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Marilyn Wedge Ph.D.

Suffer the Children

MINDFULNESS

7 Ways Mindfulness Can Help Children's Brains

Neuroscience is rediscovering Buddha—to the benefit of our kids.

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Reviewed by Jessica Schrader



The gentle meditative technique of mindfulness has been used to treat a variety of psychiatric and medical disorders. Mindfulness has been found to decrease stress, depression, anxiety, and burnout in adults. It is also used to treat autoimmune illnesses like Graves' disease and Fibromyalgia.

Mindfulness was formally introduced as a medical intervention in 1979, when Jon KabatZinn started his program of "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction" at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Since then, hundreds of medical centers, hospitals, and clinics around the world have adopted mindfulness to reduce pain and stress in patients.

Because mindfulness can promote skills that are controlled in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, like the ability to focus and

principles of neuroscience suggest that meditation can have its greatest impact on cognition when the brain is in its earliest stages of development."

Today, the practice of mindfulness has increasingly been incorporated in elementary and high school classrooms to support students' mental health and well-being. A recent [study](#), published in the journal *Mindfulness* in June 2018, showed especially good results with late adolescents ages 15 to 18.

There is a lot of buzz about mindfulness in today's ringtone-saturated culture. But mindfulness is actually an ancient technique of healing and promoting happiness that goes back 25 centuries to the teachings of the Buddha.

For all the hype, the practice of mindfulness is very simple. It is simply attending to one's perceptions in the present moment without thinking, analyzing, or judging. It is bare attentiveness, a quiet awareness of one's own body in space. Buddhist philosophy calls it "lucid awareness."

Here are seven evidence-based ways that practicing mindfulness meditation can help children:

1. It can give kids the habit of focusing on the present moment and ignoring distractions.
2. It can teach them to stay calm in the face of life's stressful times.
3. It can create good habits for the future. When faced with life's challenges, they know they can find peace by taking a few moments to meditate.

5. It can promote patience.
6. It can improve executive functions in their brain like cognitive control, working memory, cognitive flexibility, and better grades.
7. It can improve attentiveness and impulse control.

Mindfulness has nothing to do with concepts or thinking. This may be difficult for today's parents to understand with the emphasis on conceptual learning in our education system. Mindfulness cannot be "taught" like math or science. It can only be modeled and guided by a teacher or even by parents. The positive results of mindfulness on child mental health is a good argument for parents to take time to learn this ancient art and practice it with their children.

THE BASICS

What Is Mindfulness?

[Find a mindfulness-based therapist](#)

References

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Marilyn Wedge, Ph.D., is a family therapist and the author of *A Disease Called Childhood: Why ADHD became an American Epidemic*.

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