

Helping Your Child Manage Stress through *Mindfulness*

By Michele Kane, Ed.D.

SHARE THIS PULLOUT SECTION WITH YOUR CHILDREN!

The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

Let's face it: The task of raising gifted children can be daunting! As a parent of six adult gifted kids and grandmother of eight (soon to be 10), I know only too well the struggles and the joys of gifted family dynamics. For our clan, and likely yours, the incessant questioning, insatiable curiosity, depth of insight, and creative play combines with social justice concerns, emotional intensity, heightened sensitivity, and perfectionism. This bubbling stew of wide-ranging thoughts and feelings creates conditions that are ripe for stress and anxiety.

As parents, we are confronted with keeping our gifted children intellectually stimulated and emotionally balanced. This challenge creates a different type of stress when we try to balance our own intense feelings and need for intellectual stimulation with the needs of our children.

Contemplative practices, specifically mindfulness, can help address some of the issues we all face. Why mindfulness? Much of the appeal of mindfulness lies in the fact that many of the practices are portable, inexpensive, unobtrusive, and effective. Also, mindfulness practices can enhance executive functions like planning, organization, and self-regulation, plus provide a sense of calm and peacefulness.

Recent research provides evidence that mindfulness helps people develop quick, easily accessible tools necessary to respond to stressful situations.

I invite you to give some of the suggestions on the following pages a try and encourage your children to do the same. There are many pathways to find the individual practices that are best suited for each unique gifted and talented person.

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STRESSED OUT?

Mindfulness Works

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What's it like growing up in today's world? For someone like you, it might mean a busy day filled with a long commute to school, six or seven hours of classroom instruction, a few hours of after school activities, then homework and recreation. Electronic devices are ever present. Sprinkle in taking time out to eat and sleep and it seems as if there aren't enough hours in the day.

Perhaps in your world, adding to the crush of time are: the expectations of self and others to perform well; challenges with relationships; issues of discrimination, poverty, or immigration; chronic health concerns; or feeling the weight of the world's ills and feeling unable to make changes. It can be overwhelming. People who feel overwhelmed by stressors may sometimes be unable to manage these intensities in a healthy way and might do and think things that are harmful to themselves and others. Enter *mindfulness*.

Mindfulness activities have been around since ancient times and they are found in every culture and in every part of the world. In our rush toward modernization, we discarded many of these suggestions. But, current research tells us that these simple activities are very effective in addressing the stress-filled nature of our global world. In addition, many of these strategies can be used anywhere and don't require a special place, equipment, or any money. You just need a willingness to give it a try.

The good news is that there are loads of pathways to mindfulness. If one way doesn't work for you, then try another one. It's like trying to figure out which sports or activities suit you best. The goal is a good fit and for you to access your own inner wisdom that leads you to a path of personal well-being.

Current teens are the most stressed out group of people in the United States.¹

-American Psychological Association

Mindfulness is paying attention to your life here and now, with kindness and curiosity.

-Dr. Amy Saltzman

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/04/teen-stress.aspx>

FORMAL or Informal Mindfulness?

How Will You Roll?

Mindfulness is the opposite of mindlessness. Mindfulness ensures that our life does not progress on auto-pilot. Being mindful means being tuned in to what is going on here and now. It combines head (attention) and heart (kindness), focusing on our experiences as they unfold minute by minute.

-Ellen Langer, Ph.D.,
Harvard University

Mindfulness can be a bit confusing at first. Some people conjure up a monk sitting crossed-legged, eyes closed, chanting, “OM.” Actually, that can be one way to experience mindfulness, and we call such methods *formal practice*. It means that the strategy or practice is done at a consistent time in a consistent manner.

Think about being on a sports team—sometimes the coach sets a time for practice and everyone on the team comes ready to participate. That is formal practice. But sometimes, you might practice by yourself or with a small group on a specific skill or just to stay in shape—that’s *informal practice*.

It’s the same with mindfulness. Some folks like a regular routine and set schedule. Others can only fit it into a busy day where and when the time emerges for mindfulness to occur. Either way is OK and each can strengthen a sense of well-being.

Fun Fact

Dr. Ellen Langer is the first woman to chair Harvard’s Department of Psychology, since its founding in the late 1800s

Benefits of Mindfulness

Research supports that mindfulness practices may help us improve learning, manage our emotions, and reduce our body’s reaction to stress.¹

MAY INCREASE

- Learning outcomes
- Attention and focus
- Social skills
- Emotion regulation
- Behavior in school
- Empathy and perspective-taking

MAY DECREASE

- Test anxiety
- Stress
- Posttraumatic symptoms
- Depression
- Blood pressure
- Heart palpitations

ENDNOTES

¹ www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research



Try this!

Practices to Ponder WHICH DOORWAYS APPEAL TO YOU?

There are many ways to achieve mindful awareness. Which one will you try?

- ॐ focus attention on a sound/tone
- ॐ walk with intention
- ॐ breathe in and out
- ॐ eat a meal with deliberation
- ॐ scan the body for tension or tight spots
- ॐ chant or drum while listening keenly
- ॐ savor experiences in nature
- ॐ accept the present moment
- ॐ sit in silence without expectations
- ॐ get involved with athletic activities
- ॐ explore creative arts



Informal Practices: Microbursts of Mindfulness

Find small slivers of time when you might be able to try out some mindfulness strategies. If you're feeling stressed during school, try one of these solutions.¹ Or, come up with your own list and share with the adults in your life.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ॐ Three deep breaths (in through the nose and out through the mouth) | ॐ Smile inward and/or smile outward with intention |
| ॐ Savor the moment using your senses | ॐ Listen deeply |
| ॐ Positive self-talk | ॐ Cloud appreciation/watching rain/pondering shadows |
| ॐ Affirmations directed toward self or others | ॐ Sitting still like a statue |

ENDNOTES

¹ Kane, M. (2015). Happy teachers will change the world: Nurturing the inner life of teachers. In D. Sisk (Ed.), *Accelerating and extending literacy for diverse students*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

BODY SCAN

This is a good practice to do at night in bed, just before you fall asleep.
<http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations>

Ideas for Investigation

Want to explore more? Now it's your turn!

PRACTICE!

The Number Line: 5-3-1

Try this easy-to-remember practice that combines care for self as well as others.

- 5 Spend five minutes engaged in one of the mindful awareness practices.
- 3 Create a list of three things that you appreciate or for which you have gratitude.
- 1 Engage in a random act of kindness.

What 5-3-1 ideas might appeal to you or your friends? Let me know if you have good ideas to share.*

DIG DEEPER

A Still Quiet Place

www.stillquietplace.com

American Mindfulness Research Association

goamra.org/

Center for Compassion and Altruism Research

ccare.stanford.edu/research

Center for Healthy Minds

www.investigatinghealthyminds.org

Greater Good Science Center

greatergood.berkeley.edu

READ ON

Into the Magic Shop: A Neurosurgeon's Quest to Discover the Mysteries of the Brain
by James Doty

Altered Traits: How Meditation Changes Your Mind, Brain, and Body
by Daniel Goleman and Richard Davidson

Being Peace
by Thich Nhat Hanh

The Mindful Teen: Powerful Skills to Help You Handle Stress One Moment at a Time
by Dzung X. Vo

GET APPY!

Download these apps for guided meditations, mindfulness hints, and relaxation exercises.

Stop, Breathe, and Think—Free mobile app that is suitable for young people and contains mindfulness and compassion exercises. Children as young as 2–3 can begin to access mindful sitting for brief periods of time.

Calm—Free website and mobile app with guided meditation and relaxation exercises.

Insight Timer—Free mobile app with many variations of bells and tones to help guide practice.

Headspace—Free app with guided meditations for all ages.

MindShift—Developed by Anxiety BC, this free mobile app was designed for teens with an emphasis on coping and mindfulness.

*Contact author Michele Kane at michelekane1@aol.com with your feedback and ideas!