

## Mindfulness for Parents & Children Exercises, Strategies & Resources

**“Mindfulness is nothing other than present moment-awareness, an open and friendly willingness to understand what is going on in and around you. It means living in the present moment ...”**

**~ Sitting Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and their parents), by Eline Snell**

A small amount of stress can benefit us: it can drive us to study for that upcoming exam or prepare us for that important work conference. A little bit of stress is ok and understanding this is a HUGE win for kids.

But when anxiety gets to be too much, it’s important to teach our kids how to recognize and express their emotions and Mindfulness is a way of life that helps us pay attention to the here and now, to our emotions, to our physical sensations and to our thoughts. Teaching our kids some of the body clues of anxiety, including butterflies in the stomach, muscle aches and tensions, dry mouth, shaking or trembling and even shortness of breath, can help them better understand their feelings and what causes their anxiety. From here, they can turn to their deep-breathing exercises to help them cope with the stresses.

Mindfulness is a valuable tool that can help build the resiliency of our children and youth.

**Sensitive kids can sometimes feel emotions in a heightened way, giving rise to feelings of overwhelm and alarm.**

### Deep-Breathing Exercises

Make sure to choose a quiet place where you can sit upright, either on a chair or the floor. Dim the lights and wear comfortable clothing. Close your eyes. With one hand on your heart and the other on your belly, breathe in slowly through your nose and slowly exhale through your mouth. Take note of the thoughts and feelings that arise and let them come and go without judgement.

#### Remember!

- Practice! Start with a few minutes a day.
- Choose a time to practice when you are relatively calm.
- Set an alarm to remind yourself.
- Initially, do not try to use strategies if highly anxious.
- Likewise, don’t tell you child to “take deep breaths” if they are very anxious.

**“Visualize your mind as a vast clear-blue sky. Your consciousness is the sun shining in the sky. Thoughts, feelings, and distractions pass in the form of clouds in the infinite expanse of the sky. The sun keeps shining, no matter how many clouds roll by. Let the clouds pass. Do not hold onto them. Only count your breath and watch the clouds.”**

**~ Grieving Mindfully by Sameet Kumar**

## Kid-Friendly Deep-Breathing Exercises

### Candle-Flower:

This activity promotes deep breathing. It is a wonderful activity for when children need to pause, take a deep breath and relax. It can also help your child to re-center their attention by using imagery to find focus in the moment.

**Technique:** Imagine you are holding a beautiful flower in one hand and a candle in the other. Slowly sniff the flower, to the count of one, two, three, four. And then blow-out the candle to a count of one, two, three, four.

Find more information about this deep-breathing exercise on [Kids Relaxation](http://kidsrelaxation.com/deep-breathing/deep-breathing-activity-flower-and-candle/) (<http://kidsrelaxation.com/deep-breathing/deep-breathing-activity-flower-and-candle/>).



### Square-Breathing:

Square breathing is also a fun, fast and easy way to teach kids about deep breathing and to introduce the deep breath. As well, it offers an awesome visual for those children who learn better with their eyes.

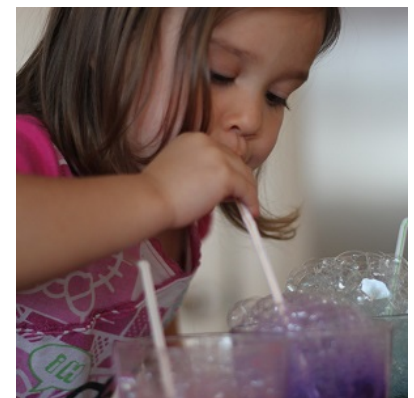
**Technique:** As you show this technique to your child for the first time, draw a square in the air with your finger. Begin in the lower left corner and model while using your finger to draw a square in the air. After you have modeled it for your child, invite them to join you by drawing their own squares in the air. As you draw your square, remember to breathe in to a count of 4. Hold for a count of 4. Breathe out to a count of 4. Pause for a count of 4. Repeat. You can then introduce your visual.

Find more information about this deep-breathing exercise on [Kids Relaxation](http://kidsrelaxation.com/uncategorized/the-deep-breath-box-square-breathing/) (<http://kidsrelaxation.com/uncategorized/the-deep-breath-box-square-breathing/>).

### Milkshake Breathing:

This is another great activity to teach deep-breathing exercises to kids and to develop their awareness of breath- plus, it's super fun! Remember: A stronger breath will produce lots of small bubbles and a slower breath will produce bigger bubbles.

**Technique:** Fill a cup with water and add a straw. Ask your child to take a deep breath through their nose and then blow-out through the straw to create bubbles. You can also add soap to water to create extra bubbles!



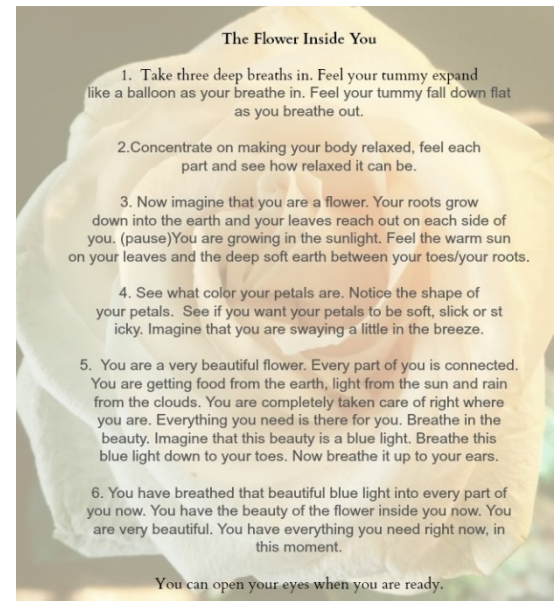
### Guided Imagery:

A natural way to introduce children to Mindfulness is through guided imagery. Guided imagery uses visualization and imagination to bring awareness to the mind-body connection. Children can easily access this healing process because they're naturally imaginative. By relaxing into a vivid story they gain tools to deal with stress. It's also a wonderful way to connect with your child!

While sitting with your child and taking deep breaths, try this guided imagery exercise, "The Flower Inside You."

**Technique:** The key is to use all your senses, to bring your attention back to the present moment and to focus on relaxing your body and taking slow, steady breaths.

Find more information about this deep-breathing exercise on [Kids Relaxation](http://centreconnexions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Flower-Inside-You-Picture-1.jpg) (<http://centreconnexions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Flower-Inside-You-Picture-1.jpg>)



## Muscle Relaxation Activities

For children and youth struggling with anxiety, they may hold so much tension in their bodies that they lose awareness of how to relax.

The following activities are geared to tense muscle groups, release the tension and then take notice of how it feels to be relaxed. Doing these simple exercises can help reduce such physical symptoms as headaches and upset stomach and can even improve sleep.

### Robots, Towers, Jellyfish:

This is a fun muscle relaxation exercise that allows kids to dance to music!

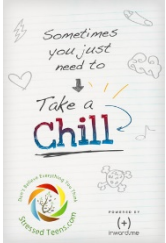
**Technique:** Play music for your child to dance to, press pause and call out one of the following:

- **Robots:** Your child should stand with legs slightly bent, arms outstretched at 90 degrees, and with their entire body tense. Squeeze all those muscles!!
- **Towers:** Your child should stand-up tall on their tippy toes, with their arms raised above their head and their entire body tense. Squeeze all those muscles!!
- **Jellyfish:** Your child should relax every part of their body and make their muscles feel loose and floppy. Flop down on the floor or a chair!!

### Pencil-Squeeze Activity:

Ask your child to hold a pencil in each hand and to squeeze them tightly to a count of ten with their eyes closed. Make sure they keep squeezing the pencils until you tell them to release them. Tell your child to put the pencils down and ask them how they feel as they rest their hands in their lap or on a desk. Do they feel the warm, tingling feeling in their hands as their hands melt into their lap, feeling very heavy and relaxed? Count to 20. Now ask your child to open their eyes – now they are ready to tackle their day!

## Check-Out the Following Apps to Help Kids Relax Through Mindfulness



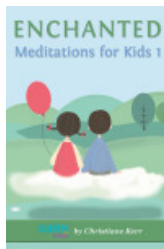
**Take a Chill – Stressed Teens App**  
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/take-a-chill-stressed-teens/id496802813?mt=8>



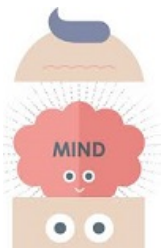
**iZen Garden 2 – Portable Zen Garden**  
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/izen-garden-2-portable-zen/id347232643?mt=8>



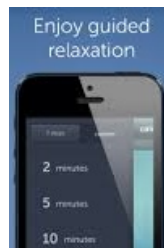
**Arabian Nights – Relax Kids**  
<https://itunes.apple.com/app/arabian-nights/id500474568?ign-mpt=uo%3D5>



**Enchanted Meditations for Kids**  
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/enchanted-meditations-for/id490096965?mt=8>



**Headspace**  
<https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>



**Calm**  
<https://www.calm.com/>



**Insight Timer**  
<https://insighttimer.com/>



**Buddhify**  
<https://buddhify.com/>

## Importance of Gratitude

Our thoughts can often interfere in experiencing gratitude. And because of practicing Mindfulness, your kids will start noticing all of the good things in life. This is a great opportunity to start “practicing” gratitude.

### Examples of How to Practice Gratitude:

- Dinner-time conversation: Ask your child, “What was a happy thing in your day today?” or “What is something that you are really grateful for?”
- Gratitude Jar: Get each family member to write down something they are grateful for at the end of the day. Add your notes to your gratitude jar. Read through all the notes at the end of month or even the end of the year.
- Gratitude Journal: This is a great exercise for parents or teens. In your gratitude journal, take note of five things in your day you are grateful for. It could be something as simple as enjoying a quiet cup of coffee in the morning or taking-in a beautiful sunrise with your child.



**And remember, time spent together doing Mindfulness (whether yoga, practicing deep breathing, doing muscle relaxation) gives you a chance to slow down and re-connect with your child!**