

# Bringing the Lessons Home

## Incorporating mindfulness into your day

All people – adults *and* children – experience stress at one time or another. For adults, stress is often related to finances, time, traffic, relationships, and/or juggling myriad home and family responsibilities. For children, stress might stem from friendship problems, school, sports, or family life or responsibilities. While we cannot prevent every difficulty, as adults we can acquire skills and strategies to help us manage our stressors. And we can share those, in developmentally appropriate ways, with our children so that they can learn to manage life's curveballs too. A tool that many of us are learning more about is mindfulness.

Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment, with kindness and without judgment. Mindfulness practice is a way of pulling back. It can include meditation, listening, focusing on breathing, doing yoga postures, or other techniques that help adults and children tune into the present moment. Many workplaces as well as schools and classrooms – around the country and world – have incorporated mindfulness into their work or learning day and the benefits are tremendous.

Some of the positive effects in K-12 education are: Improved concentration, work habits and focus; development of language; enhanced problem solving skills; increased cooperation; positive behaviors; and healthier relationships. Similarly, the benefits hold true for adults. The best news is that mindfulness practice can be tailored to fit different lives; there is not just one way to practice mindfulness! However, to reap the benefits, it is important to make it a regular part of your life.

With summer just around the corner, take time to slow down, connect as a family, and live simply. Kristen Race, Author of *Mindful Parenting*, shares ways of creating a mindful family:

**1. Creating space:** When we are in a state of stress we cannot think productively or clearly. Mindful breathing is one of the best ways to prevent and manage the stress response. A fun way to teach elementary age children mindful breathing is through imitating animal breathing. For example, snake breath is an inhalation through the nose followed by an exhaled hiss with teeth together. What animals can you come up with?

**2. Increasing awareness:** When our brains are in a stressful state this not only impacts our well-being but also our work or productivity. To calm your brains, while walking or driving with your child(ren), look for things that are new or unusual, or that you've simply never looked at closely. Ask children to notice the sky, the weather, changes in seasons, the trees beginning to bloom, etc. As a family, take a hike and use the time to listen, look, smell, and feel. What do you notice along the way?

**3. Growing seeds of peace and happiness:** Our brain is three to five times more sensitive to negative information than to positive. When we intentionally pay attention to the positives, we strengthen our neural pathways and increase our positive thoughts. A way to support positive attention is to ask your child(ren), "Who was a good friend to you today?" or, "What did that friend do to make you feel important?" Follow up with questions about what your child did to help, or to show a friend that he or she is valued. These questions support social and emotional learning!

**4. Cultivating empathy and compassion:** Children learn empathy through human face to face interactions. This begins when they are infants and smile – and so does Mom! Empathy continues to develop as children grow older; however, because of the rise of technology reducing face to face interactions, it is important that children have opportunities for peer interactions. In person, they learn to recognize how and when their peers show feelings such as being happy or excited when everyone is playing together well; or sad, mad, or frustrated when they can't agree on the same thing. Playing allows children to practice taking in the perspective of others. A great activity is to "pay it forward." Help your child think about someone who could benefit from a considerate gesture. Maybe that means writing a note or drawing a picture for the person. Or maybe it means inviting a child who is playing alone to join your group.

Whether you are able to incorporate all of these ideas into your family life, or focus in on one, when it comes to mindfulness, small changes make big differences!

