

Making Storytime Mindful

a Toolkit

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Introduction

Kids today are busy. Technology is all around and all consuming. We tell kids to slow down or pay attention, but do we teach them how?

Kids today are also stressed. COVID-19 drastically changed our world and with it depression and anxiety symptoms in US youth doubled.¹ The stress children experience today can have a profound impact on their lives. Research shows that chronic stress in childhood increases the likelihood of developing illness later in life, including depression, illicit drug use, alcoholism, anxiety, and heart disease.²

Mindfulness can help kids slow down and pay attention, and in doing so it can help reduce stress and depression. Because of these known benefits to children, mindfulness practices are beginning to be introduced into places where they gather, such as the classroom.

What if we could also bring those benefits into the museum space? Museums are a natural fit as they have increasingly positioned themselves as community anchors serving to support the cultural, social, emotional, and mental well-being of their community members.

But rather than creating new programming, which is time intensive and expensive, this toolkit has been **designed to help you integrate brief mindfulness practices into your existing storytime programming.**

Why storytime?

Storytime is prevalent across many institutions. You can find it in museums (and not just kids' museums!), afterschool programs, parks, arboretums, schools, libraries, and hospitals. Storytime happens on Scouting trips, at summer camp, and at home.



Although the included practices were chosen because they integrate easily into storytime, their utility is not limited to storytime. These practices can be integrated into different programs across many learning settings. See the “Mindfulness Practices” and “Implementing Mindfulness” sections for more information.

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit is broken down into 4 main sections:

1. **What is Mindfulness?**
2. **Mindfulness Practices**
3. **Implementing Mindfulness**
4. **Why Mindfulness?** Which discusses the benefits of mindfulness within the museum context

Handouts are included for several of the practices on the page following the practice.

How was this toolkit created?

This toolkit is informed by academic research and the author's mindfulness practice. It was created with the input and insight of educators from KidsQuest Children's Museum in Bellevue, WA. Many of the included practices have been tested at KidsQuest Children's Museum.

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- ¹ Office of the Surgeon General (OS). (2021). Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory. US Department of Health and Human Services.
- ² Lane, E. (2013, July 16). *Experts Describe Long-Term Impacts of Stress on the Young Brain*. American Association for the Advancement of Science. <https://www.aaas.org/news/experts-describe-long-term-impacts-stress-young-brain>

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is simultaneously incredibly simple and extremely complex. It's both easy and difficult to do.

There are many ways that one can define mindfulness, including:

"The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment."³

-Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD

"Being right here, right now."⁴

-Kara-Lee Ruotolo, M.Ed

"Mindfulness is paying attention, here and now, with kindness and curiosity, so that we can choose our behavior."⁵

-Amy Saltzman, MD

Regardless of definition, one way to conceptualize mindfulness is by looking at the three core elements of mindfulness:

1. Intention
2. Attention
3. Attitude

These three elements are not separate processes, instead they are all interwoven into the practice of mindfulness and reinforce one another.⁶

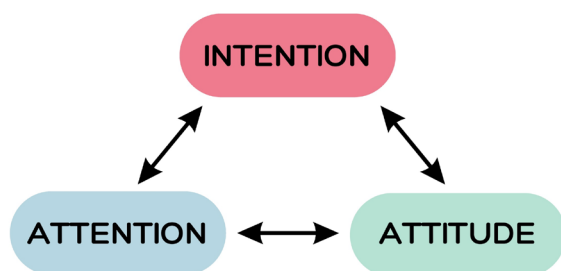


Figure 1. The three aspects of mindfulness from Shapiro, et al. (2006).

Intention. To begin a practice of mindfulness, one must make the intention to bring awareness to this moment. This intention fuels their attention and acts as an anchor when the mind wanders, helping the practitioner return their attention to the moment.

Attention. Paying attention in mindfulness means bringing keen awareness to the present moment rather than thinking about the future or dwelling in the past. Mindfulness involves bringing your attention to both your internal and external

experience. Even the most experienced practitioners will find that their minds wander. It's human nature. Mindfulness teaches people to become aware of their minds wandering, accept it, and bring their attention back to the present moment with kindness.


Attitude. How we pay attention matters. In mindfulness, the present moment should be approached with acceptance and without judgement. Those practicing mindfulness strive to attend to their experiences without “evaluation or interpretation, and practice acceptance, kindness and openness even when what is occurring in the field of experience is contrary to deeply held wishes or expectations.”⁷ More information on attitude’s role in mindfulness can be found below in this section’s “Want more information?” box.

With practice, **mindfulness can help us better understand our thoughts, emotions, and reactions.** By knowing our internal experience better, we can choose how we react and direct our attention towards thinking that serves us.



Mindfulness is:

- Being fully present and engaged in the moment
- Observing one’s experience
- Approaching the present with curiosity and kindness
- Non-judgmental awareness



Mindfulness is not:

- The absence of thought
- Experienced the same by everyone
- About being complacent
- About acting a particular way

There are many ways to cultivate mindfulness. Mindfulness can look like meditation, breathing exercises, pausing for a moment before reacting to a stressor, or acknowledging and accepting both positive and negative feelings. It can deepen through gratitude or exploring an object as you had never seen it before. **It’s likely that unknowingly or not, you are already integrating brief moments of mindfulness into your work.**

Ways you may already be practicing mindfulness at work:



- Encouraging your students to acknowledge their feelings
- Asking your students to reflect on their experiences
- Encouraging your students to make observations
- Asking students to set an intention for their work
- Having students take a deep breath when feeling overwhelmed

Why does this matter and why should we want to include more? The short answer is that mindfulness benefits those who practice with increased cognitive flexibility, decreased emotional reactivity, and reduced stress.⁸ See the “Why Mindfulness?” section to discover even more benefits and to learn about how bringing mindfulness into the museum can support the work you are already doing.

BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS



Figure 2. Some of the benefits of mindfulness mentioned in the "Why Mindfulness?" section.

The History of Mindfulness

Although mindfulness is a secular practice, it is rooted in Buddhism. Buddhist traditions and practices vary, yet the Buddha's teachings on mindfulness are core teachings to all the different traditions.⁹ Buddhism spread across the US in the 1950s and 1960s; consequentially, by the late 1970s, mindfulness meditation was being studied as a behavioral intervention to increase psychological well-being. Since then, studies demonstrating the impact of mindfulness have led to the development of many different therapies and school curriculums which utilize mindfulness principles and practices.



Want more information?

There are many great resources on mindfulness, these are only a few to help you get started.

[Psychology Today's mindfulness page](#) (webpage)

[Video illustrating the intention-attention-attitude model of mindfulness described above](#) (video)

[9 mindful attitudes as described by Jon Kabat-Zinn](#) (video)

[Additional information on 9 mindful attitudes](#) (webpage)

[Mindfulness: What it is, what it is not](#) (pdf)

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- ⁴ K-L. Ruotolo, personal communication, December 5, 2022).
- ⁵ Saltzman, A. (2014). *A Still Quiet Place: A Mindfulness Program for Teaching Children and Adolescents to Ease Stress and Difficult Emotions*. New Harbinger Publications.
- ⁶ Shapiro, S. L., Carlson, L. E., Astin, J. A. & Freedman, B. (2006). Mechanisms of Mindfulness. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 62(3), 373-386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20237>
- ⁷ Shapiro et al., 2006, 377.
- ⁸ Davis, D. M & Hayes, J. A. (2012, July/August). *What are the benefits of mindfulness?* American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/07-08/ce-corner>
- ⁹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10: 144-156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>

References for section's "Want more Information?"

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Mindfulness Practices

There are many ways to practice mindfulness. The following practices are appropriate for young children due to their brevity, use of repetition, and use of movement. A good rule is to choose practices that are no more than one minute per the child's age.¹⁰ Thus, if the program is for children ages 3 and up, don't plan on any practice that takes more than 3 minutes.

Because educators are with children for only a brief part of their day, it is important to get the family involved in their learning. Explaining practices to caregivers and reminding them to do them at home allows the caregivers to reinforce the practices long after leaving the museum. Several of the practices have suggestions on how to involve caregivers. Likewise, some practices include handouts for kids to take home. Additional ideas for involving the family can be found in the implementation section.



A Note on language

Early on in my conversations about creating this toolkit, I was advised that just the word mindfulness will turn some people off. The word elicits a connection to Buddhism, and some consider it “new age”. It was suggested that I call this toolkit “the resiliency and regulation toolkit”. Although I understand the rationale, altering the language felt inauthentic. Mindfulness is rooted in Buddhism. It's hard to layout the benefits of mindfulness without acknowledging what it actually is. Thus, I am proudly and strongly using the language of mindfulness. This may not be the case for you. You know your audience. If they won't respond well, call these resiliency practices, emotional regulation practices, or calming practices. All these practices can be implemented without acknowledging that they are mindfulness. Do what's best for you and your audience.

Trauma-informed mindfulness

Trauma is the lasting adverse effects on an individual's mental, physical, emotional, social and/or spiritual well-being resulting from a harmful event or circumstance.¹¹ Some aspects of mindfulness can be triggering for those who have experienced trauma—particularly meditation and some breathing practices.¹² Adapting traditional mindfulness practices with trauma-informed techniques helps to ensure that the practices are safe and effective for everyone.

Trauma-informed mindfulness looks like¹³:

- Voluntary practice. Never force anyone who is reluctant to practice
- Giving choice and agency. For example: “you can keep your eyes open, look down in front of you, or close your eyes...whatever feels most comfortable to you.”
- Adapting a practice if it doesn't work for someone. For example: making the practice shorter, taking a break, stopping it altogether

The practices included in this toolkit have been written with trauma-informed techniques in mind.

Types of practices



Breathing practices

When we practice mindful breathing, we practice bringing **attention** to our breath. Slow, deep breathing activates our parasympathetic nervous system. This relaxes our bodies, allows us to take in more oxygen, and slows our minds. The breathing practices in this toolkit include body movements. Movement makes the practice more fun and allows younger children who may not have great breath control to still participate. Breathing practices can be identified below with a blue breath symbol in the practice's top left-hand corner.



Grounding practices

Grounding practices are practices that bring us to the **present moment**. In these practices, children are asked to focus on their internal or external experiences. Grounding practices are useful in combating anxiety by bringing our attention to the present moment instead of thinking on the past or future. Grounding practices that focus on our external experience (like things we see or hear) are particularly useful for those who have experienced trauma as it does not require them to focus on their own internal sensations.¹⁴ Grounding practices can be identified below with a red sitting symbol in the top left-hand corner.



Emotion practices

Mindfulness asks us to bring attention to our emotions. This is not a strength for many children, particularly those younger than 6. Young children don't yet have the capacity to separate emotions from their thoughts or to embrace conflicting feelings, thoughts, and impulses. For this reason, I've included some practices that aren't strictly mindfulness, but can help children learn to identify their emotions. These practices utilize little ones' mirroring behaviors, love of play, keen imaginations, and tendency to personify and animate objects. Emotional practices can be identified below with green happy and sad faces in the top left-hand corner.



Songs

Also included in this toolkit are several songs. These songs are not practices, but rather tools to introduce different aspects of mindfulness. I've grouped each song with the type of practice with which it best aligns. You can identify songs below by looking for the black music notes in the top right-hand corner.

How to choose mindfulness practices

The following section will help you determine what practice(s) to use for your programming. Please note that the colors of the cells in the tables as well as the names of the practices below correspond to the type of practice.

Practices by target age

all ages	2+	3+	4+	5+	6+
breathe in & out: a song	hot chocolate breathing	rollercoaster breathing	gratitude	H.A.L.T.	body scan
shake break	count to three: a song	acting out emotions			
head, shoulders, knees, and toes	tense and release				
emotions song	balloon breathing				
	3 - 2 - 1				
	butterfly hug				
	mindful exploration				

Practices by approximate run-time

2 mins	3 mins	4 mins	5+ mins
rollercoaster breathing	count to three: a song	head, shoulders, knees, and toes	gratitude
hot chocolate breathing	shake break	mindful exploration	
tense and release	emotions song	body scan	
balloon breathing		acting out emotions	
breathe in & out: a song			
3 - 2 - 1			
butterfly hug			
H.A.L.T.			

Practices for specific situations

The included practices are appropriate for most types of scheduled formal group programming with a beginning and an end (e.g. school tours, gardening time, art making, music time, etc.). Although it is likely harder to implement these practices into 1-on-1 or drop-in programming, it can still be done. Some suggestions:

- Use **H.A.L.T.** when a kid is having a hard time. Help them identify the emotion and figure out how they can make themselves feel better

- Use any of the breathing techniques or the **Butterfly Hug** to help calm a kid when you see them begin to get agitated or even before a difficult task
- Use a modified **Body Scan** to ask kids to reflect on how an activity made them feel. “You said this made you feel frustrated. How did frustrated feel in your chest? How did it feel in your stomach?”
- Use a modified **Shake Break** after a difficult task. Ask the child to just shake their body for 10 seconds. **Butterfly Hugs** and **Tense and Release** can also be soothing
- Use **3-2-1** to prime a kid for a task that requires them to pay close attention
- KidsQuest Children’s Museum educators found that breathing practices were useful for regulation during programs where the adult wasn’t present to help regulate their child
- Breathing practices can provide helpful transitions between activities

Note: Several of the included practices incorporate scripts for teaching what mindfulness is, but not all. I’ve included a brief script for teaching mindfulness below.



Want more information?

More information on trauma-informed mindfulness (website & podcast)

Mindfulness resources for young children – including Alphabreaths activity guide for breath practices created by psychologists (webpage)

Additional practices from Space Between (pdf)

TedTalk with Christopher Willard – includes some activities and the science that informs mindfulness (video)




TEACHING MINDFULNESS TO KIDS

A quick script for teaching mindfulness to kids

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "Has anyone here ever heard of mindfulness? It means being right here, right now"
- 2 "We can practice mindfulness by paying attention to what is going on right now with kindness and curiosity."
- 3 "There are a lot of reasons to practice mindfulness. It can help us sleep better, make us feel less stress and negative feelings, and it can help us learn. Would you like to try a mindful practice with me?"



Point down with the pointer finger of your right hand when you say "right here" and with your left when you say "right now"

Modifications:

- Teach what mindfulness is **after** doing a mindfulness practice. "What we just did was mindfulness! We brought our attention to here and now. With practice we can learn to bring mindful attention to all sorts of things: our feelings, listening, eating, and more. During the next story see if you can listen mindfully. Really pay close attention."
- Elicit from kids how they can practice mindfulness
- Ask kids to define kindness and curiosity



BREATHE IN & OUT: A SONG



A song to the tune of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" that teaches children to breathe when experiencing strong emotions

potential programming: a song between activities. Can be used to reinforce a previously taught breathing practice

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: all ages

run time: 2 minutes

[Video of song](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "I would like to sing a song now. This song is about what we can do if we are feeling big emotions. If you'd like, you can help me with some of the movements! When I sing 'big breath in', you can try bringing your hands towards your face and taking a big breath!"
- 2 "When I sing 'big breath out', you can try bringing your hands back down and breathing out."
- 3 "When I sing 'soothe me', you can try bringing your arms around and giving yourself a hug"
- 4 Sing song

"When I'm feeling scared or sad
Worried, anxious, stressed or mad
All I have to do is Breathe
B-R-E-A-T-H-E
Big breath in and big breath out
B-R-E-A-T-H-E

When I'm feeling scared or sad
Worried, anxious, stressed or mad
All I have to do is Breathe
B-R-E-A-T-H-E
Big breath in and big breath out
B-R-E-A-T-H-E
Now I know how to soothe me
B-R-E-A-T-H-E"

Model bringing both hands towards your mouth and breathe in loudly

Model bringing both hands away from mouth and in front of body, breathing out

Model hugging self

Breathe loudly in and out

Modifications:

- If taught after a breathing technique, use the technique in the song (i.e. breathe in = smell hot chocolate)
- For older kids, add on more movements - including movements for the different feelings
- Ask kids "what can you do if you are having big emotions?"



HOT CHOCOLATE BREATHING

A breathing technique that allows kids to be imaginative while bringing awareness to their breath

potential programming: a good practice for the beginning of an activity or a transition between activities

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: 2+

run time: 2 minutes

[Video of technique](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

1 "Does anyone here love hot chocolate?"

2 "If you'd like, you can pretend to have some hot chocolate with me! Oh look! I have a warm cup of hot chocolate in my hands! I can feel how warm it is in my hands."

3 "I want to smell it! You can smell yours if you'd like. Just breathe in through your nose to smell."

4 "That smells sooo good! I think the hot chocolate might be too hot to drink though. How can we make it cool down?... Yes, blowing on it. Let's try that!"

5 "I think my hot chocolate will be ready to drink after 5 blows. I'm going to try smelling and blowing on my hot chocolate 5 times and if you'd like, you can join me!"

6 "Now it's ready to drink...Yum!"

Model raising hand

cup your hands around an invisible mug

Model a deep (and loud!) inhalation through your nose

Model a long breath out, breathing on the mug of hot chocolate

Breathe in and out 5 times as if you were smelling and blowing on hot chocolate

Modifications:

- 0-1's caregivers can help children "hold" their cups
- Help children focus more closely on their breath by suggesting that they can close their eyes if they feel comfortable doing so
- Let kids and caregivers know that doing hot chocolate breaths is a great way to relax our bodies - it works for both kids and adults!
- Give homework: suggest that the kids do some hot chocolate breaths before bed to help their bodies get ready for sleep



COUNT TO THREE: A SONG

A song to the tune of "This is the Way We Brush Our Teeth" that teaches children to breathe when experiencing strong emotions



potential programming: a song between activities

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: 2+

run time: 3 minutes

[Video of song](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "Sometimes I feel big feelings. Sometimes I feel sad or angry or even scared. Have you ever had a big feeling?" → Model raising hand
- 2 "One thing that helps to make me feel better when I have big feelings is taking a couple of deep breaths. When I'm feeling scared or maybe angry, I count to three and I breathe in for three." → Model breathing in deeply through your nose while using fingers to count to three. Then blowing out loudly as you open your hand.
- 3 "Sometimes it's hard to remember to breathe when I'm having big feelings. Thankfully, there is a song that can help us remember! During the song I'll raise my fingers to count to three. If you'd like, you can try breathing with me. When I raise my fingers we can breathe in through our noses and when I open my hand we can breathe out through our mouths. Would you like to try?" → Do one or two practice breaths with group
- 4 "Great job, everyone! Now let's sing!" **(song on next page)**



COUNT TO THREE: A SONG

A song to the tune of "this is the way we brush our teeth" that teaches children to breathe when experiencing strong emotions



5 Sing song

"This is the way I count to 3, count to 3, count to 3,
This is the way I count to 3 when I breathe

This is the way I count to 3, count to 3, count to 3,
This is the way I count to 3, will you breathe with me?

This is the way I count to 3, count to 3, count to 3,
This is the way I count to 3 when I'm feeling angry

This is the way I count to 3, count to 3, count to 3,
This is the way I count to 3 when I'm feeling sad

This is the way I count to 3, count to 3, count to 3,
This is the way I count to 3 when I'm feeling scared

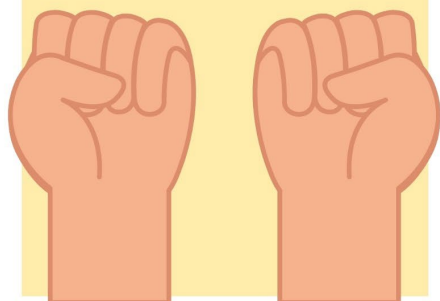
This is the way I count to 3, count to 3, count to 3,
This is the way I count to 3 when I breathe

Breathe in deeply through your nose while using fingers to count to three. Then blow out your mouth loudly as you open your hand.

Modifications:

- With older kids you can ask them to name big feelings to plug into the song. These can even be added as extra verses
- For older kids, add in movements for the different feelings. Maybe even elicit movements from them
- For younger kids don't worry about how they are breathing (in through nose, out through mouth). Just teach them to breathe to three.
- Ask kids "what can you do if you are having big emotions?" or "Do you have anything that makes you feel better when you are having big emotions?"
- Give homework: "You can do this at home! Why don't you take 2 deep breaths after brushing your teeth! Just remember to breath in for three counts"





TENSE AND RELEASE

A practice that teaches kids how to relax their muscles.
Helpful for relaxing when feeling anxious

potential programming: a good transition practice as well as a good practice for after an activity that was physical or difficult for the children

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: 2+

run time: 2 minutes

[Video of technique for a full body muscle relaxation](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

1 "Sometimes when I'm feeling a bit anxious, I like to practice breathing to help myself relax. I breathe in through my nose... and out through my mouth"

Model loudly breathing in your nose and out your mouth

2 "If you'd like, you can try breathing with me! I'm going to take 3 deep breaths. We'll try breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth."

Gesture to your nose and mouth

3 "Let's breathe in.....and out.....breathe in.....and out.....breathe in.....and out"

Do 3 loud deep breaths

4 "I'm already feeling more relaxed! I'm going to add in my hands. When I breathe in, I'm going to squeeze my fists. And when I breathe out, I'll open my hands and spread my fingers"

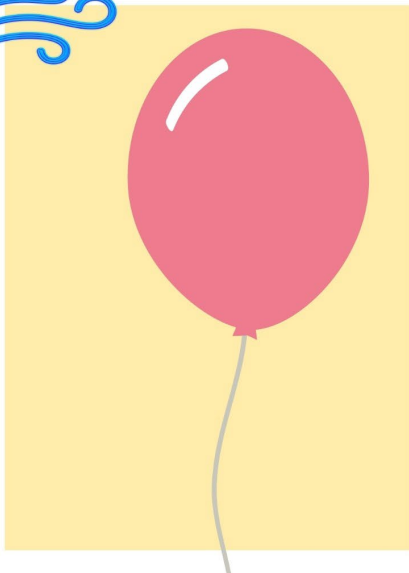
Demo hand movements

5 "If you'd like, you can join me. We'll try breathing three times, clenching and releasing our hands"

Breathe loudly through nose while clenching fists and loudly out through mouth while opening hands. Do this three times

Modifications:

- Before introducing, sing "Open Shut Them"
- For little kids jump right into the practice. Tense and release while breathing loudly. After they have joined in explain what you are doing
- Practice tensing and releasing a number of body parts with older kids: feet, legs, belly, shoulders, face. You only need to do one breath for each body part
- Help children focus more closely on their breath by suggesting that they can close their eyes if they feel comfortable doing so
- This can be a family activity! Family members can hold hands and squeeze when they breathe in



BALLOON BREATHING

A quick breathing technique to help kids calm their bodies and be a bit silly

potential programming: a good practice for the beginning of an activity or a transition between activities

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: 2+

run time: 2 minutes

[Video of technique](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

1 "When I need to relax I like to pretend like I'm a balloon being filled with my breaths"

2 "Breathing in, the balloon fills up with air"

3 "And breathing out, the air leaves the balloon"

4 "Sometimes I like to be a bit silly and make a sound like a balloon that is losing air"

5 "I'm going to do three balloon breaths. You can join me if you'd like. And you can choose breathing out normally or if you want, breathing out like a balloon!"

Place your hands interlaced to the top of your head

As you breathe in loudly, raise your arms above your head so that they form a circle

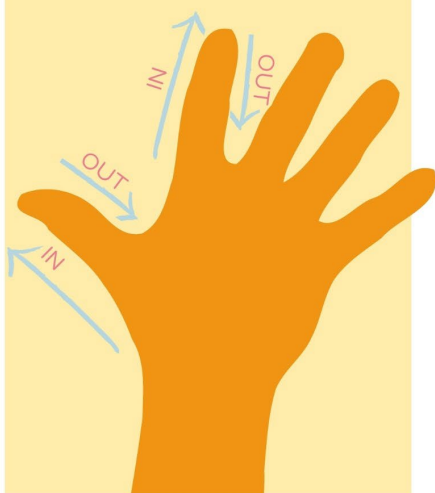
Breathe out loudly while bringing hands back on top of head

Demo balloon arm movements while blowing air out between closed lips

Do 3 balloon breaths however you'd like!

Modifications:

- With little kids, jump into the practice without explanation. Once they have mimicked your actions, you can explain how breathing can calm our bodies
- Introduce this technique by first talking about the lungs and how they fill with air like a balloon
- Help children focus more closely on their breath by suggesting that they can close their eyes if they feel comfortable doing so
- There are many different techniques for balloon breathing – including breathing with a hand over the tummy. Try out different techniques or give kids several different options for how to breathe
- Give homework – suggest that the kids teach the balloon breath to a friend or family member



ROLLERCOASTER BREATHING

A simple breathing technique to help kids calm their bodies and teach them emotional regulation

potential programming: a good practice for the beginning of an activity or a transition between activities, including story time, art-time, etc.

set up and materials: kids standing or seated comfortably. Handout if choose to use

target age: 3+

run time: 2 minutes

[Handout available](#)

[Video of technique](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "Who here has been on a rollercoaster before?"
- 2 "Rollercoasters go up and down, right?"
- 3 "If you would like, you can pretend your hand is a rollercoaster! Let's go up... and down...up...down"
- 4 "Sometimes when I'm feeling big emotions like scared or angry, I like to breathe like a rollercoaster, and it makes me feel better. Would you like to try as well? When we go up the finger, we can try breathing in. And when we go down the finger, we can try breathing out."
- 5 "Let's all do this together! We can take 5 breaths like a rollercoaster and then sit nicely"

Modifications:

- Older kids can do this for longer – when they get to the pinky finger then have them reverse (10 breaths total)
- Ask kids 6+ how this made them feel
- Ask kids 6+ what they do when they are feeling big emotions
- 0-1's caregivers can help with the tracing of the hands
- Let kids and caregivers know they can do this ANY time they have big emotions – it works for both kids and adults!

Model raising hand

Use the index finger from your dominant hand to trace along each finger of the opposite hand, going up the finger and then down it

Continue tracing, following your directions

Demo for 3 or 4 breaths, breathing slowly & loudly in and out.



SHAKE BREAK

A quick song to help ground children in their bodies. Shaking the body helps to release tension and trauma.



potential programming: a song between activities. Useful when seated for a long time or after a difficult task

set up and materials: kids standing or seated comfortably. Sufficient room between kids for them to be able to move. No materials needed

target age: all ages

run time: 3 minutes

[Video of song](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "I'd like to sing a song now that is a great song for when we've been sitting too long or when we are feeling a bit scared or anxious"
 - Mime being scared & anxious to help kids recognize what those emotions look like
- 2 "Did you know that shaking when we are scared or anxious can actually help us feel better? We can try it out with this song! You can join me by standing up or by sitting down. You can choose which is more comfortable to you"
 - Model shaking
- 3 "When I sing 'shake' we can all try shaking our bodies if we'd like to"
 - Model shaking
- 4 "When I sing 'jump' we can try jumping high in the air. If you'd prefer, you can instead try jumping your hands in the air"
 - Model both versions of jump.
- 5 "When I sing 'turn around' we can all try turning around. If you'd prefer, you could try twirling your finger around instead."
 - Model both versions of turn around
- 6 "Now that you all know the movements, let's get started!"
(song on next page)



SHAKE BREAK

A quick song to help ground children in their bodies. Shaking the body helps to release tension and trauma.



5 Sing song

"Shake, shake
Everybody shake now

Jump, jump, jump
Jump off the ground now

Shake, shake
Everybody shake now

Jump, jump, jump
Jump off the ground now
And turn around

Shake, shake
Jump, jump, jump

Shake, shake
Jump, jump, jump

Shake, shake, shake
Jump, jump, j-jump

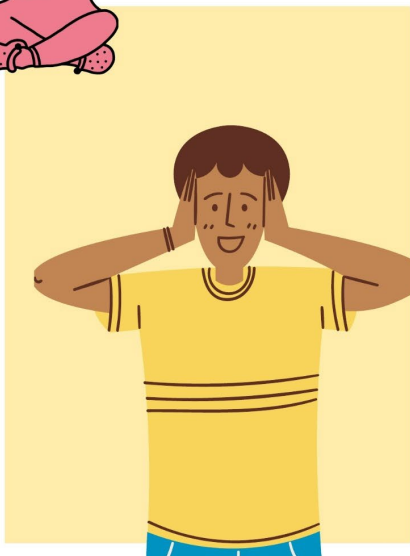
Shake, shake, shake, shake, shake
Jump, jump, jump, jump, jump
Turn around"

Do actions as you sing



Modifications:

- After the song, have the kids sit down and shake out their bodies for 10 seconds. Ask them how it made them feel.
- After shaking, practice settling. Have the kids sit and ask them to let their head settle (or soften), let their shoulders settle, let their chest settle, let their legs settle, let their feet settle. Take a couple of deep breaths together.



HEAD SHOULDERS KNEES AND TOES

A classic kid's song, done mindfully. Teaches the concept of mindfulness



potential programming: a song between activities. Can be used to teach the concept of mindfulness before introducing a practice

set up and materials: kids standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: all ages

run time: 4-5 minutes

[Video of song](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

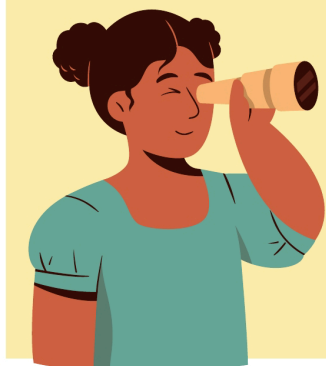
- 1 Sing "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" as you normally do
- 2 "Now I'd like to sing the song again, but this time I'll sing it slowly and with mindfulness! What is mindfulness? It means being right here, right now"
- 3 "We can practice mindfulness by paying attention to what is going on right now. Next time I sing the song, when I touch a body part I'm going to ask myself 'How does that feel?' When I touch my head I'll ask myself 'How does that feel? Does my head feel comfortable? Does it feel tight or stiff? Can I feel my fingers on my head?'"
- 4 "When I touch my shoulders I'll ask the same questions: "How do my shoulders feel? Are they tight? Are they loose? Can I feel my fingers on my shoulders? Can I feel my shirt on shoulders?"
- 5 "How do my knees feel? Are they tight or loose? Can I feel my pants against them? How about my fingers?"
- 6 "How about my toes? Can I feel my fingers on my toes? Can I feel the ground under them? Do they feel tight? Do they feel loose?"
- 7 "As I sing about each body part I'm going to pause and really think about how each part feels. If you'd like, you can join me."
- 8 Sing song, very slowly

Point down with the pointer finger of your right hand when say "right here" and with your left when say "right now"

As you talk about each body part, bring your hands to that body part and leave them there as you ask your series of questions

Modifications:

- Pair song with 3-2-1 practice ("Now that we've paid attention to our bodies, let's pay attention to the world around us!")
- Have them first wiggle the body part ("wiggle your toes!")
- Follow with your observations. "I didn't realize before, but my shoulders are feeling a bit tight today!"



3-2-1

A grounding practice to help bring attention to the present moment

potential programming: a good practice prior to science programming & activities where children should pay attention

set up and materials: everyone seated comfortably. Copies of handout if you choose to use them

target age: 2+

run time: 2 minutes

[Video of the longer version of this practice](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "I want to tell you about mindfulness. It means being right here. Right now"
- 2 "One way we can practice mindfulness is by paying attention to what is going on around us. I'd like to play a little mindfulness game. This game can help us feel better anytime we feel anxious and it teaches us how to pay attention. Also it's fun to notice new things! You can join me if you'd like!"
- 3 "For this game we'll try sitting however feels comfortable. I'll ask some questions and you can try answering them in your mind. From where you are sitting, what are 3 things you can see right now? Look closely at those 3 things. Notice all the different colors and textures."
- 4 "Now you can answer in your mind: what are 2 things you are hearing right now? Maybe you can hear other kids playing or cars driving nearby. Really listen for what you can hear."
- 5 "Now you can answer in your mind: what is 1 thing you can feel right now? Maybe it's the ground under your body or your hair touching your face. What's one thing you can feel?"

Point down with the pointer finger of your your right hand when say "right here" and with your left when say "right now"

Can give them some examples of what you can see

Pause for a couple of seconds to let them listen

Gesture to where you feel these things

Modifications:

- Introduce activity by saying we are going to be like scientists ("let's put on our imaginary lab coats!"), using our senses to explore the world. Then elicit senses from kids.
- With older children, you can do the practice involving all senses from the video or ask them to identify more things they can see, hear, and feel.
- If short on time, shorten the practice to 1-1-1 or see-hear-feel
- Have kids shout out their answers or go around the circle eliciting them
- Ask students to find as many red things as they can from their spot in 10 seconds. Ask them how many they found

mindfulness

Is all about checking in, not checking out

Try checking in with your senses

3



What are 3 things you can see?

2



What are 2 things you can hear?

1



What is 1 thing you can feel?

You can do this anywhere at anytime! Where will you try this?

mindfulness

Is all about checking in, not checking out

Try checking in with your senses

3



What are 3 things you can see?

2



What are 2 things you can hear?

1



What is 1 thing you can feel?

You can do this anywhere at anytime! Where will you try this?



BUTTERFLY HUG

A simple grounding technique to help children self-soothe

potential programming: a transition practice or a practice after a difficult activity

set up and materials: kids standing or seated comfortably. Handouts if you choose to use them

target age: 2+

run time: 2 minutes

[Video of technique](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "We all feel big feelings sometimes, even adults. When I'm having strong feelings and need to soothe myself I like giving myself butterfly hugs"
- 2 "There are a lot of ways to do butterfly hugs. You can do it by crossing your thumbs and tapping your hands on your chest. Or you can do it by bringing your hands across your body and tapping your arms. Or if you'd prefer, you can have your hands on your knees or legs and try tapping there."
- 3 "If you'd like to, join me in doing butterfly hugs. Take a moment to decide which of the ways feels best to you."
- 4 "Once you've figured out what is most comfortable, you can leave your hands there and we can try breathing in deeply all together. Breathing in.....and out...."
- 5 "Nice. Now we can start tapping. Try tapping one hand then the other. You can tap gently or you can tap a bit harder – it's whatever feels best to you. Let's do this for 30 seconds"
- 6 "If you'd like, you can now let your hands rest and take one more deep breath in and out."

Model all potential ways to give butterfly hugs. See video for one great way to teach this technique

Model a loud deep breath in and out

Give yourself some butterfly hugs!

Model a loud deep breath in and out

Modifications:

- Add in a positive affirmation like "I'm strong", "I will do great things today," "I am kind," "I am a good friend", or "I am calm"
- Suggest kids may close their eyes when doing the butterfly hugs
- Remind kids and adults that this is a great technique for everyone and can be done anywhere at anytime for however long it feels comfortable to do.

mindfulness

Can help kids and adults self-soothe



Try giving yourself butterfly hugs

- 1** Cross your arms and place your hands on your chest, on your opposite arms, or on your knees
- 2** Tap! Alternate tapping with one hand then the other
- 3** Continue tapping until you feel calmer



Give this a try next time you are feeling anxious!

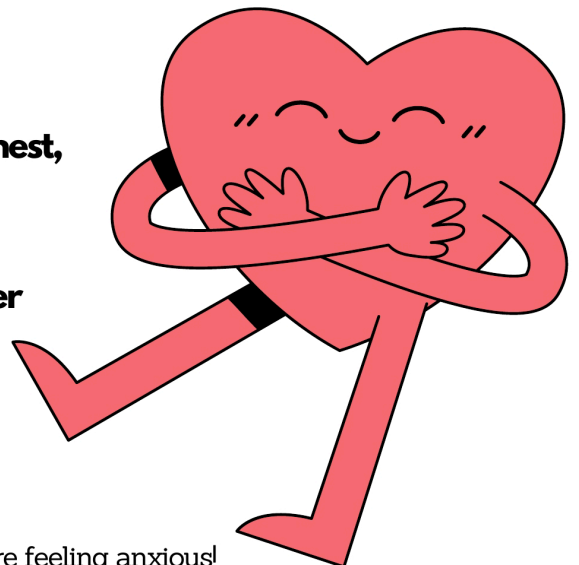
mindfulness

Can help kids and adults self-soothe

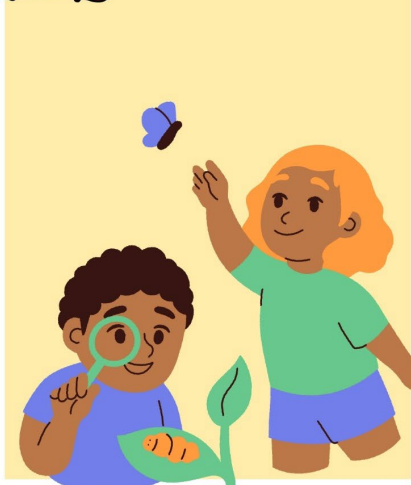


Try giving yourself butterfly hugs

- 1** Cross your arms and place your hands on your chest, on your opposite arms, or on your knees
- 2** Tap! Alternate tapping with one hand then the other
- 3** Continue tapping until you feel calmer



Give this a try next time you are feeling anxious!



MINDFUL EXPLORATION

An observation activity that helps children pay attention to small details.

potential programming: a good practice prior to science programming & activities where children should pay attention

set up and materials: everyone seated comfortably. Object(s) for the kids to explore

target age: 2+

run time: 4 minutes

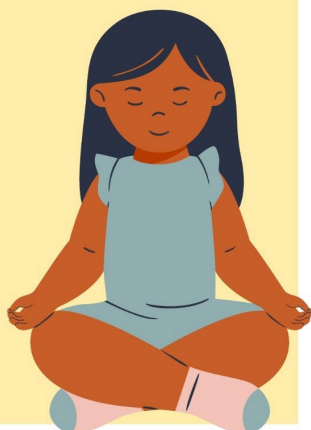
[Audio of technique](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 For a small group, present one small neutral object (nothing that is likely to elicit strong emotions). For larger groups, you may want one object per child
- 2 "Without touching this object, I'd like us all to look at it. Let's explore it with our eyes! In our minds we can ask ourselves: 'What does the surface look like? Is it shiny or dull? Does it look rough or soft? What color is it?' Let's be silent and look really closely for 10 seconds."
- 3 "Now we can explore it with touch. You may want to close your eyes when you do this. How does it feel? Notice the temperature – is it hot or cold? Notice how heavy it is and what the surface feels like. Notice if it is hard or if it bends. Everyone will get a chance to touch the object for 10 seconds. Notice everything you can while you are touching it!"
- 4 "Did anyone notice anything that they thought was surprising or unexpected? Sometimes when we bring close attention to the world we can see it in a different way!"

Modifications:

- Pair with storytime by presenting objects that relate to the story
- If the object makes noise or has a scent, add those explorations
- For younger kids, make this a sorting activity. Have them observe several objects and then ask the kids to find different ways to sort them
- Use this activity to introduce a novel item. Have them observe it closely before asking them what it may be
- Choose an object that kids have seen many times. Ask them to notice 1 thing they have never noticed before about the object
- Present several objects that are similar with subtle differences (e.g. different types of flowers). Ask them how they are similar and how they are different
- Use as a jumping off point to have a conversation about how two people can see the same thing in different ways
- Give homework. Ask the kids to pay close attention to an object at home. Maybe they can notice something new about it!



BODY SCAN

A meditation practice that helps kids tune into their body and notice sensations

potential programming: a good practice after an activity or story to help children better understand how the activity made them feel

set up and materials: everyone seated comfortably

target age: 6+

run time: 4 minutes

[Video of a longer version of this practice](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "Has anyone here ever meditated? One great way to meditate is by doing a body scan. Body scans can help us feel less stress, have better sleep, and make us feel relaxed. I'll lead you through a body scan. If you'd like to join, we'll begin by making ourselves comfortable. You can sit however you'd like. Your hands can be in your lap or by your sides. And you can have your eyes open or closed. Whatever feels most comfortable. If at any point you want to stop meditating, that's fine too."
- 2 "Let's all take 3 long, slow, deep breaths. Breathing in fully through our nose and then slowly blowing out through our mouths."
- 3 "Let's start by bringing our attention to our head and face. Observe all the sensations there. Notice the movement of the air through your nostrils or mouth as you are breathing. Notice if your teeth are clenched. See if you can soften your face and soften your jaw.

When you are ready, move your attention to your chest. Notice with kindness and curiosity what is going on there. Notice your heartbeat and how your chest rises during the inhale and how it falls during the exhale. Maybe it feels tight. That's okay.

Next, move down to your feet. Notice the sensations there. How do they feel? Just notice. Now notice your whole body from your head down to your feet. Take another deep breath and when you are ready, you can open your eyes."

Demo all the suggested ways that one can position their body for the practice

Do 3 audible deep breaths

Modifications:

- Ask kids what meditation is
- Focus on additional body parts - legs, arms, shoulders, etc.
- Give more descriptors of how body parts may feel (is it tight? sore? relaxed? etc.).
- Ask kids when they think this may be useful to practice
- Homework: suggest kids practice a body scan at bedtime to help themselves relax



EMOTIONS SONG

A classic song that helps kids recognize how their emotions affect their bodies and gives them a chance to act them out



potential programming: a fun song to use before or after a story or a conversation about emotions

set up and materials: kids standing or seated comfortably. No Materials needed

target age: all ages

run time: 3 minutes

[Video of song](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "I'd like to sing a song with you, but before we start, I'd like to talk a little bit about our feelings. Does anyone know any feelings or emotions?"
- 2 "What does that feeling look like on your face? How does it look in your body?"
- 3 "What other feelings are there?"
- 4 "Now that we know some feelings and how they look in our bodies, let's sing our song! We'll have a chance to act out the different feelings! If you'd like, you can join me!" **(song on next page)**

Elicit from kids

If there is space, you can have all the children act out the feeling

Continue eliciting emotions and how they look as many times as you'd like

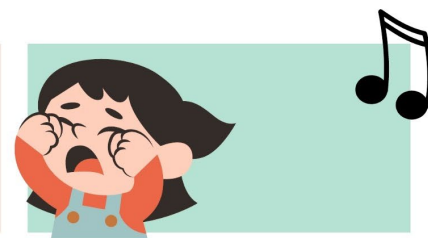
Modifications:

- Change the lyrics/movements to match how the kids said the emotions look
- Before moving to another emotion in the song ask the kids "What do you do when you are tired?" or "How does tired look?"
- Add more emotions and movements for older kids
- Explain to the kids that sometimes we can feel emotions in our bodies before we recognize them. And that by taking a moment to feel our bodies and feel our emotions we can choose what we decide to do with those emotions.
- Pair with the "Acting Out Emotions" practice. Teach the song first, read a book or tell a story, then ask the kids to act out the emotions experienced by the character(s)
- Tailor to younger kids by teaching them emotions and movements instead of eliciting them



EMOTIONS SONG

A classic song that helps kids recognize how their emotions affect their bodies and gives them a chance to act them out



5 Sing song

"If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands (clap clap)
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands (clap clap)
If you're happy and you know it, and you really want to show it
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands. (clap clap)

If you're sad and you know it, rub your eyes (boo hoo)
If you're sad and you know it, rub your eyes (boo hoo)
If you're sad and you know it, and you really want to show it
If you're sad and you know it, rub your eyes (boo hoo)

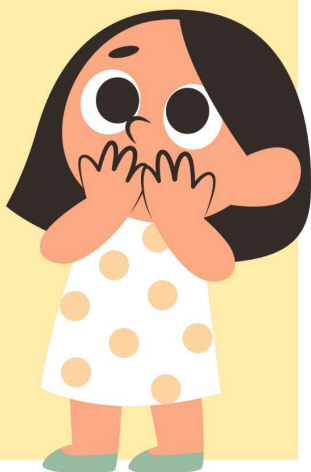
If you're scared and you know it, hide your eyes (oh no!)
If you're scared and you know it, hide your eyes (oh no!)
If you're scared and you know it, and you really want to show it
If you're scared and you know it, hide your eyes (oh no!)

If you're tired and you know it, give a yawn
If you're tired and you know it, give a yawn
If you're tired and you know it, and you really want to show it
If you're tired and you know it, give a yawn

If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet
If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet
If you're angry and you know it, and you really want to show it
If you're angry and you know it, stomp your feet"

Do actions as you sing





ACTING OUT EMOTIONS

A fun way to help children identify emotions and learn how different emotions feel in their bodies

potential programming: a good practice after reading a book or telling any story that has characters

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. No materials needed

target age: 3+

run time: 3-5 minutes

Based off of an activity in: [Teaching](#)

[Mindfulness Skills to Kids and Teens](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "How did **(character)** feel during this story?"
- 2 "Yea, they felt **(sad)**. What does **(sad)** look like? What does it look like on your face? What does it look like in your body? Can anyone show me? If you want you can stand up to act sad."
- 3 "Wow. You sure look **(sad)**. Everyone, can we all look sad too?"
- 4 "What other feelings can someone feel?"

Modifications:

- Ask kids to reflect on what happened when they pretended to feel a feeling
- Can have kids walk around with the emotions - "take a lap around the circle looking sad"
- If the book or story doesn't make it clear how the character felt, ask "how would you feel in that situation?"
- If emotions change over the course of the story, ask kids how the character felt when **(x)** happened. How did they feel at **(y)**?
- Ask different questions to lead to the same activity. i.e. "This book is about frogs. Where do frogs live? Let's all imagine we are there. What else lives there? Can you see the **(bug)**? What color is the **(bug)**? How does it feel? What kind of emotion does it have? What would a **(blue sad bug)** look like?"

Call on child. If no one volunteers, prompt them to answer

Gesture to someone who is making a good sad face. Then copy it.

Elicit emotion and have kids act it out again. Repeat as many times as you'd like





GRATITUDE

Practicing gratitude can make us happier and healthier.¹⁷ This activity helps children identify things they are grateful for.

potential programming: a good way to end a program. Can be paired with a book where a character feels grateful to aid in learning

set up and materials: everyone standing or seated comfortably. Handout needed.

target age: 4+

run time: 5+ minutes

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "I'd like to talk to you about gratitude. Gratitude is another way of saying thankful. So when I feel gratitude, I'm feeling thankful for something. The cool thing about feeling grateful is it can actually make you feel happier!"
- 2 "I'd like for us all to think about something that makes us feel gratitude. What is something or maybe someone who makes us feel happy when we think about them? You can even look around the room and find something you are feeling thankful for!"
- 3 "Another way to think of gratitude is like a gift. It's something special that brings a smile to our faces. This handout has some empty gift boxes for us to fill in. If you'd like, you can write or draw something you are grateful for in each of the boxes." **Pass out handouts and give children several minutes to complete**
- 4 "Great job everyone. I see that we are all so grateful for so many things! As I mentioned, feeling grateful can make us happier. So next time you are feeling sad, remember you have a superpower - you can make yourself feel better. Remember to think of a couple of things that you are thankful for. You can even put your gift boxes on the fridge or maybe on your wall so that you can see it when you are feeling down."

Modifications:

- Tie this activity to a story. i.e. "Did the pig feel grateful? What was she grateful for?"
- After activity elicit several things that the children are grateful for
- Use this activity to reflect on a program - "what is something during our time together that made you feel grateful?"
- Give homework: suggest that families practice gratitude by starting a family tradition where each person says something they are grateful for - maybe before dinner or bedtime

mindfulness

Can help us feel more gratitude

Draw or write something you are grateful for in the gift boxes below



When you feel down, remembering things you are grateful for can make you feel better again

mindfulness

Can help us feel more gratitude

Draw or write something you are grateful for in the gift boxes below



When you feel down, remembering things you are grateful for can make you feel better again



H.A.L.T.

A simple technique to help kids and families to stop and identify why the child may be emotional

potential programming: a good practice before reading a book. Afterwards you can ask children to try HALT and identify what was going on with the character

set up and materials: kids standing or seated comfortably. Handouts if using

target age: 5+

run time: 2 minutes

[Video explaining technique with science explained](#)

STEPS TO TEACH:

- 1 "Do you know what halt means? It means stop."
- 2 "Sometimes we have big feelings. When we are feeling emotional or upset it is helpful to remember to H.A.L.T. Halting can help us figure out WHY we are feeling emotional. It's even helpful for adults to do this too!"
- 3 "When we halt we can ask ourselves: what is going on? The letters from H.A.L.T. can help us ask some more questions"
- 4 "H is for hungry. Am I feeling hungry? When did I last eat? If your body is asking for food, then you should find something to eat."
- 5 "A is for angry or anxious. Is anything making me feel angry? Is anything making me feel anxious? If you are feeling this way ask yourself why and find a way to make yourself feel better."
- 6 "L is for lonely. Am I feeling lonely? When was the last time I talked to someone? Am I feeling left out? If you are feeling lonely reach out to a trusted friend or adult and let them know."
- 7 "T is for tired. Have I been getting enough rest? Do I need a break? If you are feeling tired, take some time to relax."
- 8 "Next time you are having big feelings, remember to H.A.L.T. so that you can figure out why the big feelings are happening."

Hold hand out in front of you to show stop

Modifications:

- Ask kids what things they can do to make themselves feel better when angry or anxious
- Follow this activity with a breathing practice - let kids know they can breathe when anxious/angry
- After reading a book ask the kids to H.A.L.T. Was the character hungry?. Angry?... etc.
- For younger kids, give them the handout and ask them to point to how the character was feeling
- Elicit from kids things that make them feel lonely or tired and what they can do about that

mindfulness

Can help us better understand our emotions

Next time you are feeling emotional, remember to **H.A.L.T.**



H is for Hungry. Are you feeling hungry? If your body is asking for food, find something nutritious to eat!

A is for angry or anxious. Is anything making you feel angry or anxious? Why? Find a way to make yourself feel better.



L is for lonely. Are you feeling lonely? If you feel lonely reach out to a friend or adult and let them know.

T is for tired. Did you get enough rest? If you are feeling tired, take a break.



mindfulness

Can help us better understand our emotions

Next time you are feeling emotional, remember to **H.A.L.T.**



H is for Hungry. Are you feeling hungry? If your body is asking for food, find something nutritious to eat!

A is for angry or anxious. Is anything making you feel angry or anxious? Why? Find a way to make yourself feel better.



L is for lonely. Are you feeling lonely? If you feel lonely reach out to a friend or adult and let them know.

T is for tired. Did you get enough rest? If you are feeling tired, take a break.



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Implementing Mindfulness

How to lead mindfulness practices

As you start to experiment with the different practices from the previous section, you'll likely learn what works best for you, your visitors, and your museum. Here are several suggestions on how to lead these practices:

Prior to practice

- Rehearse the practices before doing them. Maybe even lead your coworkers through a practice
- Let kids know what is going to happen before you start the practice (e.g. "we will do 5 breaths together")
- Prepare the room. Make sure there is space for everyone to be comfortable
- Clear the space of as many distractions as possible. It is best to practice mindfulness with few distractions. That said, children's museums are not always distraction-free; so make the distractions a part of the practice (e.g. have kids listen for noises going on around them)
- Get everyone comfortable. Let kids and caregivers know they can exist in the space anyway they find comfortable (lying down, seated, standing, etc.)

During practice

- Speak at a slower than normal pace
- Use a calm, gentle, and inviting tone
- Take frequent pauses. This allows the kids to experience what you are asking them to experience
- Join in on the practice. Not only are you modeling the behavior, you will likely also benefit from the practice
- Use inviting language. For example, using the present participle 'ing' instead of the imperative (e.g. "breathing in" vs. "breathe in")¹⁶

After practice

- Ask kids and caregivers to reflect on the experience



How integration may look - Storytime

Storytime (ages under 6):

- Welcome song
- Read book
- Introduce **Hot Chocolate Breaths**
- Sing **Count to Three** using hot chocolate breaths
- Read book
- Have kids **Act Out** character emotions
- Ask kids what the character could have done to manage their emotions
- Goodbye song

Storytime (ages 6+):

- Welcome song
- Read book
- Introduce **H.A.L.T.** ("if the character remembered to H.A.L.T. what might they have learned?". Talk about how emotions can often be felt in the body)
- Read book
- Do a **Body Scan** ("Remember how we can sometimes feel emotions in our bodies? Let's see how our bodies feel after that story!")
- Goodbye song

How to shift from chaos to mindfulness

- **Jump right into the practice without giving any background information.** This is especially effective with little kids. Once they are all mimicking you, then you can explain the “why” of the practice. This works particularly well for breathing practices, **Butterfly Hugs**, and the songs.
- **Use their energy.** If the kids have a lot of energy, have them use it.
 - **Take a Shake Break!**
 - **Go for a walk.** Do a walking **3-2-1**. Take the group on a walk and ask questions about what they notice. Along the walk you can even ask them to pick up interesting objects so that upon returning to the programming space they can practice **Mindful Exploration**
- **Get their attention.** Anything that will draw the children’s attention will help them practice mindfulness. Maybe you put on some music, start blowing bubbles, or bring out an object they’ve never seen before. Follow up the attention-getting with some questions: “How does this music make you feel? Where do you feel it?”; “What colors do you see in the bubble? How long do you think it will float before it pops?”; “What are some things you notice about this object? How might people use it?”
- **Make mindfulness a game.** E.g., set up a competition where the first person to write down 10 blue things they see is the winner. Or have a “silent walking” competition where peers rate others on how quietly they walk from point A to point B. Play a game where everyone sits quietly and listens to sounds and then guesses what is making the noise. Or fill a cup with water and as a team, the cup is passed around the circle without spilling any water. If they can do this with their eyes open, try it with eyes closed!

How to modify mindfulness practices

Throughout the practices I’ve included several modification suggestions. Ultimately, these practices are very adaptable by making tweaks that are still **in alignment with the goal of the practice**. All included practices have the intent of helping children bring attention to their breath, to their external experience, or to their internal experience.

3-2-1 is a practice that brings attention to a kid’s external experience – the things they can see, hear, and feel. We can modify this by focusing on a single sense, while still accomplishing the goal of bringing their attention to the present moment:



- For sight, ask kids to find as many examples as possible of a particular shape, color, or specimen during a tour or while reading a book.



- Focusing on hearing helps participants slow down and become aware of everyday things they might be missing. “Let’s sit quietly for 20 seconds and count how many different sounds we can hear!” Alternatively, have children on a tour practice mindful walking. Have them walk as silently as possible so that they can listen to their surroundings.



- To help kids explore the sense of touch, ask them to focus on a body part: “let’s focus on our face – can you feel the air against your skin? How about your hair?” Or ask them to feel an object with their eyes closed and guess what it may be.



- If the school group brings snacks, make it a part of the programming. Ask the kids to take the first three bites mindfully: first by smelling the food deeply, then slowly

taking a bite, and then letting the food rest on their tongue. Have them examine where on the tongue they taste the food before swallowing.

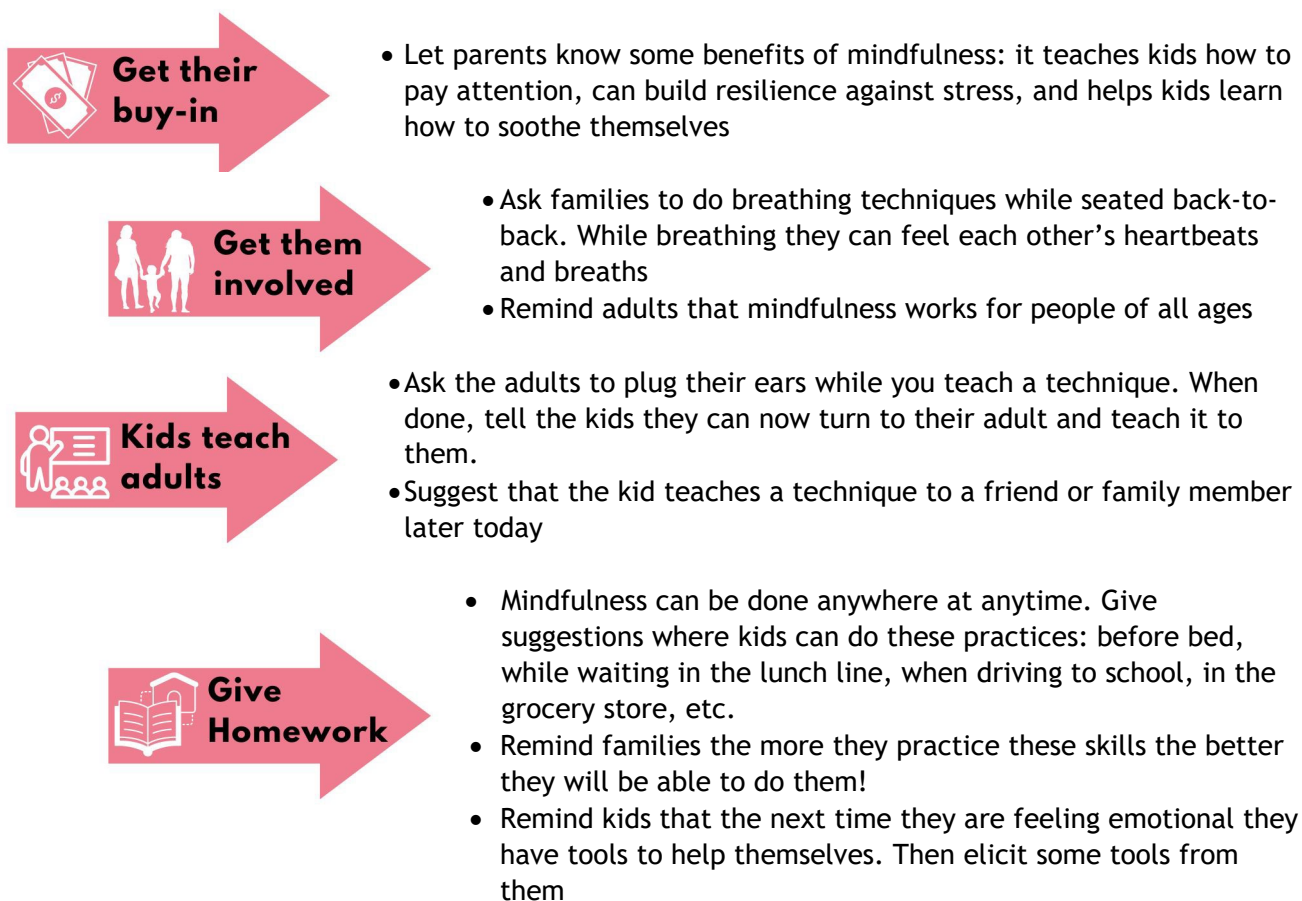
With older kids, you can modify practices by **giving the kids agency**. You can teach a breathing technique or two and ask kids if they can think of any other ways that they could practice breathing. A good book to lay the groundwork and to get kids thinking creatively about different breathing techniques is *Alphabreaths: The ABCs of Mindful Breathing*.¹⁷



Above all else: do what works for you and your audience. You don't need to do the entire practice. Take the elements that work for you. For educators who teach reoccurring classes, you may want to build up to the entire practice over time, introducing a new aspect of the practice each time you meet.

How to engage caregivers

It's important to get caregivers involved in the learning. So how can you do this?



¹⁶ Weare, K. & Bethune, A. (2021). *Implementing Mindfulness in Schools: An Evidence-Based Guide*. The Mindfulness Initiative. <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/sinschools-vfinal-digital.pdf>

¹⁷ Willard, C. & Rechtschaffen, D. (2019). *Alphabreaths: The ABCs of Mindful Breathing*. Sounds True

Why Mindfulness?

As mentioned in the “What is Mindfulness?” section, there are many benefits to practicing mindfulness, which have been demonstrated through psychological studies and clinical practice. In addition to stress reduction and decreased emotional reactivity, other benefits include increased relationship satisfaction, enhanced morality, reduced rumination (obsessive, repetitive thoughts), improved sleep, decreased cognitive decline, and reduced implicit age and race bias.¹⁸¹⁹²⁰

As this toolkit is written for museum practitioners, the intent of this toolkit is to support and elevate what museums are already doing. In that respect, mindfulness is particularly well suited to support the well-being and learning already happening within museums. Below we will examine what museums are already doing in these regards and how mindfulness can play a role.

Well-being

Museum Context. Over the course of the past decade or so, many museums have developed programming aimed at increasing health and well-being. Such programs include creative workshops, loan boxes, art therapy, and more. Research on such programs shows that museums can have a myriad of health and well-being benefits for visitors.²¹ With this research, many museums have begun to embrace the role that they can play in their visitors’ well-being.

Mindfulness Benefits. Practicing mindfulness has been shown to significantly improve both chronic pain and pain-related distress.²² Mindfulness can also reduce blood pressure and improve the body’s immune response.²³²⁴ Likewise, mindfulness practice has been found to be particularly impactful on mental health by reducing stress, mood disturbance, depression, negative thoughts and feelings, and increasing well-being.²⁵



Learning

Museum Context. Museums are sites of learning.²⁶ Children’s museums in particular are sites of social emotional learning.²⁷ Through play, visitors can learn and develop a number of skills including motor development, spatial awareness and coordination, creativity, problem-solving, and language skills.²⁸

Mindfulness Benefits. Mindfulness has been shown to impact learning. Research shows that students from schools with mindfulness practices show improvements in self-esteem, emotional regulation, social skills, academic skills, attention, working memory, and have greater learning outcomes.²⁹³⁰ Likewise, mindfulness improves self-regulation which in turn leads to higher academic achievement and executive functioning.³¹ Mindfulness-informed interventions have been successfully used with students who have learning disabilities to reduce “challenging behaviors” and increase the social benefits of group participation.³²



In sum, practicing mindfulness leads to greater learning outcomes and greater well-being. Bringing mindfulness into the museum can support and enhance the well-being and learning efforts in which museums are already engaged.

Mindfulness & You

The benefits laid out above have no age limit. Educators will experience benefits just as their students do. Furthermore, research suggests that teachers who practice mindfulness positively impact their students' well-being and learning.³³ Teachers who practice mindfulness report more adaptive strategies for coping with job stress and a tendency to evaluate challenging students more positively.³⁴ Suggestions on how readers can develop their own practice can be found in the "Want More Information?" box below.



Want more information?

Articles on mindfulness benefits:

10 Areas that Mindfulness & Meditation Make Us Better (webpage)

6 Scientifically Proven Benefits of Mindfulness And Meditation (webpage)

Getting started with your own practice:

How to get started with practicing mindfulness (webpage)

5 ways to get started with mindfulness (webpage)

Insight Timer - a free meditation app and website (website)

Zero to Three's toolkit for early childhood organizations to implement mindfulness (webpage)

¹⁸ Davis, D. M & Hayes, J. A. (2012, July/August). What are the benefits of mindfulness? American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/07-08/ce-corner>

¹⁹ Cassata, C. (June 8, 2021). 10 Areas That Mindfulness & Meditation Make Us Better. PsychCentral. <https://psychcentral.com/blog/surprising-health-benefits-of-mindfulness-meditation>

²⁰ Lueke, A., & Gibson, B. (2015). Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Implicit Age and Race Bias: The Role of Reduced Automaticity of Responding. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6(3), 284-291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614559651>

²¹ Lackoi, K., Patsou, M., & Chatterjee, H. et al. (2016). *A Preliminary Report from the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Well-being*. Museums for Health and Well-being.

²² Ball, E. F., Nur Shafina Muhammad Sharizan, E., Franklin, G., & Rogozinska, E. (2017). Does mindfulness meditation improve chronic pain? A systematic review. *Current Opinion in Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 29(6), 359-366. <https://doi.org/10.1097/GCO.0000000000000417>

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