Mindful Activities for Families

The benefits of bringing awareness to breath, thoughts, emotions and the environment will increase a child’s ability to focus and regulate their emotions. This, in turn, leads to the fuller state of living with compassion and mindfulness.



You are a parent who believes in being present, mindful and compassionate.

You have young children.

You sometimes wonder how these things can possibly go together.

[New research](https://heartmindonline.org/resources/mindful-activities-for-families#resource-sources) explores how teaching mindful practices to young children may support stress reduction, [self-regulation](https://heartmindonline.org/resources/mindful-activities-for-families#resource-sources), levels of well-being and increase the capacity for compassion. We already know that these activities make a difference with adults too.

But how do parents actually DO this? Read on for some practical and fun activity ideas that are age appropriate for young children. These ideas are not hour-long activities but “moments in time” that build awareness.

**Breath Awareness**

* **Count while you are breathing**: Practice what it’s like to take a deep breath (count to five) and then release in the same slow fashion. This can become a playful interaction; *“Can you breathe in for three seconds long?” or “How slowly can you release your air?”*
* **Blow bubbles**: Yes, bubble blowing is fun and a whole lot more! Bring awareness to your child’s breath as they blow out on the bubbles. “Listen to your breath” is a gentle way to focus attention on the breathing .
* **Toss the air**: Find a point in the distance for your child to “toss” their breath towards. *“See that house, can you toss your breath all the way over to it?"*

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**Thought Awareness**

* **Walk the line**: Try the [Montessori inspired](https://heartmindonline.org/resources/mindful-activities-for-families#resource-sources) exercise of walking on a line on the floor. There are many ways and reasons to do this activity including awareness development. Use tape to make a long line on the floor. Use a bell, or another musical instrument that would make a noise when shaken, and ask your child to “walk the line” with you while they hold the bell. Your child will be practicing concentration while walking along the line and anytime the bell makes a noise, the sound will bring awareness back to their thoughts. You might say, *“Oh, the bell went off, our minds must have been wandering away, let’s try to bring our thoughts back to the line.”*
* **Model cause and effect language**: “When I think this\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I do this\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_”. This will bring awareness to thoughts and how they link directly to our actions and behaviours. *"When I think about trying something new, I stop talking and step away."*
* **Switch the thought**: If you notice your child is struggling with a task, help them replace negative self talk with a thought that allows them to separate themselves from the task at hand and persevere to find a solution. You might prompt them with the words, *“This is hard to do but I can keep trying or ask for help.”*

**Emotion Awareness**

* **Give language to emotions**: Giving language to emotions is a first step in being able to identify and then express and process through them. Take advantage of conversations, playtime and while reading to [teach and explore new words](https://heartmindonline.org/resources/mindful-activities-for-families#resource-sources) to describe emotions.
* **Keep track of emotions**: Teach children to track their emotions with a “feeling chart.” You can find samples on the internet or create your own. Hang the chart on the fridge and keep track of the different emotions that happen for the whole family over the course of a day or week. Talk about what you see and describe how different emotions make you feel.
* **Focus in on the body**: Sometimes talking about how our body is responding to a situation is easier than talking about the feelings themselves. Notice physical cues in your child and ask questions. *“I see your fists are clenched tight from your sister taking your ball, can you feel what your hands are doing?”*

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**Awareness of the Environment**

* **Go on a sound exploration**: Imagine setting a dramatic scene with your children that you are “great sound explorers” and going on a mission to notice as many sounds as you can. Quietly keep track of the sounds by drawing or writing the sounds (during or after). For contrast, try this with eyes open and later with eyes closed. Tie the sounds into how your child feels in reaction to the sounds.
* **Find ONE new thing**: Practice paying attention to the wider environment by noticing ONE new thing a day! Imagine walking about your neighborhood or even your kitchen and noticing one new thing. *“What are the colors of those curtains?” “What is the texture of those flowers?” “Did you realize there was a mailbox on the corner?”*
* **Create a quiet zone**: Ask your children what they would like in a quiet zone. What are some activities that calm them? Find and create a little nook together that allows for this quiet space. Consider all the senses, for example, what textures do your children like (pillows, blankets or chairs), which smells aggravate and which ones calm (experiment with aromatherapy) and what role will sound play (silence, music or something different)?