

Is Mindfulness the Secret Behind Better Health & Making Kids Behave?

Dealing with disobedience is part and parcel of being a parent and working with children. We've all been there in some way or another; desperately trying to diffuse a tantrum at the supermarket till or dealing with frustrated tears at bedtime. Everyone has their own methods of handling these ups and down, but managing a child's bad behaviour and your own subsequent stress levels doesn't always have to be quite so exhausting.

Although it may have seemed unlikely at first, a form of meditation known as mindfulness is now being championed as the key to getting kids to behave *and* improving our general health.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a form of meditation which has its origins in a variety of ancient philosophical and spiritual meditation practices. However, mindfulness differs from some other forms of meditation as instead of encouraging a person to clear their minds, it asks them to concentrate on their thoughts and focus on what surrounds them without allowing themselves to get distracted.



Image: [Betty Nudler](#)

Professor of Clinical Psychology at the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, Mark Williams, says that using mindfulness to become more aware of what's going on around us can help [to alleviate the "tunnel-vision" we develop](#) when bustling between daily activities.

Mindfulness offers us the chance to take a moment to acknowledge and appreciate each sensation, feeling and emotion that affects us and respond appropriately to them. By doing this, we can move forwards with a greater understanding of ourselves and the world around us.

How Mindfulness Can Benefit Children's Behaviour

Although long dismissed as a "hippie" holistic treatment, the medical community is now embracing the practice as an effective treatment for mental wellbeing and behavioural issues.

In 2012 an academic study conducted by Katherine Weare, emeritus professor at Exeter and Southampton universities. Looking at the impact of mindfulness on children and young people, the study found that mindfulness [helps to develop cognitive and performance skills](#). In turn, this then leads to children becoming more focused in the classroom and paying closer attention to their studies.

The mostly widely used mindfulness-based secondary school curriculum in the UK, Mindfulness in Schools' [.b \("Stop, Breathe and Be"\)](#), is aimed at helping teach students mindfulness as a life tool; the basic act of becoming mindful simply by stopping and breathing becomes the crux of a nine lesson course for schools. Utilising [.b](#) properly can enhance children's happiness as well as academic performance, and help them better concentrate and deal with stress.

It isn't just in UK schools that mindfulness is being embraced either; a school in San Francisco conducted an internal study to see how mindfulness affected teenagers; after encouraging students to take part in "quiet time", where they closed their eyes and focused their minds, the school [reported a 45% drop in student suspensions](#).



Image: [Rennet Stowe](#)

Weare refers to mindfulness as the "WD40" for education, as it allows children the opportunity to find the focus needed to achieve their academic goals. Weare suggests inviting pupils to stop what they are doing to close their eyes and acknowledge what's happening both inside and outside their mind and body at that very moment. After two minutes of concentrated reflection, students often continue their work in a much calmer manner.

Other Uses for Mindfulness

Although the Buddhist practice of mindfulness has been proven to have benefits for children, how can it help others too?

Using mindfulness on a day to day basis doesn't just help children's concentration levels, but can also assist with an adult's day-to-day routine. Although an All Party Parliamentary Group on Mindfulness is already up and running, Madeleine Bunting is part of a further initiative aiming to introduce mindfulness into parliamentary discussions and explore how it can be put into practice

by the public. Bunting believes that mindfulness can provide a respite for our minds that are usually spinning with thought, and help us to [identify and then avoid damaging behaviours](#) such as obsessive thought patterns or rash reactions which we later come to regret.

The health benefits of mindfulness have been widely reported. It has been claimed that when practised correctly, mindfulness meditation could help to [reduce pain by up to 57%](#).

One of the most common uses for mindfulness is as an alternative treatment for depression and other similar mental health issues. As mindfulness aims to teach you to listen to your thoughts, emotions and other factors around you, you're able to identify and address any irregular feelings as a preventative measure towards targeting depression.

For those already suffering with depression, mindfulness is able to [reduce symptoms of the illness by up to 20%](#) according to a study by the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. For those who have suffered from depression in the past but have since recovered, mindfulness has been shown to [reduce the risk of relapse by 44%](#) according to the Oxford Mindfulness Centre.

The results speak for themselves; mindfulness has huge potential to benefit both children and adults. From what seems like such a simple concept comes the capacity to unlock great potential in our children and power in our adult lives, both personally and professionally. As more medical experts give merit to mindfulness and the practice is made more widely available, it seems hopeful that in the foreseeable future the public should follow suit too.

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