

Mindfulness and Mindful Parenting

Mindfulness is something we have been hearing more and more about in recent times. But what actually is mindfulness? I like to think of mindfulness as a way of thinking and paying attention that helps to improve our well-being and reduce distress. Applying mindfulness to your parenting can help you to cope, improve your relationship with your child and lead to better adjustment and well-being in your child.



Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be defined as a psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment, paying attention on purpose, with curiosity and without judgement.

There are two key components – formal mindfulness and informal mindfulness.

Formal mindfulness is more like meditation practice where you sit or lie down and follow a specific mindfulness meditation. This will involve paying attention in some way, for example, paying attention to your thoughts, your breath, emotions and so on. Formal practice is kind of like attention training, the more you do the easier it will be to apply and direct your attention in your day to day life.

Informal mindfulness is something we do on the go. This is perfect for mothers. This means paying attention to the present moment on purpose with curiosity and without judgement. A perfect way to practice this skill is to tune into your senses. Ask yourself in this moment – what can see, hear, feel, smell? Notice your breathing.

Informal Mindfulness Example:

Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine

Try having a mindful shower. When you do it, totally focus on what you are doing: the body movements, the taste, the touch, the smell, the sight, the sound etc.

For example, when you're in the shower, notice the sounds of the water as it sprays out of the nozzle, and as it hits your body. Notice the temperature of the water, and the feel of it in your hair and on your shoulders, and running down our legs. Notice the smell and feel of the soap and shampoo on your skin, notice the bubbles. Pay attention to your body, how does this feel, how is your body moving, is your body relaxed or tired.

When other thoughts, feelings or sensations arise, acknowledge them, let them be, and gently bring your attention back to the shower.

Your attention will wander, your mind is a thinking machine. As soon as you realise this has happened, gently acknowledge it, note what distracted you, and bring your attention back to the shower.

Try Informal Mindfulness when:

- Eating
- Walking
- Cooking
- Washing/cleaning
- Listening
- Breathing
- Driving
- Feeding/changing/ bathing/playing with your baby

Mindful Self-Soothing Techniques

Self-soothing mostly uses physical techniques that focus on your body's senses. It has to do with comforting, nurturing and being kind to yourself.

Some of you may recognise these techniques as things that you already use, however, many of us have never learned how to do those often simple things that makes us feel better.

Use them when you are feeling distressed, when emotions feel overwhelming, when situations feel like you can't stand them anymore.

Vision:

Take a walk, look at the nature around you. Buy a magazine or borrow a book with beautiful pictures or art. Pick a flower and put it where you can see it. Sit in a garden. Walk by the river or beach. Watch the rain and notice the droplets on tree leaves. Light a candle and watch the flame. Watch a nature documentary. Dim your lights in the evening and notice the ambience.

Hearing:

Listen to beautiful or soothing music, or to audio of the ocean or other sounds of nature. Sit by a beach or river. Notice the birds outside. When you are listening, be mindful, letting the sounds come and go.

Smell:

Smell breakfast being cooked at home or in a restaurant. Notice all the different smells around you. Use a beautifully fragrant hand cream. Walk in a garden or in the bush, maybe just after it rained, and breathe in the smells of nature. Light a scented candle, oils or incense. Bake some bread or a cake and take in all the smells.

Taste:

Have a special treat and eat it slowly, savouring each bite. Cook a favourite meal. Suck on a mint or sweet. Drink a soothing drink like herbal tea or hot chocolate. Let the taste sit in your mouth and notice the flavours.

Touch:

Take a bubble bath or warm shower. Pet your dog or cat. Put on a comfy shirt and feel its softness and smoothness. Sink into a really comfortable bed, chair or couch. Float or swim in a pool, and feel the water caress your body. Give yourself a cuddle and rub your arms or legs.

Can you think of other ideas? Maybe there is something you already do?

Mindful Parenting

Mindful parenting allows you to focus your attention and be present with your baby without being distracted by other tasks. It helps you connect and attune (be in sync) to your baby.

Being mindful in your parenting helps you to:

- Be more aware of your own thoughts and feelings
- Helps you to become more aware of your baby's feelings and needs
- Helps you be less critical and judgemental of yourself and your baby
- Allows you to observe situations without responding immediately
- Helps you to be more emotionally responsive, compassionate and attuned to your baby
- Strengthens your relationship

Mindful parenting is about focusing your attention on your baby on purpose in a non-judgemental way with kindness and curiosity. Pay attention to your baby's expressions, their beautiful hair or skin, the sounds they make. If they are distressed, pay attention to their distress and what they might be feeling. Try not to become overly focussed on 'fixing' but rather being 'with' your baby during their distress, just like you would a friend.

Ask questions - What is happening with my baby right now? How do I think my baby is feeling? What do I think my baby needs? What am I feeling? What do I need right now? Remember – being mindful is about being non-judgemental, bring kindness and compassion to these questions and if you don't know the answers, remind yourself, that is okay and be compassionate towards yourself and you baby for not knowing all the answers!

STOP – Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Play!

This can be a nice easy way to remind yourself to be mindful with your baby.

Stop what you are doing. Stop folding clothes, stop thinking about tonight's dinner, etc.

Take a moment and focus on your breath. Focussing on your breathing will help focus your attention, reduce anxiety, frustration and stress and help you feel calmer.

Observe what your baby is doing, how do they look right now? What is their body language? Look at their beautiful face, skin, hair. What are they doing? Are they crying and needing comfort from you? Are they gurgling and happy and seeking your attention?

Play and/or respond to your baby the way you want to. When you are in a calm state you will be better able to respond in a thoughtful, compassionate and considered way. This will also help you stay more connected with your baby.

