

Mindful Work

Mindfulness exercises for kids

This section includes some mindful practices for carers to use with their children.

Looking after children and young people who have been in the care system can be challenging, and requires plenty of emotional resilience. That's why this course gives you tools and practices that will help you be in the best place to meet those challenges.

Here we will be practicing some of the core mindfulness exercises in a child friendly way so that you can share what you are learning with the whole family.

Why mindfulness is particularly useful for looked after children

Children who have experienced an unsettled childhood through abuse, neglect or trauma will have significantly higher anxiety levels. This affects their brain development in the areas that regulate emotions, decision making and memory. The amygdala, the area of the brain responsible for emotions and reacts to fear can be enlarged in children who have experienced trauma, which means they can be more sensitive, anxious and impulsive. The pre-frontal cortex, the area of the brain responsible for logical decision making, thinking through consequences, controlling impulses and soothing us is not fully developed in most people until our mid 20's. However, in children who have experienced trauma this area could be more under developed than in other children or teens.

Research shows that practicing mindfulness can help to calm down the activity in the amygdala, and strengthen the pre-frontal cortex, which can help children gain greater awareness of their emotions and have better skills to regulate them.

The videos

The videos can be watched with your children and are simple short exercises that you can practice together. You may want to watch them alone at first, so that you become familiar with them and then feel confident to practice them with your children. Every child is different and will relate to some exercises more than others depending on their age, interests and background. So try them out, keep it light and have fun.

The 3/5 breathing exercise

This can be used when your child is worrying, feeling stressed, anxious or can't sleep. It's best to start practicing it at a time when they are already relaxed until it becomes familiar. Then they will be able to access it in times of stress. Their breath is something they can always come back to, when their minds are really full.

Body awareness exercise

Sometimes children can be so wound up that they can't put it into words and they feel like they are going to explode (maybe they do explode!). Helping them to notice what is happening in their bodies can be useful for them to acknowledge it and then be able to practice letting it go physically. Again, with this one start by practicing it when they are calm. Get them to think of a time where they were

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really angry, upset or tense. See if they can remember what it felt like in their body and then squeeze and tense the body tightly, and let it go, breathe out and relax.

Also the exercise of getting them to notice how their heart rate and breathing slows down after they have been moving around teaches them that our feelings, no matter how horrible they are, always change and go away.

Communication and expressing feelings

It can be hard sometimes for children to put how they feel into words. They may not have had trusted adults to talk to and are reluctant to open up about their thoughts and feelings. This exercise is a safe way for them to let go of whatever is on their mind without the fear of being judged or upsetting anyone. You could buy them a journal to do a 'brain dump' or bits of paper that they can burn or shred, just somewhere private they can write or draw and know nobody will see it. If there are things they want to say to you but would rather write it down you could make a box where they can post notes.

Kindness, gratitude and celebrating the good stuff

Children can often be very hard on themselves and self-critical, this can add to low self-esteem and negative thinking. Unfortunately, our brains are wired to look for the bad stuff as a way to protect us from danger. So we all need to practice celebrating the good stuff to bring us back into balance. The activities in this video are a great way for you to connect with each other and really celebrate the good things you are doing even when life is hard. Make time for this one as it can really transform the relationships in your home.

Fun mindful exercises

These are some fun, creative ways that kids can be naturally mindful and curious.

- Blowing bubbles
- Making a glitter jar
- Mindful eating

Other resources

<https://www.relaxkids.com/>

<https://blissfulkids.com/>

'Blame my brain. The amazing teenage brain revealed' by Nicola Morgan

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Blame-My-Brain-Amazing-](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Blame-My-Brain-Amazing-Revealed/dp/1406346934/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1549477363&sr=8-1&keywords=blame+my+brain)

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