

# What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness encourages us to focus our attention entirely on the present moment. When we are mindful, we become aware of our thoughts, physical sensations, and the environment we're in. Mindfulness can be the pause/gap between an experience and our reaction to it.

Some experiences in our lives can cause stress, which is an immediate, short-term emotional reaction to an experience. We know we can't avoid stress or challenges in life. When we consistently and often feel stress, it can lead to issues like anxiety and poor physical health.

Mindfulness can provide an opportunity for our bodies to rest and recover from stress, and help us choose our responses to experiences. When our minds are calm and relaxed, it also helps our physical health: we sleep better, our organs can function better (especially our brains and our hearts), and we are less at risk of certain diseases.

- We can be mindful by focusing our attention on our current thoughts and feelings. This self-awareness can help us to manage our feelings and our behaviours. When we name our feelings, it is important to say "I am feeling..." instead of "I am...", because then you recognise it is a feeling, not who you are.
- We can be mindful by focusing our attention on the world around us. This can distract us from the feelings that are making us feel anxious, worried, or frustrated. This gives our brain and bodies a rest from the stress, so we can feel calm and strong to deal with a situation. This mindfulness helps us practice actively changing our focus from feelings or experiences that are causing us stress and anxiety.



# Simple mindfulness activities



When we are feeling very anxious, worried, or frustrated, it can help to distract ourselves for a little while. This creates a pause between an experience and our feelings about it, and our reaction to it. This pause can help us to respond calmly and in a healthy, positive way.

**1. Count backwards:** Starting at 21, count backwards slowly. Focus all your attention on counting. If you get distracted and think of something else, or if you make a mistake, you have to start again! Do this until you feel calm again.

**2. Take 5:** Breathe in deeply through your nose for four counts: 1,2,3,4. Breathe out again through your mouth for four counts. Repeat for five breaths (or more if you need to).

**3. Take 5 senses:** Focus on the world around you. Name five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. If you get distracted, that's ok; just gently start again. Repeat as many times you need to feel calm.

**4. Take 5 Body Scan:** Take a deep breath in through your nose for four counts. Breathe out for four counts through your mouth. Keep breathing, and gently check in with your body. How are you physically feeling? Focus on each of your body parts, and how they are feeling, starting with your toes and moving all the way up to your face. What temperature is your body: warm, or cold? Are your muscles tight or relaxed? How fast is your heart beating? What is your breathing like? Just check in - don't judge anything as good or bad. When you are done, take three more deep, slow breaths in and out.

**5. Thankful Take 5:** Take a deep breath in through your nose for four counts. Breathe out for four counts through your mouth. Take another four deep breaths, and with every breath, think of one thing you are grateful for. It can be something that happened, a person in your life, an object, something you like about yourself, something you like about someone else, or something you felt. Notice how feeling thankful makes you feel: calm, strong, and relaxed!

**6. Count your breath:** Take a deep breath in and count it as "1". Breathe out: that is "2". Breathe in again: that is "3". Keep breathing in and out, counting your breaths, until you reach "10". If you need to, start again at "1", repeating as many times as you need to.

**7. Hold one hand out in front of you.** With the index finger of your other hand, trace the outline of your hand. Breathe in while you slowly move your finger up, and breathe out when you slowly move your finger down.

**8. Power Hand:** Hold one hand out in front of you. With your other hand, you are going to trace the fingers of your hand, taking deep breaths in and out. At the tip of each finger, pause, to think of one of your strengths. A strength is something you like and value about yourself. Once you have built your Power Hand, pause and think about what it makes you feel, and how you can use it in your daily life.

# How are we feeling?

After we have practiced a certain behavior or activity (such as breathing to calm down, doing a fun physical activity, and sharing), it's important we make time to reflect on how it made us feel.

This can help us practice communicating (both talking and listening), which is an important and helpful skill to have. It can also help us to practice identifying and sharing our feelings, and linking those feelings to something we did or experienced.

By knowing how we feel, and how someone else feels, we can manage our behaviours and actions, by doing more of what makes us and each other feel calm and strong and good!

We can ask each other how we feel by using "open questions". An open question doesn't have a right or wrong answer and cannot be answered with a "yes" or a "no".

A reflection explores how children experienced the activity and what they learnt. We want to know how the activity made them feel, what types of skills they used in the session, and how they might be able to use these skills at home. We can do this by asking three open questions:

- What was it like...?
- How did it feel...?
- How else can you...?



## Celebrate it!

When we recognise healthy, positive behaviour, it's important that we celebrate it! It will help us feel good, and when we feel good, we're more likely to repeat that behaviour. If you see bananas/positive behaviour, make sure to celebrate it!

- T**ell it! Speak to the person directly, and name the behaviour/action you want to celebrate. For example: "You're sharing!".
- L**abel it! Explain why the behaviour is something to celebrate it, and name the value it shows. For example: "Sharing is kind, and shows you care."
- C**elebrate it! Give a high five, or say "congratulations!" or "thank you!", to reinforce the positive behaviour!