

Mindfulness For Children

By Deborah Butler
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What is Mindfulness?

Being mindful means **noticing** where you are and what you're doing. However, when you're mindful, you don't let the things around you pull your attention in any direction. Think of your mind like a little monkey running around in your head. Every time your monkey mind hears a new sound or sees a new sight, it wants to run over to see the new thing.

When you practice mindfulness, you calm that little monkey down so that it doesn't run after every new sight or sound. Your monkey mind rests a little, letting things happen and noticing them.

Every human is naturally mindful. Sometimes, though, we forget to be mindful when many things around us draw our attention. We feel pulled in too many directions at once. It takes some practice to learn to be mindful when lots of things are happening around us.

How Can Mindfulness Help You?



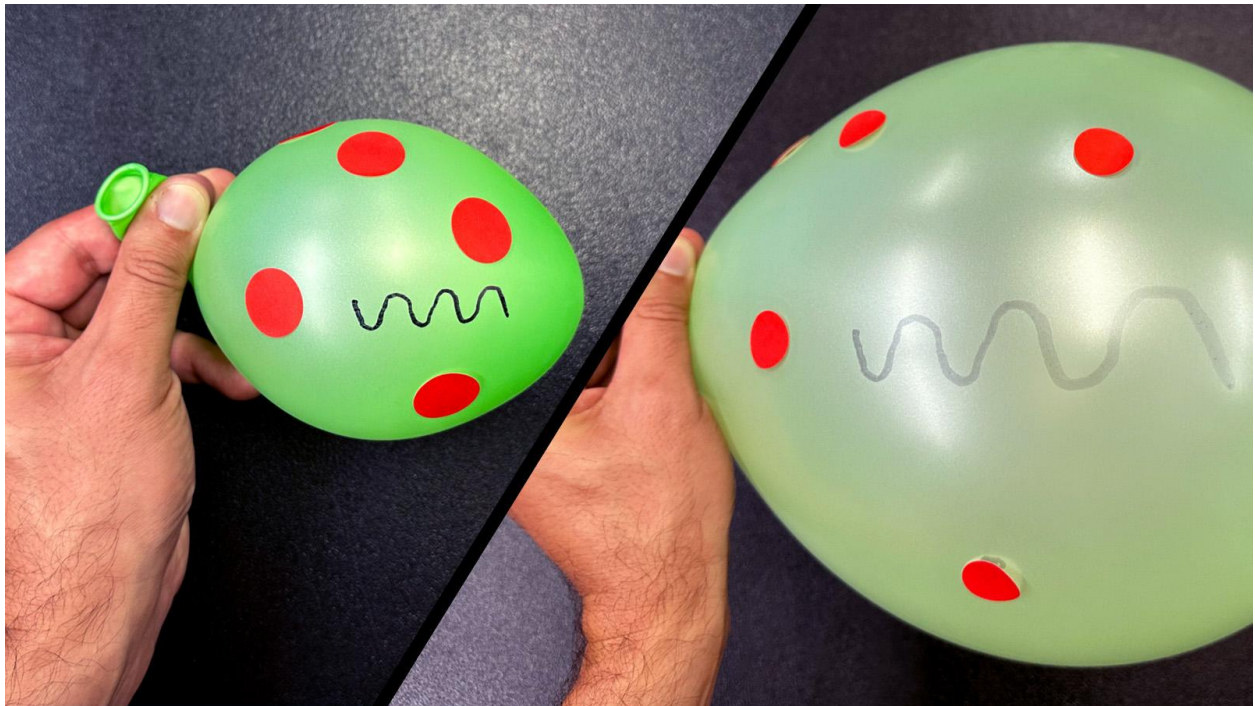
Sometimes, it's a good thing to notice everything around you. It can be helpful to think about the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and actions around you and to be curious. That's how you learn about the world around you.

But if you are constantly trying to chase all those ideas and distractions with your monkey mind, your body and mind may start to feel overwhelmed. It may feel like everything is too much. It can be like having a phone, a laptop, an iPad, and a TV, all loudly playing different videos at once. When that happens, your mind does not have time to take in any information. It becomes overloaded.

When you practice mindfulness, you allow your mind to rest. Think of what it looks like when you put dirt at the bottom of a jar and then fill it with water. What happens when you shake the jar up? The dirt and water swirl around and around, making a muddy mixture. That's a little like your mind when it's full of too many sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or feelings.

Now, think about what happens if you put the jar down and let the water sit. Soon, the dirt settles back to the bottom of the jar. The water becomes clear again. When you practice mindfulness, your mind settles and becomes clearer, just like the water in the jar. Once your mind is settled, your body becomes more relaxed, too. When you are relaxed, you can enjoy life more. You can learn better, think better, and get along with other people better.

How Can You Practice Mindfulness?



The first thing you can learn to do is breathe. What, you may be asking? You already breathe. But breathing is something most of us do without even thinking about it. When you start to focus, to really concentrate, on your breathing, it becomes mindful breathing.

Try this. Sit up straight on the floor, on your bed, or in a chair. Put one hand on your chest. Put the other hand on your stomach. Take a deep breath in. Feel your lungs fill up with air first. It's like a balloon filling with air. Can you feel this in your chest? Now, breathe in a little more. Feel your diaphragm, that muscle below your lungs, fill up. It's like filling that balloon a little more. Next, let your stomach fill up. Think of the balloon being filled all the way up now.

Now, go ahead and slowly let your breath out. It's like allowing the balloon to slowly deflate with a little bit of air coming out at a time. How did that feel when you focused on your breath moving through your body? Try it a few more times. Then, just breathe naturally. You may already feel calmer. Or, you may not feel different at all. It's okay to feel however you feel. Just noticing how you feel is important.

Now that you're sitting still and paying attention to your breathing, you can shift your attention. Close your eyes and notice the sounds around you. What can you hear? Do you hear noises from within the room? Do you hear noises from outside? Maybe you can hear your own breathing. Try not to overthink what is making the noise or noises you hear. Instead, just notice them.

Think About How You Feel



Now that you've sat quietly for a few minutes think about how you feel. Do you feel more relaxed? Are you calmer? Maybe you don't feel any different yet. That's perfectly okay. Whatever you feel is fine. Just notice anything that you feel in your body or mind.

This mindfulness practice is something you can do every day. You can practice wherever and whenever you feel most comfortable. You can sit quietly for longer and longer periods as you continue your practice.

It might be helpful for you to keep a journal about your feelings with mindfulness. You can write or draw about anything you notice each time you sit and breathe. Remember, you do not need to judge how long you sit or how quiet you are. Just notice what you feel and write about it.

You can also keep track of any changes you notice. For instance, you may notice that you can get along with your friends or family better after practicing mindfulness. Maybe you'll see that you have an easier time learning new things at school. Keeping a journal will help you to keep track of any differences you notice.

How Long Should You Practice?



Practicing mindfulness is something you can do for your whole life. The more you practice, the more you will see good things happening to your mind and body. Practicing mindfulness can help you deal with stress better. It can also help you enjoy all the things you experience every day by being able to notice them.

The best part of having a mindfulness practice is that you can make it your own. There isn't a right or wrong way to practice mindfulness. You get to decide where you sit, how long you sit,

whether or not you keep a journal, and even whether or not you tell others about your practice. You don't need any equipment or special apps. As long as it makes you feel more settled and able to notice things better, you can be in charge of your practice.