



## **Our counsellor introduced parents to the concept of Mindfulness, a skill that can help teenagers deal with the complexities of modern life.**

### **So what is Mindfulness?**

According to Jon Kabat-Zinn mindfulness means "paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally."

Mindfulness practitioners learn how to pay attention on purpose by practicing specially developed mindfulness meditation practices & mindful movements. With practice, practitioners learn to slow down or stop brain chatter and automatic or habitual reactions and experience the present moment as it really is.

When practicing mindfulness everyone, however much they practice, will experience thoughts creeping in to their heads uninvited. This is fine – it's what our brains do naturally, but how we respond to these thoughts is important.

If we start to think about the thought or get annoyed with ourselves for not being able to retain our focus, it stops us paying attention and takes us away from the present moment. If we just acknowledge the thought and let it go without judgment, we retain our focus on being in the present moment. Think of it as puppy training with our thoughts as the puppies - they need training and constant retrieval and reward.

As with all new skills, the more we practice it the easier it becomes. It's like a muscle. The more we use it, the stronger it gets. For young people, it can be helpful to liken it to physiotherapy for the brain. Every time they practice paying attention to their breath for example, or focus on something or somewhere with their 5 senses, they do a bicep curl for the brain.

Neurons that fire together, wire together.

But meditation on its own is not going to "solve" anything, nor is it going to create any changes straight away. Mindfulness is a set of skills that promote self-compassion and compassion to others

They include: Meditation, practicing focused awareness and relating to our feelings differently and not judging them as either good or bad

### **WHY PRACTICE MINDFULNESS?**

Have you ever been driving somewhere and arrived at your destination only to realise that you remember nothing about your journey? Most people have! These are common examples of "mindlessness," or "going on automatic pilot." In our modern, busy lives we constantly multi-task. It's easy to lose awareness of the present moment as we become lost in our efforts to juggle work, home, finances and other conflicting demands.

As humans, we are often "not present" in our own lives. We often fail to notice the good things about our lives, fail to hear what our bodies are telling us, or poison ourselves with toxic self-criticism. That is true for our children too, especially as much of their time is spent in a parallel cyber world where being "present" takes on a whole different meaning.



Human minds are easily distracted, habitually examining past events and trying to anticipate the future. Becoming more aware of our thoughts, feelings and sensations may not sound like an obviously helpful thing to do, however, learning to do this in a way that suspends judgment and self-criticism can have an incredibly positive impact on our lives.

Mindfulness will not eliminate life's pressures, but it can help us respond to them in a calmer manner that benefits every bit of our lives, head and heart. It helps us recognise and step away from habitual, often unconscious emotional and physiological reactions to everyday events. It provides us with a scientifically researched approach to cultivating clarity, insight and understanding. Practicing mindfulness allows us to be fully present in our life and work, and improve our quality of life and relationships.

## SHOW ME THE EVIDENCE

Two good articles:

<http://bemindful.co.uk/evidence-research>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/08/mindfulness-meditation-benefits-health\\_n\\_3016045.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/08/mindfulness-meditation-benefits-health_n_3016045.html)

Practicing mindfulness brings benefits to the brain in many ways that have the potential to make a real difference to the mental health of children

Research shows mindfulness practice can change one's pre-frontal cortex, the conductor of the brain, whose job is it to orchestrate thoughts and actions according to internal goals. This change can help to:

- Bring teens into the present moment through a reduction of focus on the past or future, and more attention on the here and now.
- Reduce rumination, "distorted" thinking, worries, negative self-talk and judgments.
- Increase letting go, empathy, patience, being with what is, and kindness toward self and others.

In addition to increasing one's decision-making ability and ability to be aware of thoughts and emotions; brain imaging studies show increased activity in the left prefrontal lobes of experienced meditators. This area is linked to positive emotions, self-control and temperament. In addition to anxiety reduction, meditators also showed significant improvement in immune functioning.

Some of the other benefits of mindfulness suggested by the latest research include:

- Increased emotional regulation
- Increased social skills
- Increased working memory
- Increased calmness and self-acceptance
- Better sleep
- Fewer conduct and anger management problems



## RESOURCES

Watch this 2 minute video with your child on you tube if you are interested:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rqoxYKtEWEc>- Mice and mindfulness on YouTube

Ted talk by Andy Puddicombe, the founder of Headspace mindfulness app:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzR62JJCMBQ>- All it takes is 10 mindful minutes on YouTube

Lovely video helping teenagers understand their critical mind:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRqI4lxuXAw> - compassion for voices- a tale of courage and hope on YouTube

A short piece on understanding the brain by Dr Dan Siegal  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vESKrzvgA40>- Hand model of the brain

## SOME SUGGESTED READING FOR ADULTS

The compassionate mind approach to building self-confidence-M Welford

Mindfulness - A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world - Mark Williams and Danny Penman

Get Some Headspace - How 10 minutes can make all the difference - Andy Puddicombe

The Now Effect - How this moments can change the rest of your life - Goldstein

A Mindfulness Stress Reduction Workbook - Bob Stahl

## FOR ADULTS AND CHILDREN:

The Mindfulness Colouring Book - Emma Farrarons

Get out of your head and into your life for teens - Joseph Ciarrochi

The Happiness Trap Pocketbook – Russ Harris

## SOME GREAT APPS

<http://stopbreathethink.org>

[www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com) Free 10-day trial

<http://smilingmind.com.au>- Great for younger children

## SOME GREAT ARTICLES

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/may/26/five-of-the-best-meditation-apps>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-rudell-beach-/teaching-mindfulness-to-teenagers\\_b\\_5696247.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-rudell-beach-/teaching-mindfulness-to-teenagers_b_5696247.html)



RESPONSIBILITY  
RESPECT  
LOYALTY  
INTEGRITY

[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/introducing-men-to-mindfulness\\_uk\\_573d8e9ae4b0328a838bf833](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/introducing-men-to-mindfulness_uk_573d8e9ae4b0328a838bf833)

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elisha-goldstein-phd/can-mindfulness-really-re\\_b\\_1017931.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elisha-goldstein-phd/can-mindfulness-really-re_b_1017931.html)