

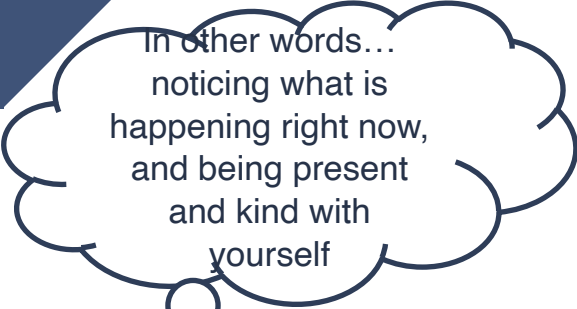
Mindfulness Strategies for Managing Stress in Children and Teens

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Defining Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?



In other words...
noticing what is
happening right now,
and being present
and kind with
yourself

- The practice of being fully aware of one's thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment
- Paying attention to the present moment in an accepting, non-judgmental manner
- First popularized in the East by religious and spiritual institutions (e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism)
- Jon Kabat-Zinn (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program) has been credited with the popularity of mindfulness in the West (1979)
- Can be taught and practiced at home or at school with children as young as preschool

Benefits of Mindfulness

Long-lasting developmental benefits (evidence-based):

- Improved focus and concentration
- Better sleep
- Decreased stress and anxiety
- Better problem-solving
- Improved impulse control
- Improved social skills



When Can Kids Start Practicing Mindfulness?

- Even if young children struggle to sit still or close their eyes and giggle, it is still useful to normalize the practice and start to teach them that mindfulness is a positive act that benefits our physical and social-emotional health
- Habits formed early in life will inform behaviors in adulthood
- Evidence suggests that by age 4-5, children have a fully developed awareness and understanding of one's own thought process
- Children who are taught to improve their own learning or thinking process early on have been shown to be more resilient and become better learners



Helping Kids and Teens Practice Mindfulness

Tips for Teaching Mindfulness

- Make sure your child is ready to give mindfulness a try (state of calm, not full of energy and running around the room)
- Offer to practice mindfulness with them
- Assure your child that it's okay for them to get off track; demonstrate how to gently guide themselves back to mindfulness when they realize they lost focus
- Ensure your child has a positive experience by finishing the practice by doing something they enjoy

Tips for Teaching Mindfulness



Use it for
positive
situations only



Create a daily,
consistent
routine



Prepare the
environment



Involve your
child in the
process



Share your
experience of
mindfulness



Encourage
your child to
share their
experience

Mindfulness Strategies/ Activities in Action

Mindful Breathing

- A staple of mindfulness practice
- Controlled breathing sends the brain a signal that all is well; it begins to calm the nervous system and slow the body's stress response
- YouTube videos can be useful in teaching children/teenagers how to engage in mindful breathing



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvF9AEe-ozc>

Breathing Exercises

Belly Breathing

When breathing in, the belly expands slightly. When breathing out, it contracts. Do several rounds and return to normal breathing.

Belly Buddies

Have younger children lie down with a teddy bear or stuffed animal on their belly. Let them watch as it moves up and down while they breathe, as if they are rocking it to sleep.

Four Square Breathing

Breathe in for a count of 4. Hold the breath for a count of 4. Breathe out for a count of 4. Hold the breath for a count of 4. Complete several rounds and return to normal breathing.

Bunny Breath

Make 3 quick sniffs in the nose and one long exhale out of the nose. Invite kids to pretend to be bunnies, sniffing the air for other bunnies or carrots to eat.

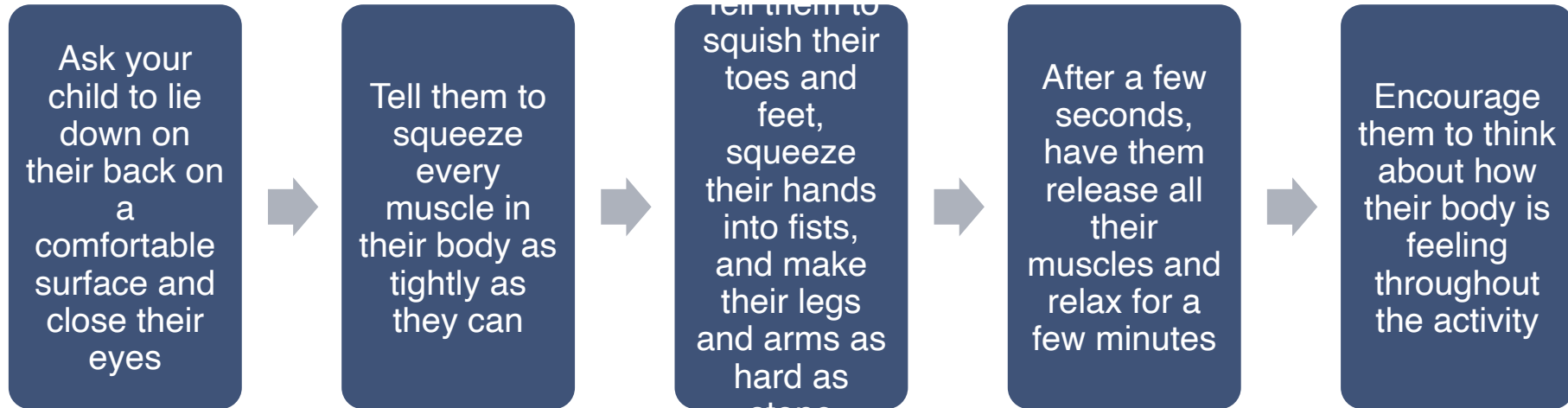
Count to 10 Breathing

Breathe in 1. Exhale 2. Inhale 3. Exhale 4. Inhale 5. Exhale 6. Inhale 7. Exhale 8. Inhale 9. Exhale 10.



Body Scan

- Another key practice in mindfulness and easy to teach to children or teenagers:



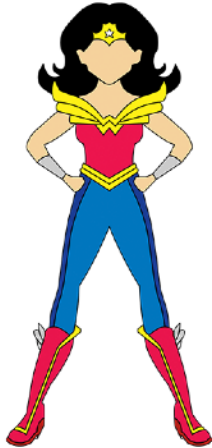
- Body scan meditation script: <https://www.mindful.org/body-scan-kids/>

Heartbeat Exercise

- Paying attention to one's heartbeat plays a role in many mindfulness exercises and activities
- Ask your child to jump up and down or do jumping jacks for one minute
- When they have finished, have them sit down and put a hand over their heart
- Instruct them to close their eyes and pay attention to their heartbeat and breath
- This exercise teaches children to notice their heartbeat/breath, and use it as a tool to help their focus



Mindful Posing: Be a Superhero



The Superman

Stand with feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out to the sky, stretching the body as tall as possible

The Wonder Woman

Stand tall with legs wider than hip-width apart and hands or fists placed on hips

- Good for kids as young as 3
- Do superhero pose for 1-2 minutes
- Ask how they feel after a few rounds of trying these poses

Safari Exercise

- Tell your child that you will be going on a safari: their goal is to notice as many birds, bugs, creepy-crawlies, and other animals as they can
- They should pay attention to sounds and anything that walks, crawls, swims, or flies
- They'll need to stay quiet and alert, and will need to focus all of their senses to find them
- Quietly talk about what you:
 - See (e.g., trees, butterflies, houses, bugs, dogs)
 - Feel (e.g., the weather, a pebble in our shoes, the wind)
 - Hear (e.g., wind, people, birds, cars)
 - Smell (e.g., flowers, trees)



Spidey Senses

- A fun way to frame traditional mindfulness exercises
- Ask your child to switch their senses up to a superpower level, just like Spiderman
- In this moment...
 - What can they hear?
 - What can they see?
 - What can they taste?
 - What can they smell?
 - What can they feel?
- Guide your child as they stay in the Spidey state for 2-3 minutes
- Beneficial materials: bell, flower, small food item (e.g., berry, raisin, piece of cereal)



Senses Countdown

- Good for older children or teenagers
- Extension of Spidey Senses
- Try to notice...
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can touch
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste



3 Good Things (Appreciation Practice)

Leading the exercise:

- Ask your child: “Do you ever feel disappointed by something or someone?”
Ask: “How did that make you feel?”
- Say something like: “I bet that even when you’re feeling disappointed, there are good things happening in your life, too. Let’s name three good things together.”



Appreciation Practice

Tips for naming three good things:

- Remind your child that the point of this exercise is *not* to pretend they're not upset when they're feeling upset. It's to remember that they can feel two things at once. They can feel grateful for good things while feeling sad, hurt, or disappointed by other things.
- Help your child/teen to brainstorm if they have trouble thinking of three good things on their own.
- Parents can encourage kids to remind them to name *Three Good Things* when they're stuck on a disappointment or annoyance, too.
- To develop a habit of thankfulness, play *Three Good Things* around the dinner table, before bedtime, and at other times the family is together.

Journaling

- A useful mindfulness practice for older children or teenagers
- Helps encourage people to turn their attention inward, be aware of the small details around them, and freely explore what they notice
- Prompts may include:
 - *Write 5 things that made you grateful today*
 - *Write about something difficult that you experienced today*
 - *What brings you the most joy and why?*
 - *Write about 3 beautiful things that you saw today*
 - *Describe an instance when you were motivated today*
 - *List five qualities your best friend or family member has that make you love them*

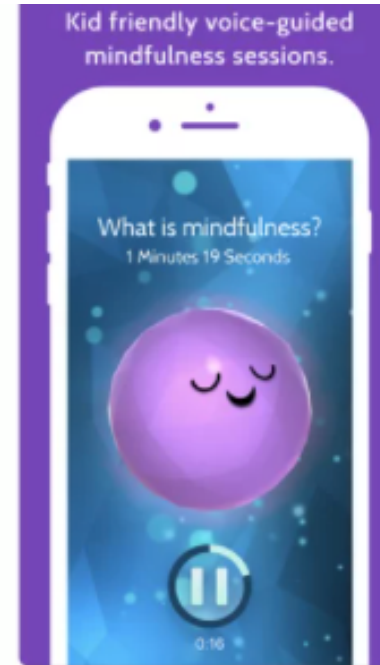
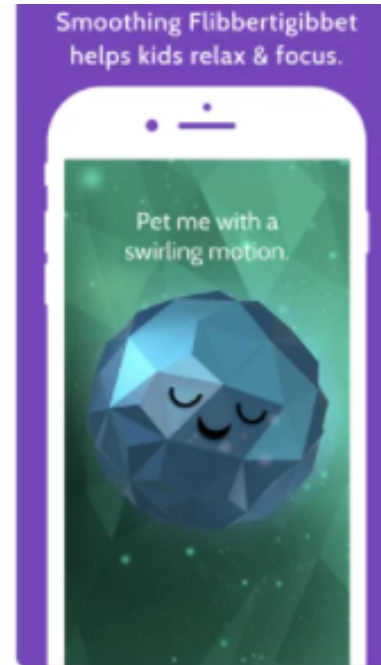
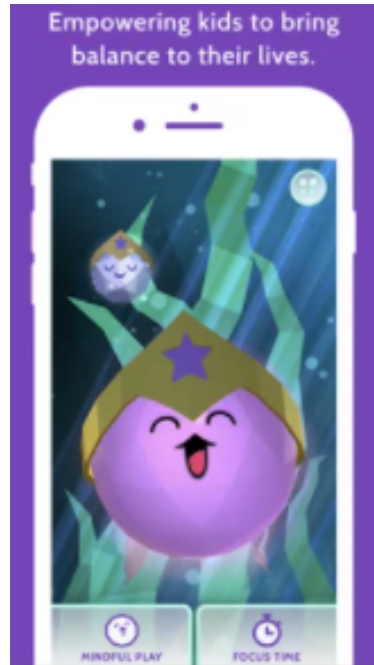


Supportive Technology

Supportive Technology

Mindful Powers

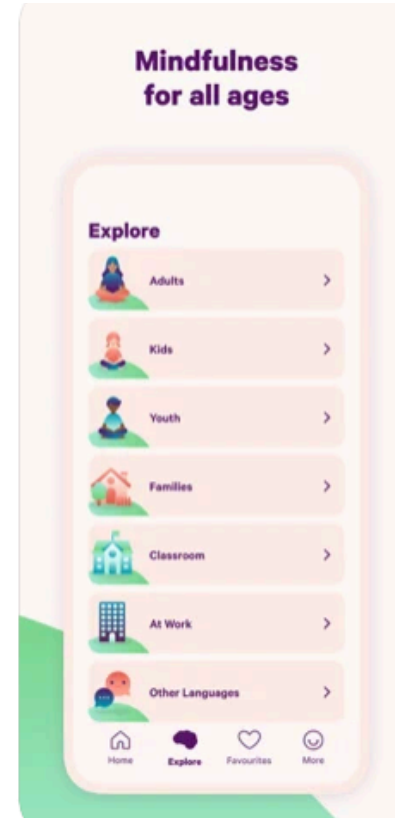
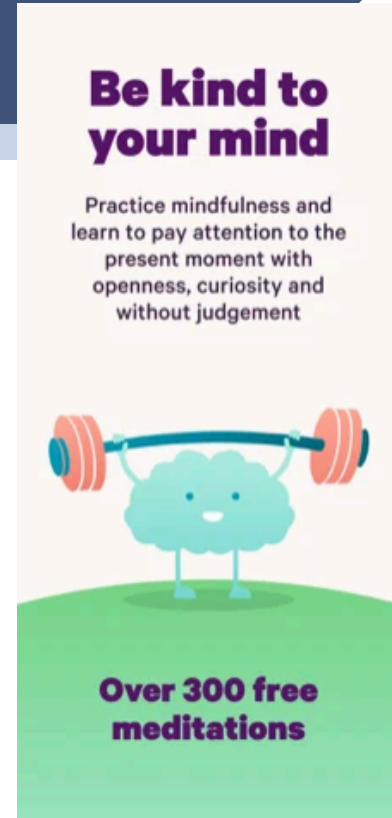
- Fun and easy-to-use
- Designed to be a part of child's daily routine
- Interactive voice-guided sessions
- Involves sensory-based repetitive interactions to trigger relaxation
- Free (with in-app purchases); ideal for ages 7-10



Supportive Technology

Smiling Mind

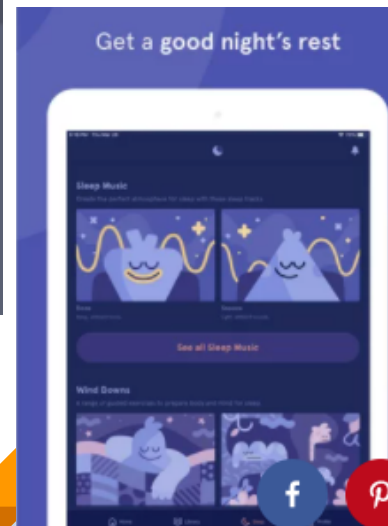
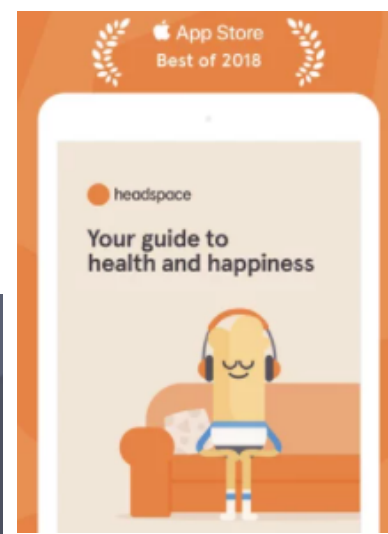
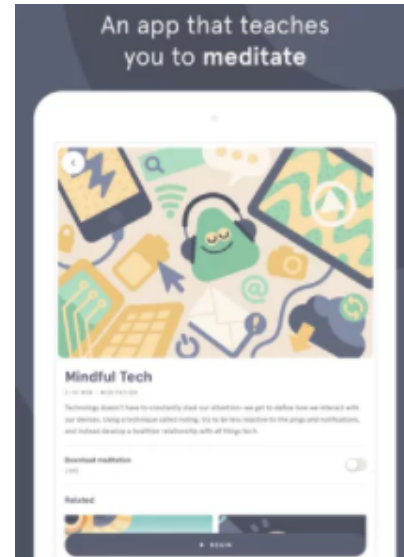
- Mindfulness meditation app developed by psychologists and educators
- Offers dedicated modules and programs for kids (ages 3-12), teenagers (13-18), and adults (19+)
- Includes grounding body scans, sensory exercises, and breathing meditations guided by smooth and calming voices
- Recommended use: 10+ minutes per day



Supportive Technology

Headspace for Kids

- Popular adult mindfulness app now has a kids' series of breathing exercises, visualizations, and meditations
- Five categories: kindness, focus, sleep, calm, and wake-up
- Three age groups: 5 and under, 6-8, 9-12
- \$12.99 per month or \$69.99 per year



Supportive Technology

Sleep Meditations for Kids

- Offers 4 bedtime stories that are transformed into guided meditations
- Helps children with sleep challenges, insomnia, stress, and anxiety
- Targeted to children under the age of 12
- One free 13-minute meditation; \$2.99 for other meditations



Supportive Technology

Video: Still Quiet Place

- Animated video that helps children learn how to go to a “still quiet place”
- GoZen also offers other videos and activities



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIJn5XhqPN8&t=51s>

Supportive Technology

Video: 3 Minute Body Scan Meditation

- Body scan meditation from *Fablefy - the Whole Child*
- Uses music and animation to guide children through a short body scan meditation
- Designed for children to get in touch with their bodies, let go of negative feelings, and release pent-up emotions



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihwcw_ofuME

Supportive Technology

Video: 14 Minute Body Scan for Teens and Adults

- Body scan meditation from *Fablefy - the Whole Child* that is targeted to teens and adults

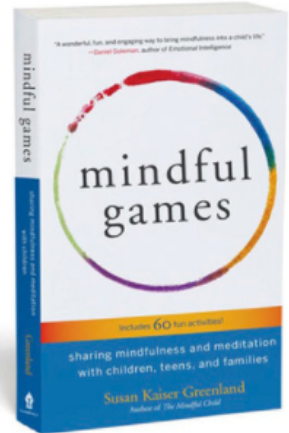


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcnJz2R0hx0>

Additional Resources

Mindfulness Books for Kids & Parents

- ***The Mindful Child* by Susan Kaiser Greenland:** helpful guide for parents that includes techniques to help children develop mindfulness
- ***Mindful Games* by Susan Kaiser Greenland:** activity card set that brings mindfulness to one's daily routine in a playful way
- ***Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)* by Eline Snel:** features 75 mindfulness games and activities that can help children ages 4-8 to deal with anxiety, improve concentration, and handle difficult emotions
- ***Mindfulness Workbook for Kids* by Hannah Sherman:** introduces the idea of mindfulness and offers 60+ engaging mindfulness activities for kids ages 8-12
- ***Mindfulness for Teens in 10 Minutes a Day: Exercises to Feel Calm, Stay Focused, & Be Your Best Self* by Jeanne Marie Battistin:** a practical guide to mindfulness techniques for teenagers



Questions?