



Mindful Parenting for Parents and Caregivers

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION FACT SHEET • FS108E

When we are mindful, we see what is before us.

When we are not mindful, we see what is in our mind.

—Scott Rogers

What is mindful parenting?

Mindful parenting is when parents or caregivers intentionally develop a nonjudgmental awareness of their own thoughts, emotions, and sensations in the present moment. They then extend this awareness to the relationship with their children in order to create desirable change that is in line with their parenting goals and priorities. There are five dimensions of mindful parenting that can help parents respond to their children more skillfully, that is, with more awareness and less reactivity (Duncan et al. 2009).

Why practice mindful parenting?

Parenting can be full of challenges, big and small, yet parenting provides countless opportunities for parents to grow in tandem with their children. Practicing mindfulness and mindful parenting in particular can help parents improve communication, improve their ability to parent in line with their values, and balance the goals they have set for themselves and their children (Duncan et al. 2009). Parents who practice mindfulness can cultivate their ability to be aware, attentive,

intentional, self-regulated, content, and appropriately responsive. Parents who practice mindfulness are more likely to create satisfying family relationships and to be effective when applying parenting strategies while in the moment. Children with parents or caregivers who practice mindfulness have shown signs of greater resilience, such as better school performance, more positive relationships, greater flexibility and adaptability, and healthier self-esteem (Placone 2011; Singh et al. 2007).

How to practice?

Everyone, including parents who feel multiple demands on their time, can practice paying attention to their sensations, emotions, and thoughts—comfortable and uncomfortable—without automatically judging or reacting. Practices can vary in length, content, and intention. A practice can take less than it takes to silently repeat a word or statement, such as “breathe,” or it can take 5–10 minutes as it does in the sample practice “Kindness to Myself and to My Child” that follows. Longer, more intensive sessions, retreats, workshops or workshop series can help catalyze deeper learning. Many parents find it helpful to set a specific goal around practice length, time, and/or frequency that is not out of reach and stick to it for a certain time frame. Some parents find it helpful to participate with a “practice buddy” and/or in a group that meets on a regular basis.

The Five Dimensions of Mindful Parenting

1. Listening with full attention
2. Nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child
3. Emotional awareness
4. Self-regulation in the parenting relationship
5. Compassion for self and for child

SAMPLE PRACTICE: Kindness to Myself and to My Child

Introduction:

Start this introductory “Kindness to Myself and to My Child” practice session by first reading and reviewing the steps in your mind. Then follow each step outlined below. (Refer to this instruction sheet for help with regular, possibly daily, practice.) Practice whenever you remember, with the intention of being *patient, accepting, and nonjudgmental, even compassionate towards yourself*, especially when it feels like focusing is too difficult or progress is too slow in coming.

Time needed: 5-10 minutes.

Step 1. Find a place to sit that is quiet with few distractions. Sit comfortably, yet remain alert. Become aware of your posture, your breath, and the temperature of your breath as it enters and leaves your body. Notice any physical sensations or thoughts and allow them to enter or leave your body and your mind at will.

Step 2. Bring into your awareness, attention, or mind an image of yourself, and repeat the following affirmations silently:

May be **well**

May be **peaceful** and at ease

May **live with ease of heart**

May be **happy** and free

Note: You can change the phrases in bold to ones that resonate with you. Possible words or phrases may be safe, healthy, joyful, or something similar.

Step 3. Take a few more breaths to return to your body. Notice how you feel now.

Step 4. Repeat steps 1-3 and the sequence of affirmations, substituting the name(s) of your child (or children).

For a more detailed discussion of mindfulness techniques or alternative techniques, check out Further Readings and Resources listed below.

Further Readings

Kabat-Zinn, J., and M. Kabat-Zinn. 1997. *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*. New York: Harper Collins.

Placone, P. 2011. *Mindful Parent Happy Child: A Guide to Raising Joyful and Resilient Children*. Palo Alto: Alaya Press.

Rogers, S. 2005. *Mindful Parenting: Meditations, Verses, and Visualizations for a More Joyful Life*. Miami Beach: Mindful Living Press.

Additional Resources

Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network. <http://www.cyfernet.org/>.

Parenting Further. <http://www.parentfurther.com/why/9-parenting-strategies>.

References

Duncan, L.G., J.D. Coatsworth, and M.T. Greenberg. 2009. A Model of Mindful Parenting: Implications for Parent-Child Relationships and Prevention Research. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 12(3): 255–270 doi:10.1007/s10567-009-0046-3.

Kabat-Zinn, J. 1994. *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. New York: Hyperion Books.

Singh, N.N., G.E. Lancioni, A.S.W. Winton, J. Singh, J.W. Curtis, R.G. Wahler, et al. 2007. Mindful Parenting Decreases Aggression and Increases Social Behavior in Children with Developmental Disabilities. *Behavior Modification* 31(6): 749–771 doi:10.1177/0145445507300924.



By **Jenn Crawford**, Extension Educator, Family and Human Development, WSU Chelan County, Wenatchee, WA.

Copyright 2013 Washington State University

WSU Extension bulletins contain material written and produced for public distribution. Alternate formats of our educational materials are available upon request for persons with disabilities. Please contact Washington State University Extension for more information.

You may download copies of this and other publications from WSU Extension at <http://pubs.wsu.edu>.

Issued by Washington State University Extension and the U.S. Department of Agriculture in furtherance of the Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension programs and policies are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, sex, religion, age, color, creed, and national or ethnic origin; physical, mental, or sensory disability; marital status or sexual orientation; and status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local WSU Extension office. Trade names have been used to simplify information; no endorsement is intended. Published February 2013.

FS108E