

Mindfulness and How It Helps Kids Excel

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Last week I started teaching an intimate mindfulness class to four girls all between the ages of 7 and 9. It was nothing less than magnificent, and that is *always, always* the case whether I'm teaching to a small group or a larger classroom.

Here's why...

(First, for those who are new to mindfulness -- it is the practice of learning to pay attention and is steeped in brain science and neurology. It helps children increase their attention span, compassion/empathy, academic performance, sense of purpose, to name just a few.)

1. With mindfulness exercises, **all kids excel** on some level, and their abilities only improve with practice. There is no right or wrong (what a concept!). Everything is about observation and feeling. What *you* see/how *you* see it... it is personal, unique, creative and always interesting (for the students and the teacher).
2. Mindfulness **isn't about grades or being perfect**. Everyone's answer has equal merit *and* differences are cherished. Do you see the freedom in that? This allows for expanded thought and exploration. In a typical school setting, in many subjects, there is only one way. Via mindfulness, there are millions, trillions of ways. **AND**, your answer this week can be totally different the next week. Therefore, it creates an environment that is never dry or boring; it allows for constant evolution and growth.
3. Mindfulness **offers something for everyone** -- mindful walking, breathing, seeing, hearing, eating, writing, studying, etc. You might have one kid who eloquently describes a feeling and then, in the next exercise, you see that soft-spoken child from the back of the room performing mindful breathing like nobody's business. It also works with all learning styles (visional, audial, kinesthetic) as well as all learning "disabilities" and challenges. **And**, get this, kids can *and* will expand this awareness into everything they do including sports (football, swimming, gymnastics, soccer), the arts (music instruction, drawing, acting) and into their social world (friendships, social events).
4. Youngsters and teenagers brilliantly **find comfort and connection in being quiet and listening inwardly**. My adult students struggle while my younger participants more naturally get the mindful process. Surprised? **And**, that's the reason... **IT IS natural**.

Finally, consider this: In Western society we are taught to deal with anxiety and stress by being strong, suppressing our emotions or masking our feelings. Mindfulness teaches us a dramatic new scenario -- to open to who we are and what's going on inside in a clear, healthy way. Learning this as a young person creates an adulthood of stability and peace... a peace that many of us can't even imagine. Tis beautiful to contemplate!

Want to try this for yourself? Here are two mindfulness exercises that you and your kids can do together.

1. At bedtime, teach your child about their breath. As they are stretched out in their bed, place your hand gently on their tummy and ask them to make it rise and fall. Explain to them that this process supplies their heart, mind and body with oxygen which is vital for their health and nourishment. Breathing also helps get rid of waste and toxins. Talk about what their body feels like when they breathe. Also, ask them to hold their breath and then discuss. **What this does:** This exercise connects your child to the power and

significance of their breath... most of the time we don't think about, consider, look at or are aware of this necessary event that happens over 20,000 times in a day. Learning to work with the breath is also key in managing stress. You are giving them, as well as yourself, body awareness. (Two articles to utilize for more info... [Why Do We Breathe](#) and [Deep Breathing](#).)

2. When you see your child/children for the first time in the morning play the "good morning game" (or whatever you want to call it). Right when you see your child, go over to them and connect deeply with their eyes. Then you will both take turns saying "good morning" and shake hands or do a high five. Treat each other as though you have never met before -- that's how fresh I want you to make it feel. **What this does:** How many times do we mindlessly pass each other in the morning on our way to the bathroom or to hurriedly make breakfast. This simple exercise makes us pause. It *not* only allows us to greet the morning but to also to consciously greet those who are the most significant in our lives. It also allows parent/child to start the day anew especially if there was a disagreement or argument the day before.

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