



Health Tips for Parents

OCTOBER 2017 | VOLUME 136

How mindful meditation can help your child

Mindful meditation is a time of quiet contemplation that offers children and adolescents an opportunity to decompress and reflect on their physical, mental and emotional experiences.

By refocusing the brain on the present, mindful meditation can help children improve their attention, regulate their emotions and build resiliency. “Mindful meditation allows children to develop a greater sense of appreciation for their lives,” says Diana Winston, director of mindfulness education at UCLA’s Mindful Awareness Research Center. “It helps kids and teens develop important life skills — focus, reflection, compassion and a sense of connection — and is especially beneficial for children with attention-deficit disorders or those prone to anxiety or anger.”

Techniques and tips

Meditation should not be a punishment or a forced activity, advises Winston. If you feel your child is ready and able,

start with one-minute daily sessions and build to five-minute sessions as they get older. For younger children, try game-based techniques (e.g., mindfulness-based activity cards) or calming sound exercises that focus their attention on specific sounds. Adolescents can start with a more advanced approach, such as “breathing on purpose” — counting the number of breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling completely through the mouth. When the mind starts to wander, refocus on breathing.

“You can start with meditation, but mindfulness is a quality of attention that you can bring to any moment, when you eat, as you walk to class or before you go to sleep,” Winston says.

Benefits

Mindful meditation offers a range of mental, physical and emotional benefits, including:

- Reducing stress
- Building resiliency
- Enhancing emotional regulation
- Improving cognitive focus (e.g., when test taking)
- Encouraging deeper personal insight
- Improving general health and well-being



Social media and parent modeling

Children today face many distractions, especially with social media — an influential communication tool that has also been linked to feelings of anxiety and loneliness among young people. “If children spend a lot of time on social media, they may become very distracted and lose the capacity to be present with themselves,” Winston says. To prevent excess media use, parents should not only limit the amount of time kids spend on their phones and computers, but they should also model mindful behavior at home to show their children alternative ways of meaningful connection. “Parent modeling plays a large role in how children process their emotions and response to their circumstances,” Winston says. “When parents start living in the present, their kids will too.”