

**Introduction to
Mindfulness Practice:
Clinical and Personal Applications for**

**Mindfulness With
Children and Adolescents**

Presented by Greta Nielsen, MA, LCPC, NCC
March 1, 2019

1

Self-Care Self-Compassion

Everyone is on his or her own life journey.


I am not the cause of this person's suffering, nor is it entirely within my power to take it away.

Although this moment is difficult to bear, I will help to the extent that I can.

<https://soundcloud.com/hachetteaudiouk/meditation-eight-the-three-minute-breathing-space>

2

Mindfulness



Strive to focus on the present

3


What is Mindfulness?

- A pause, the space between stimulus and response – Tara Braich
- A kind of balanced awareness where we see what is happening clearly but we don't overanalyze it, avoid it or belittle it – Kristin Neff
- Paying attention, on purpose in a particular way in the present moment and nonjudgmentally – Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Attentiveness, moment to moment – Sylvia Boorstein

4

Friendly Awareness

- Curious George
 - Model to understand open, curious way we monitor life experiences when practicing mindfulness, as well as the importance of not always reacting to what we observe; at least not immediately.
 - Playful way of seeing the world, one that's not burdened by preconceived notions. Receptive to new experiences; without judgement or self-criticism.
 - Mastered the ability to experience whatever is happening with curiosity but not yet learned to control his response. Were George to hold off for a moment and give himself breathing room to view his experience more clearly he could better choose his action/response.



5

Research – Mindfulness is not a fad (10 journal publications in 2000, 667 in 2016)

- Mindfulness is an effective treatment for a variety of psychological problems, and is especially effective for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress
- By practicing mindfulness we play an active role in changing the brain and increasing our well-being and quality of life.
- Findings support the use of MBT for anxiety and depression in clinical populations. This pattern of results suggests that MBT may not be diagnosis-specific, but, instead, may address processes that occur in multiple disorders by changing a range of emotional and evaluative dimensions that underlie general aspects of wellbeing. Therefore, MBT may have general applicability.
- Evidence supports that MBSR improves mental health and MBCT prevents depressive relapse.
- Clinical Psychology Review*, August 2013: Mindfulness-Based Therapy: a comprehensive meta-analysis
- Psychiatry Res.* January 2011: Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density
- Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, April 2010: The Effect of Mindfulness-Based Therapy on Anxiety and Depression: a meta-analytic review
- Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, August 2011: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials

6

Why Should We Practice Mindfulness with Children?

- Kids are more stressed than ever.
- Helps them learn to focus and become less reactive.
- Allows them to become more aware of, and better understand, their thoughts and feelings.
- They become more attuned to the world.
- Increases patience and frustration tolerance and the ability to stay calm in the midst of challenging situations and intense emotions.
- Increase executive functioning.

7

Cultivates Positive Social and Personal Values

- Moving away from thoughts of the past (regrets) and fears of the future.
- Active awareness, not tuning out but tuning in.
- Resist "auto-pilot" – rewires habitual reaction and gain chance to consider response *mindfully*, not automatically.
- Kids can't control all of the consequences that result from their actions, but they can work to understand better why they act in a certain way.
- Emotional brain hijacks thinking brain when upset occurs. Mindfulness calms the nervous system.
- If they recognize motivations for their actions they have an opportunity to shift gears.
- "About To" moment – Joseph Goldstein
 - The moment when the intention to act is set.
 - Why am I choosing to do this? How does it make me feel? Is my motivation friendly or unfriendly?
 - ACT Choice Point Theory

8

Helping Children Understand Mindfulness

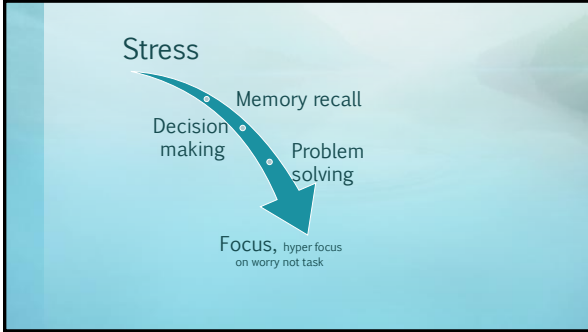
Paying attention to your life, here and now, with kindness and curiosity.

If we keep bringing attention back to ourselves and our internal experience; overtime it's calming and centers us. We become better able to be strong and steady within ourselves and less at the whim of others and external events.

Tool: Help them remember a mindless situation – routine behaviors



9



10

Emotional Regulation – Goal = Identify, Tolerate, Express

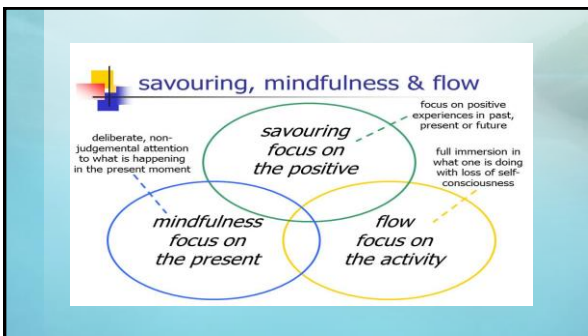
- Powerful link with Executive Functioning skills
 - Air traffic controller: safely, quickly and effectively manage multiple sensory inputs.

↑ Emotion ↓ Regulation


Our thoughts, feelings and urges become entangled and our ability to think clearly and make wise decisions is directly related to what we feel and how intensely we feel it.

Our brain short-circuits: emotional dysregulation moves from the frontal lobe and blocks pathways for effective communication between our emotional and rational parts of our brain needed for effective life management.

11



12



How to be in that middle triangle:

Each ball is a stressor. They can come a little at a time, or be flooded. We can be prepared sometimes, or it can come out of the blue.

You can only hit 1 ball at a time; successfully to win the 'point'.


13

Mindfulness is NOT Meditation

Introspection is critical but kids need skills to navigate their world every day and need a 'road map' to plan, organize and think through complex problems.

It helps define what they want/need to do and make plans to accomplish it.

It creates a pause between a stimulus and a reaction.



14

Friendly Observer

Helps separate their sense of self/identity from their feelings.

Discourages pre-adolescents and teens from over-identifying with their thoughts and emotions and encourages them to view their experiences differently.


Thich Nhat Hanh: *Your True Home: The Everyday Wisdom of Thich Naht Hanh*

"Feelings are born, take shape, last for a few moments, and then disappear....we look mindfully at this river of feeling. We contemplate their arising, their remaining, and their disappearance. We witness their impermanence. When we have unpleasant feelings, we say to ourselves, "This feeling is in me, it will stay for awhile, and then it will disappear because it is impermanent." Just by seeing the impermanence of feelings in this way, we suffer a lot less."

15

ex: Make a Fist

If you can observe it and describe it,
it's not you,
not the core you,
not the real you.




16

4 Insights

Road map for teaching mindfulness to children –
Larry Rosenberg: Breath by Breath

1) Life Has It's Ups and Downs

- no matter how hard they try, how good their parenting is, kids will be confronted with problems they can't ignore
- stress is real and tips them out of balance.
- mindfulness helps them put their problems in to perspective.



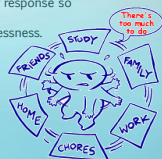
17

Tools:

1. Balance Perspective – Scale
2. Focus on Highs *and* Lows – Happy/Crappy, Success/Struggle
3. Posture – How do you carry yourself when you're happy vs upset?
4. Cognitive Distortions

18

- 2) Delusion Makes Life Harder Than It Needs To Be
- we need to clearly see and fully experience hard things in our life.
 - problems aren't fixed, but managed by clearly seeing what's causing them and recognizing whether or not there's anything that can be done to change the situation.
 - key to managing stress usually lies in how we respond to it, not in the situation itself.
 - a lot is happening all the time and mindfulness helps put experiences in their proper place and measure your response so it's in the right proportion.
 - develop peace of mind NOT zone-out: mindlessness.



19

Tools:

1. Find Ways They Are Capable - Character Traits
2. Empower What's Within - Use experiences in which they've been brave, taken risks, etc. "Back-Flip Katie"
3. Catch Them Doing, Not Avoiding - When in their life have they approached, persevered, involved themselves? What's different during these times? Sport, Art, Music, Hanging with friends, etc.

20

Essence of Character Development

The opportunity to recognize what quality they're practicing and ask self whether it will help them become the person they'd like to be.

Are these qualities ones that are likely to lead to happiness?

Choose one character trait to focus on each day and act in ways to achieve this.



21


Character Traits

Kind	Helpful	Generous
Kind	Shy	Easy
Kind	Leader	Accomplished
Neat/Clean	Grave	Artistic
Like	Logical	Old
Strong	Kind	Creative
Passion	Jolly	Responsible
Gracious	Cooperative	Independent
Respectful	Unselfish	Respectful
Confident	Amiable	Selfish
Shy	Curious	Happy
Imaginative	Witty	Conscientious
Tough	Agile	Unhappy
Calm	Determined	Naive
Polite	Wagging	Accomplish
Wagging	Chaotic	Witty
Wiser	Thoughtful	Aggressive
Witty	Smart	Imaginative
Adventurous	Organized	Artistic
Helpful	Respectful	Appreciative
Self	Adapted	Grave
Kind	Respectful	Naive
Responsible	Agile	Imagined

22

3) Happiness is in Reach

- happiness emerges when suffering ends.
- a change in perspective: external events stay the same yet we shift our thinking and response.
- kids tend to get caught up in what they're not doing/getting and forget to enjoy and appreciate what IS happening/receiving.
- helps to appreciate who they are and see their strengths more clearly.



23

Tools:

1. Gratitude Journal
2. Reframe Cognitive Distortions
3. Coping Strategies List -
 - First and Then
 - I have control when...
 - I win when....

24

Cognitive Distortions

- Kids need reminders on need to shift their thoughts so they don't distort what is really going on.
- Tolerate disappointment and hurt as one event; not always and forever.
 - This time I didn't get what I want.
- Most frequently used:
 - All-or-None Thinking
 - Catastrophizing
 - Mental Filtering
 - Mind-Reading
 - Should, or Must, Statements

LIFE IS LIKE A CAMERA. JUST FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT AND CAPTURE THE GOOD TIMES, DEVELOP FROM THE NEGATIVES AND IF THINGS DON'T WORK OUT, JUST TAKE ANOTHER SHOT.

25

4) The Key To Happiness

Desire: when something good happens we tend to want more; pretty quickly we begin to focus our energy on replicating it.

Aversion: when something bad happens we tend to do everything we can to avoid it but may miss aspects of otherwise negative experiences that can lead to useful life lessons.

Indifference: ignore experiences about which we are neutral and become preoccupied with something else.

Consciously or unconsciously we often spend much of our time plotting to get what we want, try to avoid what we don't want and ignore everything else.

Automatic Pilot:
When we want more or less of something we focus on a past or future moment and miss out on what's happening now. Oblivious to what we're doing and it's impact.

26

Tools:

- Poker Chip Theory for self-esteem – Dr. Richard Lavoie

Tall stack = more willing to accept challenges and seek opportunities; to bet a chip or 2 on their own success. If they lose a few, they have plenty of chips left.

Small stack = precious few chips means the gambling is greater. Dare not risk their small treasure, yet in holding onto them they avoid the chance to accumulate more chips.

We earn chips by looking for ways to feel accepted & worthy, loved & valued

27

Breathing Room

Believing that our impressions, thoughts and memories are always accurate can lead to disappointment and frustration. When we have an emotional reaction it's important to pull our attention back so we can give ourselves "breathing room" before we draw definitive conclusions about what is/not happening.

Tool: cell phone pauses
pauses in games

Reminders -

bracelet (One Thought Away-),

colored tape on i-pad/toothbrush, rubber band around phone, etc.



28

Mindfulness gives us a more acute body awareness as we strengthen an early warning system for problems.

0 → 10

We try to avoid upsetting/uncomfortable feelings, events, etc., yet by avoiding we never feel in control.

Practice exposing to challenges and sitting through them.



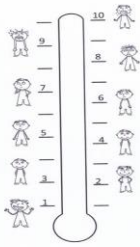
It doesn't rain forever



At the bottom it is calm

29

How Are You Feeling Today?



Recognize they have different intensities and responses; not 0 to 10 immediately.

Develop coping strategies at each level to bring them back down to state of calm.

Use Emotion Charts to help them identify what they feel
The feeling wheel:
<https://med.emory.edu/excel/documents/Feeling%20Wheel.pdf>

30

Identify and Express Emotions

Difficult to problem solve and change behaviors if not aware of what you're feeling and what feeling triggered your response.

Help increase awareness of graduated levels of emotions:

Use Emotion Charts to help them identify what they feel
The feeling wheel:
<https://med.emory.edu/excel/documents/Feeling%20Wheel.pdf>

31

Direct-Focused Attention

Energy flows where attention goes...
What's your attention focused on?

- Making the connection between effort and outcome. Rewards change every time we do the right attention.
- Better understand the importance of consistency because it doesn't get tired and attention.
- Recognize that by showing up in the arena, you have to pay attention to what you're doing. There is a reward for it.
- Where and how often choose to direct their attention. Making a high attention in who they are and who they will become.

32

- Spot distractions and recover from them. The object is not to rid our environment of distractions but to recognize them and resist engaging.
- Easier to choose where to focus attention but the hurdle is to keep it there for an extended period of time.
- Need to develop the capacity to detect if we're distracted and when we are, disengage attention from the source, redirect and engage it back toward the chosen object of attention.
- Takes mental discipline to filter out peripheral sensory input.
 - 5 senses
 - counting breaths: 1,1,1 2,2,2
 - focus rocks
 - tone bar
 - candle flame

33


- Watching a Play:
Adapting the mind-set of a conscious decision to abandon one's agenda to have a different experience and an active process of allowing current thoughts, feelings and sensations without reacting to them.

Similar to mindfulness – we participate in the experience without becoming enmeshed in drama.
- Stages:
 - 1) Observation
 - 2) Understanding experience
 - 3) Take action
 - ~ 3 Gates: Sufi Teaching
Is it True? Is it Necessary? Is it Kind?

34

Being Mind vs Doing Mind

- Teach them how to "let go".





When caught in 'doing mind' we miss important pieces of information that could change our experience of the world.

- Teach them how to observe.
 - show and tell: where do feelings go when you focus on doing something else? Still there, just don't impact your thoughts or behavior.

35

Worry Basket

Learn to focus on something other than worry, fear, anger, etc. Choice to let worries overwhelm us or free self by leaving Doing Mind and move to Being Mind.

36

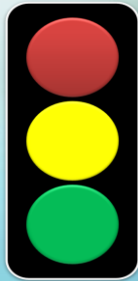
More Strategies

- **Still Place/Quiet Place/Safe Place** (5-8 y.o.)
 - Let kids put name to it
 - a place inside you, you can find just by breathing
 - teach breathing; noticing how insides feel; want it to feel like a warm smile in your body, snuggle in
- **Superpower Senses** (young kids; boys in particular)
 - who's your favorite superhero?
 - Spiderman using the 5 senses
- **Silly Walk**
 - helps with zones of regulation
 - dimmer switch: 10%, 25%, 50%, 75%, 100%

37

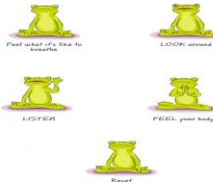
Pause Presence Proceed

1. Pause - stop, where is your mind?
2. Presence - breathe deeply.
What is this situation asking of me?
1. Proceed - make decision mindfully.



38

Mindfulness



This resource is for people who want peace. It was created by Dr. Doyle and is licensed under Creative Commons, so please share it, print it, photograph it and stick it on as many walls as possible. World peace is possible.

39

• Breathing

At core of all mindfulness work.

Have them imagine a time when they were upset and were held/hugged by a parent. When we adopt the breath and attend "in" we feel held - leads to emotional regulation.

Teach 3 separate parts:
 Inhalation, exhalation and the pause between the two.

Starfish Stretch & Hand Meditation
 Stuffed Animal
 Flower/bubbles (young children)

As they practice we want them to notice the difference in their bodies when they change the way they breathe; fast, slow, or steady.

40

• Senses

Taste/smell - raisin, candy
 Vision - Glitter wand, magnifying glass
 Hearing - tone bar, ringing bell
 Touch - various objects

Slow Motion - Freeze

Increases body awareness.
 Helps kids to become more deliberate when they move and more aware of where their bodies are in relation to other people/things.
 MindFUL vs MindLESS action

Mind Jar

Thoughts and emotions cloud our judgements, but if left alone we can see more clearly.

41

• Exposure Therapy

purposely face situations, objects or events you are afraid of or worried about until the anxiety decreases.
 repeated corrective response can lead to changes in our associations and perceptions. Visualize success and having control.

Body Outline

draw place on the body the emotion develops as a sensation, then choose different color for calming and image that instead.

Mindfulness Bell - Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh
 Signals break and check-in.

42

On-line activities and apps

- Headspace
- Calm
- Smiling Mind
- Mindfulness app
- Stop, Breathe & Think (Breathe Kids)
- 10% Happier
- Pacifica
- Gonoodle.com
- Breathe2Relax
- Susankaisergreenland.com/inner-kids-program

43

Mindful Parenting

- We have to Model: It's up to us to change our behavior if we want them to change theirs.
- Parenting Purposefully & Thoughtfully – avoid letting our feelings dictate our reactions.
- Let go of guilt and shame about past and loosen grip on future so fully in-tune with what's happening now. Accept what's happening rather than change or ignore it.
- Tune-in to how we feel so we can make thoughtful choices about how to respond – MindFUL vs Mindless reactivity.



44



45

• **Tune-In**

Parents typically corral children's wandering minds and bodies and shepherd them through maze of goal-directed activities dictated by school, family and extra-curriculars.

Build warm, trusting relationship in which shared attention, interaction and communication is occurring on your child's terms.

Backward Follow-The-Leader



46

• **Challenge**

Try to notice 2 times each day when you are physically with your kids, but not mentally present.

• Develop habit of paying attention even when you're bored – drinking coffee, sitting in traffic....

• **STOP**

- Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Proceed

• **STAY**

- Stop, Take a breath, Attune, Yield



- Like a car, we can forge ahead without looking or we can observe traffic flow and respond accordingly.

47

Loving Kindness Meditation

Research associates self-compassion with other positive qualities:

- Wisdom
- Personal Initiative
- Curiosity
- Happiness
- Optimism

Sit back, relax and enjoy



48



49

Resources

- **Acceptance and Mindfulness Treatments For Children and Adolescents** – Laurie Greco
- **Dr. Amy Saltzman** – Holistic physician; conducted research on benefits of teaching mindfulness to students.
- **Buddha's Brain: the Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, and Wisdom** – Rick Hanson
- **Cognitive-behavioral Treatment of Borderline Personality Disorder** – Marsha Linehan, PhD
- **Full Catastrophe Living** – Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD
- **How to Train a Wild Elephant** – Jan Chozen Bays
- **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression** – Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, John Teasdale
- **Mindfulness and Psychotherapy** – Germer, Fulton & Siegel
- **The Mindful Child** – Susan Kaiser Greenland
- **Parenting In The Present Moment** – Dr. Carla Naumburg
- **The Stress Reduction Workbook for Teens** – Gina Biegel

50
