

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

News From Your School Counselor

Mindfulness

1. Mindful breathing is a staple of practicing mindfulness and is often the foundation of other exercises. Breathing meditation is instructing students to imagine a sailboat that rises and falls as they breathe; with each inhale and exhale, the boat moves gently on top of the water. They also get an opportunity to envision their breath as a color and focus on the experience of their breath moving through their nostrils.

Some other examples include:

- ❖ Breathe in like smelling a flower- breathe out like blowing a leaf; breathe in like smelling hot chocolate, breathe out like cooling off pizza.
 - ❖ Noticing the breath: this involves simply paying attention to what breathing actually feels like.
 - ❖ Five-finger starfish meditation: this breathing technique has kids holding up one hand in a starfish position (fingers spread wide) while they gently trace up and down each finger with the other hand, focusing on regular breathing at the same time.
 - ❖ Counting the breath: this technique is exactly what it sounds like; have your children pause and count his or her breaths. One breath in is "1", the next breath out is "2", etc. You can have them count to 10 if they're very young, or slightly higher depending on their abilities.
2. Mindful walking is an active practice that requires you to be consciously aware and moving in the environment rather than sitting down with your eyes closed. The practice brings you closer to nature and your body. It also helps strengthen your concentration, makes you more aware, and connects you to the present moment.

Here is an example of a script you could use with children/adults: Walk with soft eyes fixed on the ground about 8 feet out. Feel the sensation of each foot as it presses down onto the earth or floor. Notice your foot as it lifts up, touches the ground and is lifted up again. Follow the movement and the feeling of each footstep with your mind and your breath.

- OR -

The Safari exercise: a fun way to help kids learn mindfulness. This activity turns an average, everyday walk outside into an exciting new adventure.

Tell your kids that you will be going on a safari, and 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 will need to focus all of their senses to find them.

3. Mind Jar

This activity can teach children about how strong emotions can take hold, and how to find peace when these strong emotions come up.

- ❖ First, get a clear jar, like a Mason jar, and fill it almost all the way with water. Next, add a big spoonful of glitter glue or glue and dry glitter to the jar. Put the lid back on the jar and shake it to make the glitter swirl.
- ❖ Finally, use the following script or take inspiration from it to form your own mini-lesson:

“Imagine that the glitter is like your thoughts when you’re stressed, mad or upset. See how they whirl around and make it really hard to see clearly? That is why it is so easy to make silly decisions when you are upset – because you are not thinking clearly. Don’t worry this is normal and it happens in all of us (yep, grownups too).”

Now watch what happens when you are still for a couple of moments. Keep watching. See how the glitter starts to settle and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When you’re calm for a little while, your thoughts start to settle and you start to see things much clearer” (Karen Young, 2017).

This exercise not only helps children learn about how their emotions can cloud their thoughts, it also facilitates the practice of mindfulness while focusing on the swirling glitter in the jar.

4. Mindful Eating

One way to think of mindful eating is to imagine that you are a scientist examining your food for the first time. Give your full attention to the whole experience, from observing the appearance and presentation of food to eating it carefully to fully experience its various flavors. If you do this, you may find that a common meal becomes a richer experience.

Here’s how to try the exercise. You can use a raisin, a piece of chocolate, or even an entire meal as your object for mindful eating.

Start by looking at what you are planning to eat. What do you notice visually?
Now, smell the food carefully. What do you notice?

If applicable, do you notice any sounds? If you are eating something like a raisin, try holding it close to your ear as you squeeze it gently. Or if you’re unwrapping a chocolate, listen to the crinkles of the wrapper as you unfold it.

What do you feel with your fingers? Is the food warm or cold? Is it smooth, rough, or sticky?

Now, put the piece of food on your tongue, but don't chew on it yet. Just leave it on your tongue and notice how it feels in your mouth. Do you taste anything yet? What activity do you notice in your mouth?

Start chewing it, very slowly, just one bite at a time. Notice how the tastes change as you chew.

Try to notice when you swallow, and see how far you can feel the food into your body.

5. Mindful Posing

One easy way for children to experience mindfulness is through the simple method of body poses. To get your kids interested, tell them that doing fun poses can help them feel strong, brave, and happy.

Have them go somewhere quiet and familiar, a place they feel safe. Next, tell them to try one of the following two poses:

- 1 The Superman: this pose is practiced by standing with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out, stretching the body out as long as possible.
- 2 The Wonder Woman: this pose is struck by standing tall with legs wider than hip-width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips (Karen Young, 2017).

6. Mindfulness Games for Kids

Here are a few, fun activities to get kids involved in mindfulness without even knowing it!

- 1 Blowing bubbles. Have your kids focus on taking in a deep, slow breath, and exhaling steadily to fill the bubble. Encourage them to pay close attention to the bubbles as they form, detach, and pop or float away.
- 2 Pinwheels. Use the same tactics from blowing bubbles to encourage mindful attention on the pinwheels.
- 3 Playing with balloons. Tell your kids that the aim of this game is to keep the balloon off the ground, but have them move slowly and gently. You can tell them to pretend the balloon is very fragile if that helps.
- 4 Texture bag. Place several small, interestingly shaped or textured objects in a bag, and have each child reach in to 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.
- 5 Blindfolded taste tests. Use a blindfold for each child and have them experience eating a small food, like a raisin or a cranberry, as if it was their first time eating it.

7. Body Scan

The body scan is one of the basic practices in mindfulness, and it is an easy one to teach to children.

- ❖ Have your kids lie down on their back on a comfortable surface and close their eyes.
- ❖ Then, tell them to squeeze every single muscle in their body as tight as they can. Tell them to squish their toes and feet, squeeze their hands into fists, and make their legs and arms as hard as stone.
- ❖ After a few seconds, have them release all their muscles and relax for a few minutes.
- ❖ Encourage them to think about how their body is feeling throughout the activity

8. Gratitude Practice

Practice present-moment gratitude. Make sure to notice all of the things for which you are grateful as they pop up throughout your day. Allow yourself to be in the present and to fully appreciate each thing you are grateful for as it arises. Write them down at the beginning and end of each day.

9. 5 Senses

Bring awareness to each of your 5 senses. One at a time, for about one minute each. The point here is to focus on the present moment and how each sense is being activated in that moment. The order in which you pay attention to each sense does not matter.

Hear: Begin to notice all of the sounds around you. Try not to judge the sounds- just notice them. They are not good or bad, they just are. Sounds might be internal, like breathing or digestion. Sounds might be close by or more distant like the sound of traffic. Are you now hearing more than you were before you started? You may begin to notice subtle sounds you did not hear before. Can you hear them now?

Smell: Now shift your attention to notice the smells of your environment. Maybe you smell food. You might become aware of the smell of trees or plants if you are outside. You might notice the smell of books or paper. Sometimes closing your eyes can help sharpen your attention.

See: Observe your surrounding and notice the colors, shapes and textures. If you really look, you may notice things that have gone unnoticed.

Taste: You can do this one even if you have food in your mouth. You may notice an aftertaste of a previous drink or meal. You can just notice your tongue in your mouth, your saliva, and your breath as you exhale. We have tastes in our mouth that often go unnoticed. You can run your tongue over your teeth and cheeks to help you become more aware.

Touch: Last one. Bring your attention to the sensations of skin contact with your chair, clothing, and feet on the floor. You can notice the pressure between your feet and the floor or your body and the chair. You can observe temperature like the warmth or coolness of your hands or feet. You might take time to feel the textures that you noticed by sight a moment ago. You can feel several objects on your desk to fully focus your attention on the present.

When finished, pause to notice how your body feels in this moment. Compare how you feel now with how you felt 5 minutes ago- what has changed? Try this exercise next time you're feeling overwhelmed. This can be useful to use before a test or speech, too!

10. Breathing Buddies

Hand out a stuffed animal to each child (or another small object). Have the children lie down on the floor and place the stuffed animals on their bellies. Tell them to breathe in silence for one minute and notice how their Breathing Buddy moves up and down, and any other sensations that they notice. Tell them to imagine that the thoughts that come into their minds turn into bubbles and float away. The presence of the Breathing Buddy makes the meditation a little friendlier, and allows the kids to see how a playful activity doesn't necessarily have to be rowdy.

11. The Bell Listening Exercise

Ring a bell and ask the kids to listen closely to the vibration of the ringing sound. Tell them to remain silent and raise their hands when they no longer hear the sound of the bell. Then tell them to remain silent for one minute and pay close attention to the other sounds they hear once the ringing has stopped. Google chrome has an awesome bell called "bell of mindfulness". You can easily add it to any device.

12. "Draw the word"

This is something you can do with your siblings or parents. Find a partner. One person would stand up and one person would place a hand behind their back. The partner then traces a word on the palm of their hand and the student has to identify what the word is. This exercise is effective for focusing the mind and helping students learn how to be in the present. My students love trying to guess the words when we do this in school.