

Mindful Breathing for Ecoplay

This Mindful Breathing Exercise may be used any time you or your child are feeling emotionally overwhelmed, stressed out, or depressed, but that is not its only purpose. If you make it a part of your daily routine, it will actually improve your ability to concentrate, focus, and regulate your responses to your emotions. It is three simple steps, outlined below. You don't have to do it for any exact length of time. You just do it for as long as is necessary.

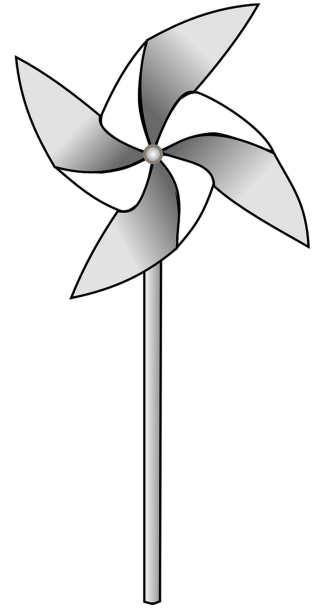
You may find it helpful to set aside a time every day to practice mindful breathing together with your child.

STEP ONE

Focus on your breathing.

Take long, deep, regular breaths. For children under 12, it may help to give them a pinwheel or give them a bubble wand to let them blow bubbles when exhaling so that they can estimate about how slowly they should exhale. Teach them to feel all the sensations of their breath as it enters and leaves their body. Can they feel each individual muscle in their abdomen as they breathe in and out? Can they feel their nostrils flare with each breath? Can they sense the air being warmed by their body as they breathe?

When you are stressed out, your heart rate goes up, your blood pressure goes up, and your breathing becomes rapid and shallow. All three of these physiological responses are wired together through your nervous system. If one changes, they all change. While you can't consciously will your heart rate or blood pressure to decrease, you can change your rate of breathing. The more slowly, regularly and deeply your child breathes, the more they influence their heart rate and their blood pressure to do the same, thereby calming their "fight or flight" response.



STEP TWO

Leave Doing Mode and enter Being Mode.

In Being Mode, you are not trying to go anywhere or do anything. You are simply being. Note that if you engage in Mindful Breathing with the goal of "trying to relax" or "trying to calm down," that "trying" is "doing" and when you are engaging in mindful breathing, you are not doing. Your goal is to "be," not to "do." Just teach your child to focus on the breathing in the moment, without doing anything else.

STEP THREE

Leave Thinking Mode and enter Sensing Mode.

This doesn't mean that your child is "trying" to stop thinking. Remember, "trying" is "doing." The more you tell yourself, "Don't think about it," the more you're thinking about it. Instead, you're just refocusing your attention and concentration from your thinking to your senses. You are paying attention to what your senses are telling you. Ask your child, "What are you seeing right now? What do you hear? Are there any scents where you are? Tastes? How does your body interact with this environment?"

The more they are able to focus on these physical sensations, the more they will be able to leave thinking mode and enter into sensing mode.

That's it! Just use these three simple steps whenever your child needs a break from thinking or feeling or when their emotions overwhelm them...or you. If it seems difficult to do at first, that's okay. It's a skill like any other. It becomes easier with practice. If it were easy the first time, you'd already be doing it! Just remember to keep practicing.