

QUICK BYTES

TRAUMA NETWORK FOR CHILDREN



Mindful Moments: Keeping Calm in Stressful Times Part 1: Tips for Parents of Young Children

Brought to you by the PTSS team (KKH) · May 2020

The global outbreak of COVID-19 has caused major changes in every aspect of our lives, including school, work, and even leisure. Routines have been upended, and it is difficult to tell when or how things will return to normal. In these uncertain times, we may feel anxious, confused, and worried about the changes happening around us, and what they mean — even children, our very young ones are not exempt from these feelings. One way we can all manage our fears and anxieties is to incorporate mindfulness into our daily lives.

Mindfulness is about being fully present in the moment without placing judgements on how we are feeling. Practising mindfulness helps to quiet our minds and sharpen our focus, so that we can better handle unexpected or distressing situations that come our way. Mindfulness has been gaining popularity over the past few years, and many schools all over the world have been incorporating it into their curricula, to help their students cope with everyday stresses and worries.

As a parent, it is a good idea for you to practise mindfulness strategies before introducing these activities to your children. This will not only help you manage your own stress and anxiety, but will also allow you to serve as a living example of the benefits of mindfulness, which in turn increases the chances of your children practising these strategies.

Some general tips are as follows:



1. Aim for simple, short activities that you can do with your child throughout the day, in keeping with your child's attention span and his/her level of understanding.

2. Older children (e.g. those who are in upper primary levels) can start incorporating some of these activities independently.

Below are three strategies to get your children started:

1. Listening Ears

Aim: Teaches children to pay attention to things in their surroundings that they might otherwise not notice.

- Use anything that can make a ringing sound that gradually disappears (e.g. a bell, a rain stick, a singing bowl, or even a mobile app with some of these sounds).
- Let your children know that they will be using their super listening powers to listen for a sound. Inform them that when they can no longer hear the sound, they are to raise their hands.
- They can close their eyes if they wish.



2. Mindful Breathing

Aim: Encourages calmness, which can be especially helpful in reducing anxiety (e.g. about the ongoing changes in routine, environment).



- Mindful breathing without any visual cues can be difficult for young children. Try using objects to help a young child focus his/her breathing.
- Ask your children to get their favourite stuffed toy (ideally, something that is relatively small), and lie down. If your children are older and can practice this without soft toys, you can ask them to place their hands on their belly.
- Place their toy/hand on their belly, and ask them to focus on the rise and fall of the toy/their hand as they breathe in and out.
- Practice this for about two to five minutes, depending on the attention span of your children.
- During this activity, it may also be helpful to play some soft, relaxing instrumental music.

3. Break Time

Aim: Allows your children's minds to rest before continuing activities, so that they can play and learn better.

- During break time, encourage children to take part in a relaxation activity such as the two activities listed above.
- Break time should be around five minutes, which is sufficient time for the mind to relax and prepare for the next activity. If your children are younger or have difficulties sustaining their attention, it is fine to work with a shorter duration in the beginning.
- Encourage break time when transitioning between different activities (e.g. playtime to mealtime), and at the start of their bedtime routine. Older children who are in school can also use break time during their studies, especially if they are feeling stressed when doing their home-based learning assignments or other revision activities.



As your children start feeling more comfortable with the introduction of mindfulness activities in their life, you may consider incorporating more activities. We have listed a few of the popular options below — some may work better than others for you and your children. Just keep to what works best for you!

Useful Resources

- *COVID-19 Resources for Self-help, Parenting, Clinical Practice, and Teaching* - this weblink has many resources for general mindfulness strategies that you can use. There are also specific parenting-related mindfulness exercises that you may find helpful: <https://www.guilford.com/covid-resources#stream>.
- *Deep Printing Breathables* - there is a set of four breathing techniques that older children can use. These printouts serve as a visual cue for children: <https://store.copingskillsforkids.com/collections/digital-products/products/deep-breathing-printables>
- *Insight Timer* - this is a free app with access to over 40,000 different types of tracks for mindfulness meditation. This is suitable for children, teenagers, and adults: <https://insighttimer.com/>
- *Ninja Dream Training – A Guided Bedtime Meditation for Kids* - this is a Spotify playlist that can be played at bedtime, to help children calm their worries: <https://open.spotify.com/album/6KCZeZ4YTRdDdowKRRKOC5t>
- *Mind Yeti* - this is a Spotify podcast which children and teenagers can use to practice mindfulness techniques: <https://open.spotify.com/show/2raVdnpdHFB1txPZiul9c9>
- *Smiling Mind* - this is another free mindfulness strategies. This is suitable for children, teenagers, and adults. You can obtain more information from the website, and obtain the download link for the app from here: <https://www.smilingmind.com.au>.
- *Stop, Breathe and Think* - this is an app for young children aged five to 10 years and is a wonderful introduction to mindfulness for children: <https://www.stopbreathethink.com/>.



Trauma Network
for Children



The Stay Prepared – Trauma Network for Children (TNC) programme is a joint collaboration between KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and Temasek Foundation. It aims to enhance the psychosocial capability of the Singapore community to support children and youth after crises or traumatic events.