

RELAXATION AND MINDFULNESS TO HELP CHILDREN CALM DOWN

Mindfulness helps us calm the mind, relax the body and respond to stress and develop resilience by focusing on “the Now” in our body, breath and surroundings. “Spaghetti” is a metaphor for resilience. When spaghetti is not cooked, it is rigid and it breaks if you try to bend it whereas when cooked, it bends. By practicing mindfulness and putting in effort we can learn to be like spaghetti so that we can “bend” and adapt to stress in tough times. Even if we’re sad that we can’t see our family and friends or are stressed about homework we can say to ourselves, “This won’t break me.”

AT SCHOOL

These skills can be used as a transition from one subject to another, at the beginning of the day, after lunch and recess, at the end of the day or on Fridays.

Counting

Pick a random number like 80 and count to it to help your child calm down. Have your child pick a number and count to it.

Five Senses “54321”

This exercise helps “ground” children to be present in their bodies and connect to their surroundings. Have your child find or describe: 5 objects they can **see**; then 4 objects they can **feel** or touch; then 3 things they can **hear**; then 2 things they can **smell**; then 1 thing they can **taste**.

Imagine Your Favorite Place

A child's imagination is a powerful tool to help them take a “mini vacation” to their favorite place, no matter where they are. Ask them to imagine a place where they feel safe, relaxed, and happy. Have them imagine who may be with them i.e. a person, animal or pet, what they are doing in this place, what they see and hear in this place.

Calming Jar

This activity can be done one-on-one or in a group. Children shake their jars and as the glitter settles to the ground, encourage them to settle their mind too. To learn how to make a calming jar google: goodto.com glitter-jars.

AT HOME

These skills can be used to help your child settle down- before homework, school, or bedtime.

Yoga

Go Noodle website has videos specifically designed to help kids take deep breaths and relax.

Take a Bath

Add bubbles or toys to the tub, play some soothing music or listen to an audiobook.

Nature Walk

Take your child for a walk outside in nature. What do you hear? What do you see that is growing? Touch the bark of a tree trunk or collect acorns or leaves. How does it feel? Rub a pine needle. How does it smell? Return regularly to the same place and observe the small and big changes of the seasons. What new sounds can you hear? What new things are growing? While walking, ask your child to describe how the ground feels. How does it change with each step? Change is always happening, and the earth has rhythms.

Flower and Bubbles Breathing

Have your child hold a **flower** in one hand and a **bubble wand** or a **pinwheel** in the other hand. Smell the flower. Breathe in slowly and deeply through the nose. Blow bubbles or move the pinwheel. Breathe out slowly through the mouth.

Belly Breathing

Have your child lay on the floor with their one hand on their stomach. For younger children, find a favorite stuffed animal to place on their belly, and ask them to take their stuffed animal “for a ride.” Slowly breathe in and notice how the stomach expands like a balloon. Slowly breathe out and notice how the stomach deflates. Then, have your child stand up with one hand on the stomach and one hand on the chest. Have them try to breathe deeply moving just their belly, not their chest.

Bunny Breathing

Have your child pretend they are a bunny. Kneel with their hands drawn up and their chin tucked down. Twitch the nose to get ready for breathing. Take several short, quick “sniffs” in through the nose. Exhale in one long, smooth breath.

Mindful Baking

Put on calming music and lead your child through baking or cooking something simple i.e. cookies a pizza. Have your child count out quantities and show them how to carefully measure ingredients. Have them feel sensation of kneading or rolling out dough. Smell the aroma of baking. Taste the end-product! You can turn this into a practice of compassion by making an extra batch for an isolated neighbor, or as a “thank you” in gratitude to someone.

Making Lemonade

Have your child imagine that they are standing beneath a lemon tree. **Pick lemons.** Stretch hands in the air and grab the imaginary lemons. **Squeeze the juice.** Make tight fists and squeeze hard. **Take a break.** Throw the lemons on the ground and relax the hands. Repeat until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade. **Relax.** After the last squeeze and throw, shake out those hands!

The Big Squeeze (Progressive Relaxation)

Starting with their toes, have your child pick one muscle and squeeze it tightly. Count to five, then release for 10 seconds. Pay attention to how the body feels. Repeat by moving up the body and squeezing different muscles, one at a time. You may also refer to: www.yourfamilyclinic.com/adhd/relax.htm. <https://youtu.be/8Xp2UzG7UYY>

Animals

Have your child move like different animals i.e. kangaroo, snake, penguin. Ask them how their body feels different with each animal?

Alphabet

Gently trace a letter of the alphabet in your child’s palm with your finger and ask what they feel?

Rub Hands

Have your child rub their hands together quickly for a minute; then have them stop and notice how their hands feel i.e. tingly, warm.

Mindfulness Resources for Children

These resources are designed to teach children techniques for managing their bodies, breath, and emotions.

- Yoga 4 Classrooms Card Deck by Lisa Flynn
- Sitting Still Like a Frog-Activity Book and Audio Exercises by Eline Snel
- Breathe Like a Bear-Book by Kira Willey
- YouTube videos and Resources for Children with Anxiety by Lynn Lyons:

References

- Connecticutchildrens.org/coronavirus/resilience-is-mindfulness, Ana Maria Verissimo, MD, MA
- Copingskillsforkids.com/blog/calming-and-relaxing-coping-skills