

Mindful Activities with Kids

Simple practices to learn with children

Mindfulness is an important practice in times of trauma, anxiety and stress, to assist us to regulate our emotions and our physiology. It helps us to have a calm presence, and is equally important for our children.

Younger children need us to co-regulate with them, and in time they can learn self-regulation. Think about a newborn baby, we need to soothe and regulate and meet all their needs – this is co-regulation. As they grow and develop, we teach them they are able to begin to meet some of their own needs until, by about age 25 when the brain is fully developed, we hope we have raised independent, self-regulating adults.

Teaching our children mindful practice at any time is a helpful skill, but even more so now as life has changed so quickly, with both parents and children alike needing to live and interact in new ways, often in confined spaces. A mindful practice simply allows us to be in the present moment and assists us with regulation.

These are some simple and fun mindful activities that can be undertaken throughout the day. The goal is to practice simple techniques and make them part of daily life. Build them into part of your current routine. If a child is becoming dysregulated, then the sooner you can begin an activity, the better.

- **Mindful Cup of tea** - Kids can participate in mindful cup of tea (see both hand-out and video) – using herbal non caffeinated tea and cooler water for younger kids. This is one I do with my grandchildren and get the best china out. They love choosing their herbal tea and having the best china. If we break a cup, it's worth knowing the experience has been fabulous!!
- **Five Senses exercise** – see video and PDF; this is great with kids as a family activity or one on one with a child. In time, children can go into the garden and do this activity by themselves.
- **Belly breathing** – lying on their backs, invite younger kids to bring their favourite small soft toy and place on their belly. As them to breathe deeply into their belly, count to three and breathe out. As they do so, they can watch the soft toy move up and down.
- **Dragon breathing** – this can also be fun, and can be done sitting or standing. Take a deep breath into your belly just like a dragon, poke your tongue out as far as you can and breathe all the air out with dragon sounds.
- **Igloo** – Although many of us are living in confined spaces, we still all need some personal space. Giving kids permission to make an igloo of pillows, cushions or whatever you have, can give them a sense of their own space. They can hide away to

read, listen to music, colour, or just take time out. This can be great for self-regulation and learning we can all take time out and create our own space when we need it.

- **Cubby** – Similar to an igloo, a cubby can be made under a table, in a corner with blankets or sheets, or with whatever you can find. This can be a calming soothing space for any age. Both the igloo and the cubby can empower our kids to know they can seek refuge and take time out when they need it; in this way they are learning self-regulation.
- **Bowl of rice** – this simple activity involves keeping a quantity of dry rice in a container, and running your hands through it or playing in it with small toys, similar to a sandpit. It is soothing, and works as well with adults who give themselves permission as with kids. Sand works as well or any dry similar alternative.
- **Tactile box** – this is about you and your child putting together a box of different ‘tactile’ items that they can pull out and go through as they need. This could include playdough (soft and squishy) a smooth pebble, a soft toy that is nice to feel, lavender or something similar to smell, something that makes a noise (such as a toy with a small bell), a favourite photo, a simple craft or activity, a journal or colouring book (suitable for their age). This can be as creative or as simple as you like. Children soon learn that, when they need it, they have their own special box that they can decorate and keep for when they need some time out for regulation.
- **Gingerbread Feelings** – draw the shape of a gingerbread person on a large piece of paper. Remember this is about the experience, not about the artwork. Now colour or draw with shapes in the gingerbread person something that matches what you feel inside of you right now. Invite a conversation about the drawing but don’t press for it. The process itself may be enough. Children can be encouraged to do this activity as often as they find helpful.
- **Thankful Practice** – this is a helpful practice with a mindful element, and many households are currently practising it. When having a meal together, each person says three things they are thankful for about the day. This helps create a mindset of looking for things during the day that can be shared over the meal.



Blowing bubble is a simple mindful practice we can all enjoy.