

Mindfulness for Children (and Adults) and the Benefits

Recently a few staff members from the Junior School participated in mindfulness training for children. The training program, titled 'Peaceful Kids', revealed to our staff that practising mindfulness has the potential to deliver the following benefits:

- Minimise symptoms of anxiety and stress.
- Minimise anxiety symptoms occurring in the future.
- Build emotional resilience.
- Empower children to self-manage their anxiety.
- Teach children to 'self-calm'.
- Improve sleeping patterns.
- Improve concentration, attention and memory.
- Reduce reactivity and increase emotional intelligence.
- Increase joyful experiences.

Mindfulness can be described as the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment. It can be developed through the practice of meditation and other brain exercises. Well-known Australian child psychologist, Dr Carr-Gregg said earlier this month:

'Mindfulness has been found to reduce anxiety and improve concentration, productivity and sleep for students. We know that one in seven primary schoolkids have significant mental health disorders, and one in four kids have psychological problems in high school. I think every year in the last five years that number has gotten bigger. If we just sit on our hands and do nothing, the only thing that can occur is we'll have the same problem, if not worse.'

(Sydney Morning Herald, May 6, 2018)

Many people with faith use mindfulness as a window to prayer, finding the quiet and still mind the perfect platform to experience God. By other names, mindfulness and meditation are a part of most religious traditions. In our Christian tradition, prayerful meditation, which stills and quietens the busy mind – so bombarded by noise and other stimuli in our modern world, provides the opportunity to open our minds and our hearts to God.

Mindfulness practice is simple, powerful, takes just a few minutes each day and can be done almost anywhere, so it can be a great addition to your everyday mental health self-care. It is easy to dwell on painful memories, old problems, worries and fears about the future, and without an anchor to the present, minds can get overwhelmed by stress.

Mindfulness is that anchor to the present moment. By tuning in to your breath, body and senses, you can learn to let those stressful thoughts and feelings come and go without getting caught up in judging or controlling them. Children and adults can benefit from learning how to strengthen the 'mind muscle' so that a sense of calm and stillness becomes easy to reach in daily life.

Mindfulness meditation activities have been practised in many of our Junior School classrooms for a couple of years now. Staff use their knowledge and skills of mindfulness and apps such as Smiling Mind and Breathe to guide these sessions. We are currently looking at the Peaceful Kids program and note the ease of delivering this program which aligns well with the Personal and Social Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum – more information on this later.

Psychologists use mindfulness as part of several evidence-based therapies including Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-based Cognitive Behavioural

therapy (MCBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and Dialectical Behaviour therapy (DBT).

If you were considering becoming more mindful (and the benefits are the same for adults as for children), you would start having mindful moments after identifying an everyday activity such as brushing your teeth, eating lunch and walking. You would focus on noticing what your senses are saying. If your attention wanders, that's OK – simply bring your mind back to your senses.

Thoughts and feelings come and go and while anchored to the present moment, you keep your awareness on your senses while focusing on your breath. You feel the air go in and out and the pauses in between – you don't control your breath in any certain way, you simply allow the air to come and go.

Let mindfulness spread to other parts of your day. Practise little moments of mindfulness when you're waiting for the kettle to boil, or while waiting for your children to come out of school. Try it sitting still, or moving around, in the morning or last thing at night. Keep practising, it gets easier and more satisfying the more you do it.

Here is a step-by-step guide to the practice of mindfulness as described at <https://www.sane.org/mental-health-and-illness/facts-and-guides/mindfulness>

THE BASICS OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

Mindfulness helps us put some space between ourselves and our reactions, breaking down our conditioned responses.

Here's how to tune into mindfulness throughout the day: <https://www.mindful.org/wp-content/uploads/jason-lee-getting-started-green-sitting.jpg>

1. Set aside some time. You don't need a meditation cushion or bench, or any sort of special equipment to access your mindfulness skills, but you do need to set aside some time and space.

2. Observe the present moment as it is. The aim of mindfulness is not quieting the mind or attempting to achieve a state of eternal calm. The goal is simple: we're

aiming to pay attention to the present moment, without judgment. Easier said than done, we know.

3. Let your judgments roll by. When we notice judgments arising during our practice, we can make a mental note of them, and let them pass.

4. Return to observing the present moment as it is. Our minds often get carried away in thought. That's why mindfulness is the practice of returning, again and again, to the present moment.

5. Be kind to your wandering mind. Don't judge yourself for whatever thoughts crop up, just practice recognising when your mind has wandered off, and gently bring it back.

That's the practice. It's often been said that it's very simple, but it's not necessarily easy. The work is to just keep doing it. Results will accrue.

Practising mindfulness can help you to cope with everyday life and deal with the tough times. It can also help you to concentrate, relax and be more productive. Becoming mindful involves training your brain, so it takes time. Don't expect to be able to hold your focus for very long to begin with. It's completely normal for thoughts to wander; the goal is not to have

a blank mind, but to focus on the 'what' and the 'now', and when thoughts drift, guide them back. Mindfulness is a practice which assists with mental fitness for both adults and children alike.

More information can be found at the links below:

www.peacefulkids.com.au

<https://www.mindful.org/how-to-practice-mindfulness/>

<https://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-practise-mindfulness>

www.smilingmind.com.au

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mindfulness-and-mental-health>

[https://blackdoginstitute.org.au/.../7-mindfulnessineverydaylife-\(with-gp-notes\).pdf](https://blackdoginstitute.org.au/.../7-mindfulnessineverydaylife-(with-gp-notes).pdf)

Suggested apps:

Smiling Mind

Breathe

Insight Timer

Headspace: Guided Meditation

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