

Parent Guides Mindfulness by Suzy Reading



Mindfulness is everywhere these days but how do we actually introduce it into daily family life? If you think this is just about meditation keep reading! Suzy Reading is filled with ideas on how we can bring simple moments of mindfulness that everyone will enjoy into our busy days.

Francesca Geens, Creator The HappySelf Journal

Building your mindfulness muscles together

Mindfulness is everywhere – in the media, workplace and schools from as young as nursery age. Why does it deserve our attention and how can we develop the skill as a family?

Mindfulness is your superpower

In times of big emotion or challenge, mindfulness helps us cope. When we feel squeezed by life, mindfulness helps us feel less pushed around by our thoughts and feelings, allowing us to step back and choose carefully how we respond.

As a skill, mindfulness lies right at the heart of feeling healthy and happy. It's the habit that allows us to notice how we're feeling – head, heart and body – and take better care of ourselves; different things in different moments.

Mindfulness is core to many mood-boosting and stress-busting practices, such as gratitude, savouring and time in Nature. How can you appreciate something you don't notice?

So, mindfulness really does deserve the spotlight and it's something we can all grow with practice. Best still, it's something we can enjoy together, bringing us closer as a family. A family who is skilled in mindfulness will collectively cope better with stress and are able to truly enjoy the peak moments.

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is paying attention to the moment as it's unfolding, recognising all the things happening inside you: your thoughts, emotions, sensations and memories, and all the things occurring in the environment around you. It is noticing coupled with acceptance and compassion – we let everything be as it is and we give ourselves permission to feel as we do, offering up a little tenderness when things are tough.

How to get mindful

Watch your child absorbed in play and you'll see they're already mini masters of mindfulness and we can learn a lot from them. As parents we can highlight this natural ability, showing them how to use it in other moments like brainstorming a problem or moving through a difficult feeling. Practicing mindfulness activities together at home will help them apply this skill throughout their day.



As a parent, if you're thinking, 'mindfulness isn't for me', it's more likely that you haven't found a mindful activity that strikes a chord yet. Stick with it, there will be something perfect for you and your family. Mindfulness isn't a 'one size fits all' thing. Different things appeal to different people and even your own preferences change, so we need lots of mindful activities to choose between.

How do we develop the practice of mindfulness?

A mindfulness practice is a constant process of bringing the mind back to 'now', because the mind will wander and it will always be full of thoughts. Mindfulness is not about emptying the mind, it is about anchoring it on things like your thoughts, your feelings, your breath, your body, nature or sounds.

Try these five different ways to become mindful with your family:

1.) Blue Sky Mind

Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes, soften your body, relax into your breathing and become aware of your thoughts. Let all your thoughts just come and go, allowing them to be as they are. Imagine that your thoughts are like the weather – they can be sunshiny, like puffy white clouds, rainbows, dark rain clouds, thick fog or misty rain. It's all ok! You are not your thoughts, you are the wide blue sky and you can just watch your thoughts come and go just as the weather comes and goes. Relax into that knowing, be the big blue sky and peacefully watch your thoughts as they appear and float away.

2.) Mindfulness Jar

Into a clean, empty jar, place a tablespoon of glitter and stars, fill it two thirds with water, add a few drops of food colouring and screw the lid on firmly. Your mindfulness jar provides a soothing, practical activity whenever your feelings are jumbled up or your mind feels really busy. Take yourself off somewhere quiet, give the jar a shake and watch the glitter as it swirls and finally settles.

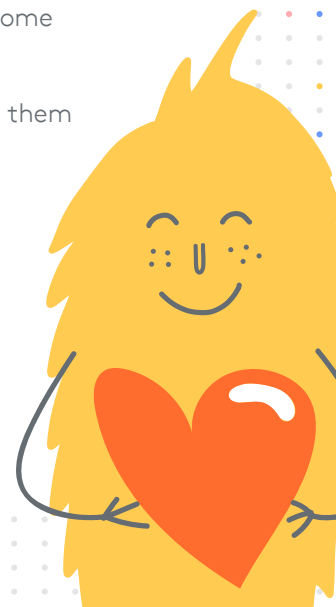
Our minds are just like the glitter – sometimes they're still and calm, sometimes they're whirling about and busy. When we give ourselves a moment to take a few calm breaths and watch our thoughts and feelings, they slow down and settle just like the glitter in our jar, helping us work out what we need to do. When we feel calmer it's easier to talk about our feelings and come up with solutions.

A mindfulness jar can be helpful for all the family or you can each make your own, using them whenever you want to feel calm.

3.) Strike a Pose!

Use your body to build your mindfulness muscles, focusing on how it feels to be moving or still.

'Mountain breaths' can be an invigorating morning ritual: stand tall, feet hip width apart, arms down by your sides and gaze forwards. Breathe in, raise your arms out and up overhead, looking up to your fingertips.



Breathe out, lower your arms back down by your sides and look ahead. Do this six times, growing taller with each repetition. Enjoy the feeling of confidence and energy this brings.

At the end of your day, take ten breaths in child's pose for instant calm: from all fours, sink your bottom to your heels, relax your arms and forehead to the floor. Let your body soften and drop, easing away the busyness of your day. It's perfect before bed.

4.) Balloon Belly Breathing

Lie on your back, hands resting on your tummy. Let your whole body relax and feel your breathing smooth itself out. Imagine there is a balloon in your tummy that fills as you breathe in and gently deflates as you breathe out. If it feels ok, see if you can make your breath out longer than your breath in, maybe exhaling through pursed lips like you are gently blowing out a candle. Let your hands go along for the ride or if you like, pop your favourite teddy on your tummy and see them ride your breath. There is no rush to fill or empty your balloon, just enjoy the sensation of breathing into your tummy, keeping your mind anchored there.

5.) A Mindful Nature Walk

Head out together in Nature's beauty. Set the intention to notice anything that piques your curiosity or inspires a feeling of awe. Leave worries, arguments, your to do list and distractions behind. Make sure your phone comes out only to take photos. Use all your senses to appreciate the environment around you and let your family know about the things you can see, hear, smell and touch so you can all enjoy them together.

And let's be honest, sometimes it can be a challenge getting everyone on board, so remember there are other alternatives like sharing a mindful meal together, a kitchen disco session or savouring a cuddle.

We hope you and your children enjoy building your mindfulness muscles together and make some bonding memories in the process. Enjoy sharing these practices and we hope you'll see that mindfulness serves you equally well in times of challenge and savouring precious times of ease.

Further reading

Books:

Self-Esteem Starters for Kids: Know Your Feelings by Beth Cox and Natalie Costa

Self-Esteem Starters for Kids: Stretch Your Confidence by Beth Cox and Natalie Costa

Find Your Power! Discover the Wonder of You! By Beth Cox and Natalie Costa

Stand Tall Like A Mountain by Suzy Reading

Mindfulness for Children by Uz Afzal

You are Awesome by Matthew Syed

Create Your Own Happy by Penny Alexander and Becky Goddard-Hill

Yoga cards:

Enchanted Wonders A-Z Cards by Ayala Homossany



Podcasts:

Made For Mums Sleepy Time Podcast <https://www.madeformums.com/school-and-family/sleepy-time-sleep-podcasts-for-toddlers-and-primary-school-children/>

About the author

Suzy is a mother of two, an author, Chartered Psychologist and Coach. She specialises in self-care, helping people manage their stress, emotions, and energetic bank balance. It was her life experience of motherhood colliding with the terminal illness of her father that sparked her passion for self-care which she now teaches to her clients, young and old, to cope during periods of stress, loss and change and to boost their resilience in the face of future challenges.

Suzy is on the editorial board for Motherdom Magazine, the Psychology Expert for wellbeing brand Neom Organics and is a founding member of the 'Nourish' app. She is the author of 'The Self-Care Revolution' (2017), 'Stand Tall Like a Mountain: Mindfulness & Self-Care for Children and Parents' and 'The Little Book of Self-Care' which both came out in 2019 and her latest book 'Self-Care for Tough Times' is hot off the press.



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