



# MEANTÓIR

Professional Supports for  
Early Childhood Education

## Knowledge Byte #2

### Help Children Slow Down through Mindfulness Play

Mindfulness has been steadily gaining popularity, as more and more adults engage in the practice which encourages us to pay attention to our emotions and live in the moment as a way of relieving stress and anxiety.

So what exactly is mindfulness? In a nutshell, **mindfulness is a type of meditation where you shift your awareness to focus on what you're sensing and feeling in that present moment.** Practising mindfulness can involve breathing methods, guided imagery, and other techniques to help relax the body and mind and help reduce stress responses. It's not about 'switching off' your mind, but bringing your awareness into the present and giving your mind a rest.

#### What about Young Children?

The growth of smart phones, tablets and apps, can mean that children exist in a fast-paced 'swiping' culture where they can find it hard to stop and be still. They can find it hard to 'just be' and to connect with things that are slower.

Research shows that mindfulness techniques have a positive impact on the health of children. Adult supported Mindfulness sessions can decrease anxiety, stress, reactivity and unwanted behaviour. It can also improve sleep, self-esteem and help children better manage their emotions.

#### Practicing Mindfulness with Young Children

As children tend to be more open to new experiences, it's easy to introduce Mindfulness to young children. The key is to keep it as simple as possible and embed in the daily routine. **Below are 5 simple and meaningful Mindfulness routines for young children:**

##### 1. Balloon Breathing

Breathing techniques is a useful practice for any time of the day and can have significant immediate effects. To start, ask children to place their hands on their tummy. Tell them to imagine that they have a small balloon in their tummy and that each time they breathe in, the balloon blows up, and each time they breathe out, the balloon deflates.

As they breathe in, they can say to themselves in their head, 'Blow up balloon', and as they breathe out, they can say, 'Let all the air out'. Ask them to close their eyes and picture the balloon blowing up and deflating with each in and out breath. You should continue this for about 30 seconds to three minutes, depending on the age and attention span of children.

## **2. Eat like a Scientist**

When it comes to snack/mealtimes, it can often be a race to eat as fast as possible, to the point that we often barely register the process. This exercise, is great for instilling a sense of appreciation in children, and encourages them to slow down and think about what they are eating.

During snack time, choose a piece of food to share with children -fruit or dried fruit works well. Now tell children that you are going to explore what you are eating. Take a moment to investigate what your food looks like:

- What colour/shape is it?
- What else can you notice about the way your food looks?
- Looking really closely, can you see any patterns or lines on this food?
- In the same way, explore the texture of the food.
- Take a deep breath in. How does it smell?
- How does it feel in your mouth? Notice the shape and texture. Does it taste of anything?

The adult should keep children engaged, exploring their plate in this way until all of the food is finished thereby slowing down the eating process and engaging children in a meaningful way.

## **3. Find Positive Moments**

Mindfulness doesn't have to consist of lengthy and intense meditation sessions. One idea is to urge children to say what they're thankful for at the end of every day and share your own thoughts to give them confidence in the act. Gratitude is a cornerstone of mindfulness and can help enrich your quality of life. It can help teach children early on that there are positive moments in every day.

## **4. Let's Talk about Feelings**

Take some time aside to talk to your children about their emotions. Ask them how they feel mentally and get them to describe how this makes their body feel. Use images with younger children. Understanding how your emotions impact your physicality is an important part of mindfulness, which helps you break down negative thoughts and understand that they are temporary.

## **5. Bedtime Body Scan**

For children that have a little trouble falling asleep, body scanning can be extremely effective for making children feel much more relaxed and ready to drop off when they lie down. Get children to lie flat on their back and guide them through their own body from their head to their toes. Ask them to feel every part of their body, squish it (tense the muscles) and let go. This practice will teach children more about how they carry tension in their body and how to release it.

Compiled from: Mindfulness For Children, Uz Afzal/ Mindfulness in Ireland, Irish Life.