



## **Research confirms that for children, mindfulness can:**

- ✓ Reduce attention problems (Crescentini, Capurso, Furlan, & Fabbro, 2016);
- ✓ Mitigate the effects of bullying (Zhou, Liu, Niu, Sun, & Fan, 2016);
- ✓ Enhance focus in children with ADHD (Zhang et al., 2016);
- ✓ Improves social skills when well taught and practiced in children and adolescents.

Here are some tips and activities I have tried with my daughter, clients of various ages and of course for myself.

### **The Adventure Explorer**

The explorer exercise is a great way to help kids learn mindfulness. This activity turns an average, everyday walk into an exciting new adventure.

Tell your children that you will be going on an investigation: their goal is to notice as many birds, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and any other animals as they can. Anything that walks, crawls, swims, or flies is of interest, and they'll need to focus all of their senses to find them, especially the little ones (Karen Young, 2017). If you have the energy start a story where you ask them a question they have to try and solve. The story can develop as the walk is taking place. You would be surprised the imaginative stories that can be created.

A similar exercise for adults is the mindfulness walk. This exercise provokes the same response in children that a mindful walk elicits in adults: a state of awareness and grounding in the present. Instead of just walking really notice what you smell, hear and feel. When it comes to feeling not only focus on the external aspects such as the wind or a particular clothing on your body, but also what you feel internally.

## **Texture Bag**

My daughter loves taking turns with me doing this one. Place several small, interestingly shaped or textured objects in a bag. Have your child reach in and touch an object, one at a time, and describe what they are touching. Make sure they don't take the object out of the bag, forcing them to use only their sense of touch to explore the object.

## **Blindfolded Taste Tests**

I use a version of this practice in one of the workshops focusing on Food & Mood, but when you add a blindfold the little people just love this! Use a blindfold for your child and have them experience eating a small food, like a raisin or a cranberry, as if it was their first time eating it. Encourage them to smell it, hold in on one side of their mouth and take 3 deep breaths before moving it over to the next side. Try different things before swallowing the food item.

## **Heartbeat Music**

Paying attention to one's heartbeat has a role in many mindfulness exercises and activities. To begin, tell your child or adolescent to put their hand on their heart. You could start with asking them to say the beat rhythm out-loud and if you have more than one child they can beat-boxing, hum, or other instrumental sounds which coordinate with the heart rhythm, if you have only one child you can make the sounds up and then change roles. Then ask them to jump up and down in place or do jumping jacks for one minute.

When they have finished, have them sit down and put a hand over their heart again. Instruct them to close their eyes and pay attention only to their heartbeat, then shift their attention by asking them to notice their breath (Roman, 2015).

This exercise teaches the person to notice their heartbeat and their breath, and use it as a tool to help their focus. These skills will come in handy as they start engaging in more advanced mindfulness activities.

## **Adolescent Mindful Driving Exercise**

Safe driving requires paying attention. It's easy for drivers to get distracted - and that can lead to accidents. If you drive, practice this mindfulness skill when you get in the car. It helps your

mind focus better as you drive. So, offer your adolescent a “friendly challenge” to remain focused driving for a set number of minutes.

Before they start the car, take a moment. Invite them to bring your attention to how their body feels in the driver's seat. Is the seat comfortable? Does it feel soft, firm, cool, or warm?

Ask them to take a slow breath as you settle into the seat. Shift their attention to notice if their feet reach the pedals easily. Adjust the seat if needed. Take a slow, deep breath.

Ask them to notice any inner dialog popping up for them in their head “this feels weird, why am I even doing this, I think my mom/dad lost their mind”. Ask them to let the thoughts go and turn their attempting to fastening their seat belt. Saying "Right now, I plan to pay attention while I'm driving and I plan to drive safely"

Then suggest their attention moves to the mirrors. Check the mirrors and adjust as needed.

Take a slow breath and let them feel the sensations which arise when they start the car. Suggest they pay attention to notice the area around your car. Are there people or cars around?

As they drive, ask them to notice any situations that require them to slow down or speed up. If they are used to driving fast as them to notice what they feel in their body as they drive slower. They may share their thought “driving slow is so boring”, but redirect them to where boredom rests in their body. If they every have the urge to talk to you or listen to music remind them that the point of this experience is to be aware of only driving from point A to B or until agreed time is over.

As you can imagine it would be impossible to list all the options and possibilities into one document, however, if these are not a good fit for your child or situation please reach out so other approaches and/or activities could be customized to meet your child/adolescents needs.

**Your Time is N.O.W**