

Mindful Games for Children

By Deb Taylor

Integrating Mindfulness into children's daily lives is a new frontier many educators and parents are enthusiastic about. Although the increased interest among practitioners and parents is escalating, the research is still young. The preliminary surveys are optimistic as program developers such as Susan Kaiser-Greenland of Innerkids.org assert that children demonstrate more awareness to their emotions through mindfulness-based games. According to Kaiser-Greenland (2010) "When children take a few moments before responding to stressful situations, they allow their own healthy inner compasses to click in and guide them to become more thoughtful, resilient, and empathetic. The step-by-step process of mental training...provides tools from which all children—and all families—will benefit." (Kaiser-Greenland, 2010 p. 2)

Dr. Daniel J. Siegel MD, recognized for his research on child psychology and neurobiology, recommends we help guide our children in the practice of becoming aware of their bodily states through The Wheel of Awareness. This 'paying attention' to the sixth sense, the bodily sensations, can be very helpful in calming their system down to recognize, accept and let go of the external stresses and act from a healthier minded state. (Siegel 2015, Brainstorm, 128)

Mindful Movements are physically calming activities that help children release pent up tension and anxiety. These engaging movements allow children to get in touch with inner emotional states which can lead to more appropriate behaviour. When children learn and integrate these skills into their lives, they are better able to respond in healthier and happier ways to the daily stresses of life. This practice includes positive intention setting, breath work, compassionate awareness to self and others, and yoga.

Many children have difficulty self-regulating. This is where mindfulness and mindful movements serve as medicine in daily doses with absolutely no negative side effects! As we set intentions for the day, for our relationships and for our productivity, we bring compassionate awareness into each choice we make with ourselves and others. The helps children self-regulate.

Starting out as a pre-K teacher, Dr. Ilana Nankin found her own stress relief in yoga. She implemented a mind-body practice in her classroom, creating a "peace corner". As she lead her group in breathing exercises, she found her students incredibly engaged and better able to focus and regulate their emotions. Nankin remembers, "My students would always ask, 'When is yoga time?'" "And as soon as we practiced our mindful movement, my students would calm down and focus." Rabbitt, M., Tust, A. (2017).

Dr. Jack Miller, professor at the University of Toronto at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) reports that after practicing a minimum of six weeks of daily mindfulness, his students focused their journal writing on how mindfulness affected their increased energy, increased listening capacities, improved sleep and generally experienced greater calm and clarity (Miller 2018, 120).

Below are some engaging activities to help children develop improved focus, emotional awareness, emotional regulation, and stress management habits (MYndful Movement Schools program).

Fading Tone: Sitting with eyes closed or cast down. Take a calming breath to begin relaxation. (Adult facilitator rings a bell). Pay close attention to the sound. Raise your hand when you can't hear the tone anymore.

Pass it Back: Pass an object or roll a ball back and forth to the child, first naming a physical sensation in your body, then naming an emotion you are feeling i.e., "My body feels relaxed. My mind feels happy" "My body feels stiff. My mind feels nervous" (modified from Mindful Games Activity Cards, Kaiser-Greenland, S. 2017).

Tame the Dinosaur: Run your right hand over your left ear and down your neck, shoulder, arm and off your hand. Take a deep breath in and blow out. Repeat as you tell your brain that you are okay (modified from Be the Boss of your Thoughts, Yordy, J., 2013).

Kindness Bird: As the child holds a feather, ask questions to guide focus to the colour, shape, size, and how it feels in their fingers. Holding the feather just in front of their face, direct the child to breathe through the nose calmly and watch the feather flutter. The child can then run the feather down their face, neck and arm to bring on a peaceful state of relaxation.

References

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About the Author

As an intermediate and senior level teacher, mindfulness facilitator and yoga instructor, Deb Taylor is committed to teaching people how to feel better, in body and in mind. Deb has had more than 300 hours of mindfulness-based study and learning including the Mindful Schools teacher training and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program. Her formal teaching experience of more than 20 years has taught her the correlation between a child's mental health and their readiness to learn. Through her mindfulness-based classroom practice, the MYndful Movement curriculum has been developed to teach children, teachers and parents, new ways of moving, breathing and coping with compassion to self and others. For more information on the MYndful Movement program contact:

www.debtaylorlife.com

info@debtaylorlife.com

