course is one such class, which has been shown to result in increased self-regulation and executive function (Garey, 2017).
2. The Hawn Foundation's MindUP curriculum is also a useful tool for teaching mindfulness to children (Garey, 2017). These courses can help children learn how to manage their stress as they grow up.
3. There is also a popular course called "MonkeyMind and Me: A Mindfulness Course for Children." Children learn how to meditate and practice mindfulness over eight one hour sessions held over eight weeks. The lessons are delivered through stories about

MonkeyMind, a friendly puppet who has trouble with self-regulation (“MonkeyMind and Me”, 2017). The course includes lessons, opportunities to practice, design of a homemade project, and a graduation ceremony.

The structure of these lessons and exercises transforms teaching mindfulness into an experience everyone might enjoy—and benefit from.

The Basics: Teaching Essential Mindfulness Practices and Skills: Before you delve into the classroom, review these basic skills and you may have better success with students and clients learning mindfulness.

Mindful Breathing: Mindful breathing is a staple of practicing mindfulness. It is the foundation of many other exercises. To help kids learn how to engage in mindful breathing, you can use a video like the one below:

This video guides children through a breathing meditation by instructing them to imagine a sailboat that rises and falls as they breathe; with each inhale and exhale, the boat moves gently on top of the water.

They also get an opportunity to visualize their breath with a color and focus on the experience of their breath moving through their nostrils. Lastly, the video ends with the exercise of the children imagining (with their eyes closed) that they used to be a fish and paying attention to how it would feel to breathe through their lungs for the first time.

Body Scan: The body scan is a key practice in mindfulness, and an easy one to teach to children.

- Have your kids lie down on their back on a comfortable surface and close their eyes;
- Then tell them to squeeze every muscle in their body as tight as they can. Tell them to squish their toes and feet, squeeze their hands into fists, and make their legs and arms as hard as stone;
- After a few seconds, have them release all their muscles and relax for a few minutes;
- Encourage them to think about how their body is feeling throughout the activity (Roman, 2015).

This simple exercise gets kids to be more aware of their bodies and helps them find a way to be present in the moment.

Heartbeat Exercise: Paying attention to one’s heartbeat has a role in many mindfulness exercises and activities. To begin, tell your kids to jump up and down in place or do jumping jacks for one minute.

When they have finished, have them sit down and put a hand over their heart. Instruct them to close their eyes and pay attention only to their heartbeat and, perhaps, their breath as well (Roman, 2015).

This exercise teaches children to notice their heartbeat, and use it as a tool to help their focus. These skills will come in handy as they start engaging in more advanced mindfulness activities.

Mindfulness Meditation for Very Young Children

Mindfulness For Children Improves Their Relationships:



SOCIAL SKILLS



PARTICIPATION



MITIGATION OF

EFFECTS OF BULLYING



RESPECT



SELF-REGULATION



PositivePsychology.com

You might be thinking that these tips and exercises are great for elementary or middle school students, but less realistic for young children. This section focuses on children who are toddlers through kindergarten graduates.

One mother explained laid out her five strategies for teaching young children mindfulness—starting with her three-year-old child learning mindfulness.

Her strategies are:

- Teach kids to recognize and identify their own emotions. Children need to associate the word or term for an emotion with the actual experience of feeling that emotion. Encourage them to think about how each emotion feels in their body. Does anger feel like they've got steam coming out of their ears? Does love make them feel like their heart is going to burst open?

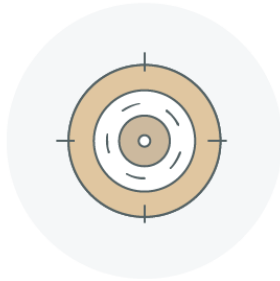
- Validate their emotions. Children often respond with frustration or sadness when told that their pain, however trivial it seems to us, is “not a big deal.” When teaching mindfulness, let kids feel their feelings without fear of judgment. Focus instead on teaching them tools to listen to their emotions.
- Teach kids mindful breathing strategies. As we noted above, mindful breathing is a building block in all mindfulness practices. Children benefit from focusing on their breathing when confronted with emotions that are hard to manage.

The author of the blog laid out three techniques she has put to use with her children:

1. Noticing the breath: this involves simply paying attention to what breathing actually feels like.
 2. Five-finger starfish meditation: this breathing technique has kids holding up one hand in a starfish position (fingers spread wide) while they gently trace up and down each finger with the other hand, focusing on regular breathing at the same time.
 3. Counting the breath: this technique is what it sounds like: have your children pause and count their breaths. One breath in is “1”, the next breath out is “2,” etc. You can have them count to 10 if they’re very young, or slightly higher depending on their abilities.
- Lead them in a guided meditation. Use a script or an exercise or app like the ones described above for this **meditation**.
 - Practice what you preach. As we mentioned earlier, it is so important to actually “do as you say.” Kids are intuitive and human nature encourages mimicry, two advantages we can harness when trying to teach (Beach, “Baby Buddhas.”)

Guide your kids every step of the way, but make sure you are taking those steps yourself as well. It will make everyone’s practice richer.

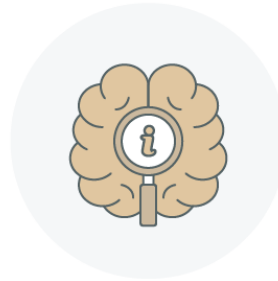
Mindfulness For Children Improves Their Executive Function:



FOCUS



**PLANNING AND
ORGANIZING**



**REMEMBERING
DETAILS**



METACOGNITION



PositivePsychology.com

Childhood and adolescence are important developmental stages that will construct the groundwork for mental health in the adult developmental stage.

In recent literature, mindfulness-based school programs have demonstrated a range of social, cognitive, and emotional benefits for elementary and middle-school students.

Cognitive Benefits: Executive function is a set of mental skills that constitutes attention, switching focus, planning, organizing and remembering details. Research in education suggests that mindfulness practice can lead to improvements in executive function in children.

For instance, in the study of Flook et al., (2010) conducted on 3rd graders, students who went through an 8-week mindfulness program showed improvements in behavioral regulation, metacognition and focus compared to the control group who did not have the mindfulness program.

In another study, students who had a 24-week of mindfulness training scored higher in attentional measures in their elementary school (Napoli et al., 2004). Additionally, a study on preschoolers emphasized that children who went through a mindfulness curriculum for 12

weeks earned higher marks on academic performance measures. They also showed greater improvements in areas that predict future success (Flook et al., 2015).

Social Benefits: A social skill is any skill that we use to interact and communicate with others.

Deficits and excesses in social behavior can affect learning, understanding, and classroom climate. Recent research on lower-income and ethnic minority elementary school children highlighted how a 5-week mindfulness curriculum can lead to better participation in activities, as well as nurture a classroom culture of mutual respect and care in 9th-grade students (Black et al., 2013).

Emotional Benefits: Emotional health, which is a positive sense of well-being, is an important component of child and adolescent development. Emotional problems such as anxiety, stress, and depression can affect self-esteem, performance, and social interactions.

Mindfulness practice may facilitate the ability to manage stress, and also lead to deeper well-being in students.

According to one study by Schonert-Reichl and his colleagues (2010), mindfulness practice leads to higher scores on self-report measures of optimism and positive emotions in elementary school students.

Moreover, in a study conducted by Wall (2005), self-reported findings showed preteens feeling calmer, with an enhanced experience of well-being—and improved sleep—after a 5-week modified mindfulness-based stress reduction program.

Videos on Mindfulness in Schools: These four videos can help students open their minds to the benefits of mindfulness. We recommend pairing any of these segments with a discussion.

Questions for after the selected clip can include, “Has anyone practiced mindfulness, and how has it gone for you?” or “What do you think is the reason most people do not practice mindfulness, and how can we start changing this?”

A Take-Home Message: Research confirms that mindfulness can improve mental health by aiding well-being, attention, self-regulation, and social competency. It just needs to be practiced—and encouraged.

Mindfulness-based programs in schools can have a life-long impact on the psychological, social, and cognitive well-being of children and teens. Even at home or with clients, how can you incorporate mindfulness into your teachings and own schedule?

Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.