

Mindfulness:

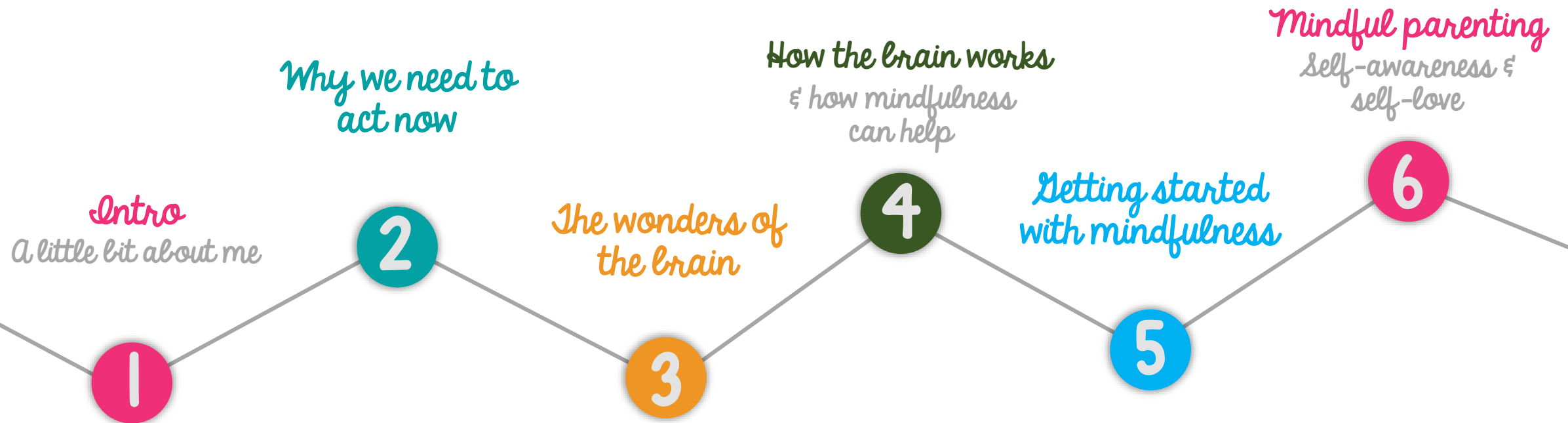
Benefits and Practical Applications for Children *and* Caregivers

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Chestnut Ridge Middle School  Washington Township Public Schools

Roadmap for Tonight



Roadmap for Tonight

*Mindful
Breathing*

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*Cultivating
Gratitude*

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*Mindfulness
Meditation*

9

*Final thoughts
& reflections*

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A Little Bit About Me

Contact

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Education

- M.A. Communication Sciences & Disorders
Montclair State University / 2010-2013
- B.A. English & Psychology
Montclair State University / 2004-2009

Experience

- Washington Township Public Schools
Preschool through Grade 8
- NJ Early Intervention Services
- PowerBack Rehabilitation (Genesis)

Related Interests

- Neuropsychology, cognition, and learning
- Vulnerability and meaningful conversations
- Digital design
- Meditation and mindfulness



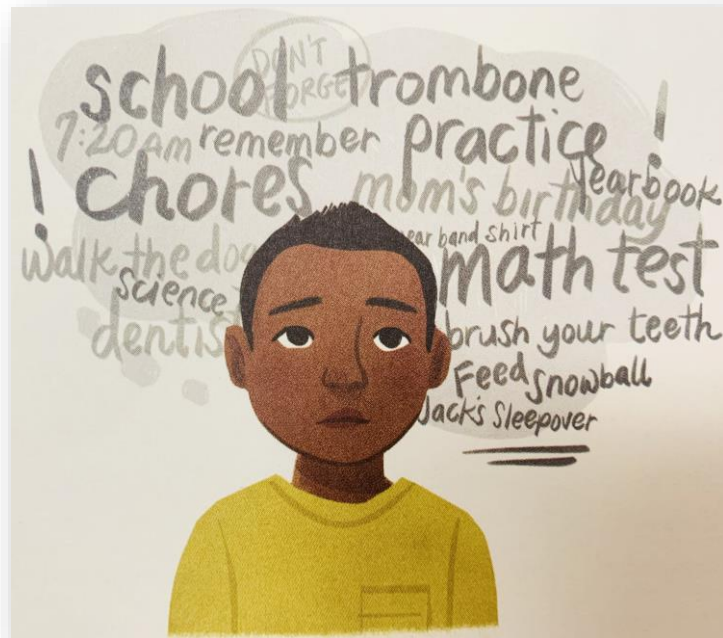
Why We Need to Act Now

Life today presents:

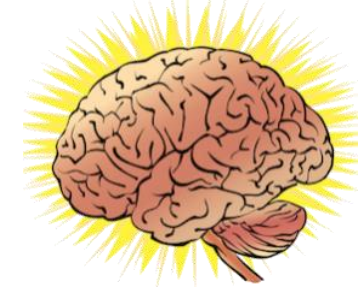
- A schedule that is too busy
- Pressure to perform
- Too much media
- Lack of face to face relationships
- Increasing anxiety and depression
- Sleep deprivation
- A brain that is in a constant state of flight or flight

The result:

- Decreased efficiency
- Problems with attention
- Distractibility
- Impulsive behaviors
- Increased depression and anxiety
- Sleep difficulties
- Social struggles



The Wonders of the Brain



Before we can fully embrace mindfulness,

we need to understand a few key things about the human brain.

- By becoming familiar a few important areas in the brain, responsible for thinking, learning, and feeling, we can learn to use the powers of the brain to create emotional well-being.

- We can teach our children how their brains work.

Most importantly, we can teach them that they can be in control of their brains rather than the other way around.



Brain imaging

The field of cognitive neuroscience studies how the brain develops and functions, using brain imaging devices like EEGs, MRIs, and PET scans.

These techniques allow neuroscientists to actually *see thinking* as it happens.



Neuroplasticity

GREAT NEWS! You CAN teach an old dog new tricks.

Neuroplasticity means that we can change the structure of our adult brains and even our behavior at whatever age we are...just *by intentionally focusing our attention.*

How the Brain Works: Two Brains in One

Old Brain or Downstairs Brain

The **old brain** is about survival and instinct. It has 2 parts:

1. One part of it manages our automatic responses (e.g., breathing, swallowing, blinking).
2. The other part is the “emotional brain.” It is responsible for generating emotions and turning on and off our stress response.



New Brain or Upstairs Brain

The **new brain** is constantly developing and plays a key role in **memory**, **attention**, **perceptual awareness**, **thought**, **language**, and **consciousness**.

In other words, it controls most of what we think of as **intelligence**.

New/Upstairs Brain: The Prefrontal Cortex

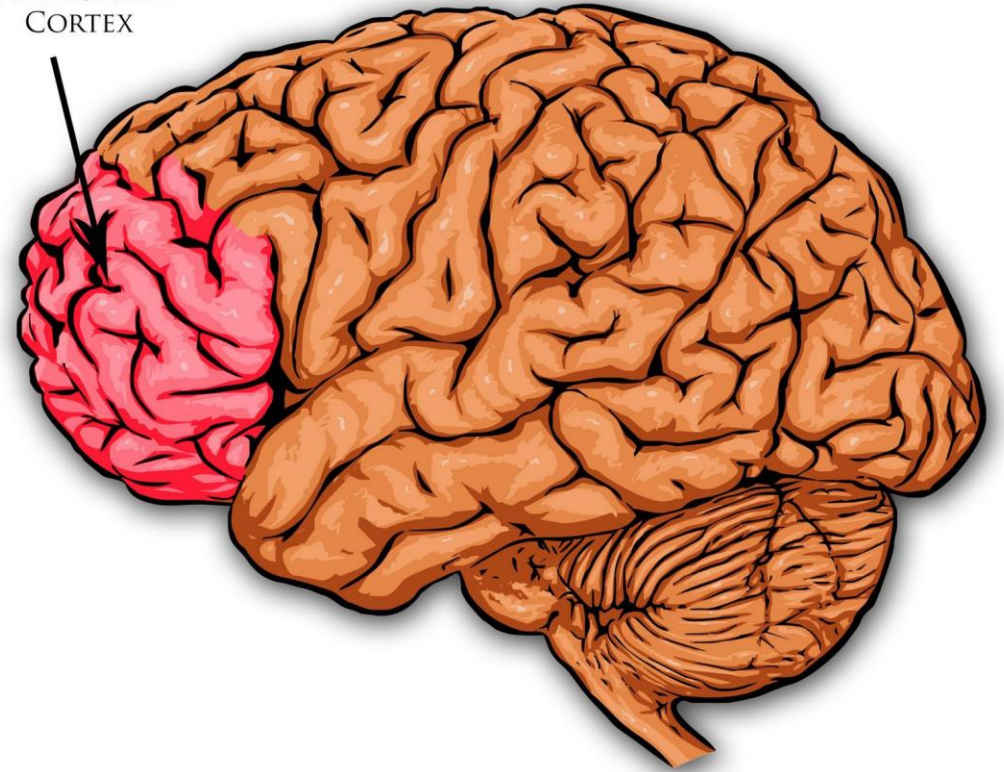
Prefrontal Cortex (PFC; the "Wise Old Owl")

The PFC is the part of the New/Upstairs Brain where our higher-level thinking occurs. It is in charge of executive functions: thinking, planning, reasoning, problem solving, decision making, and impulse control.

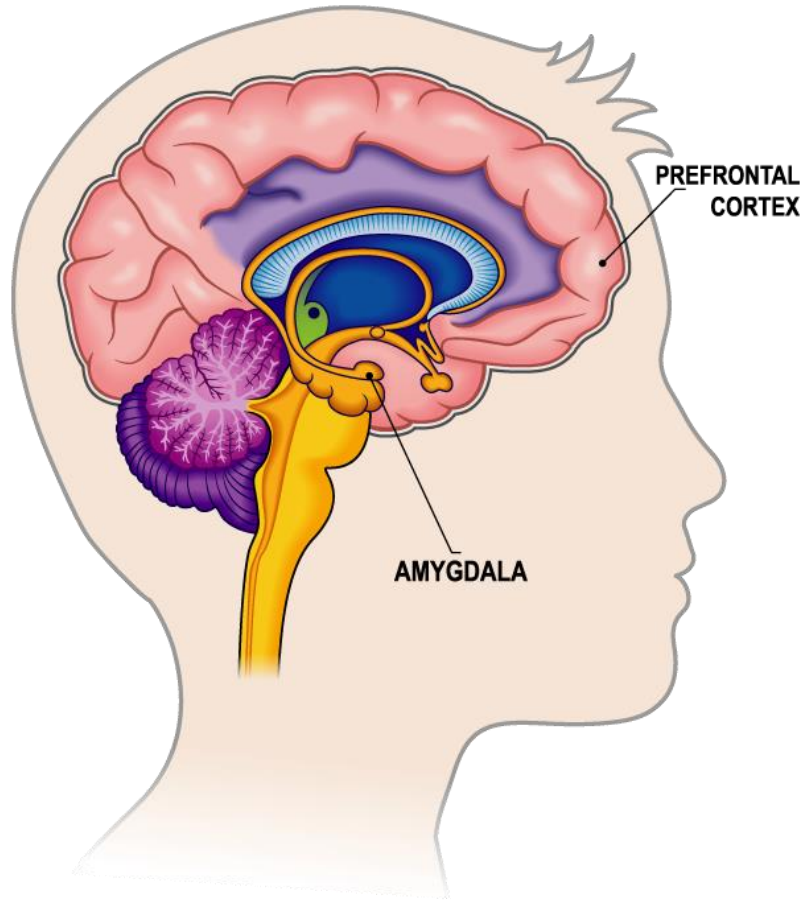
Basically, the PFC figures stuff out for us and helps us make good, well-balanced choices.



PREFRONTAL
CORTEX



Old/Downstairs Brain: The Amygdala



Amygdala (the "Guard Dog")

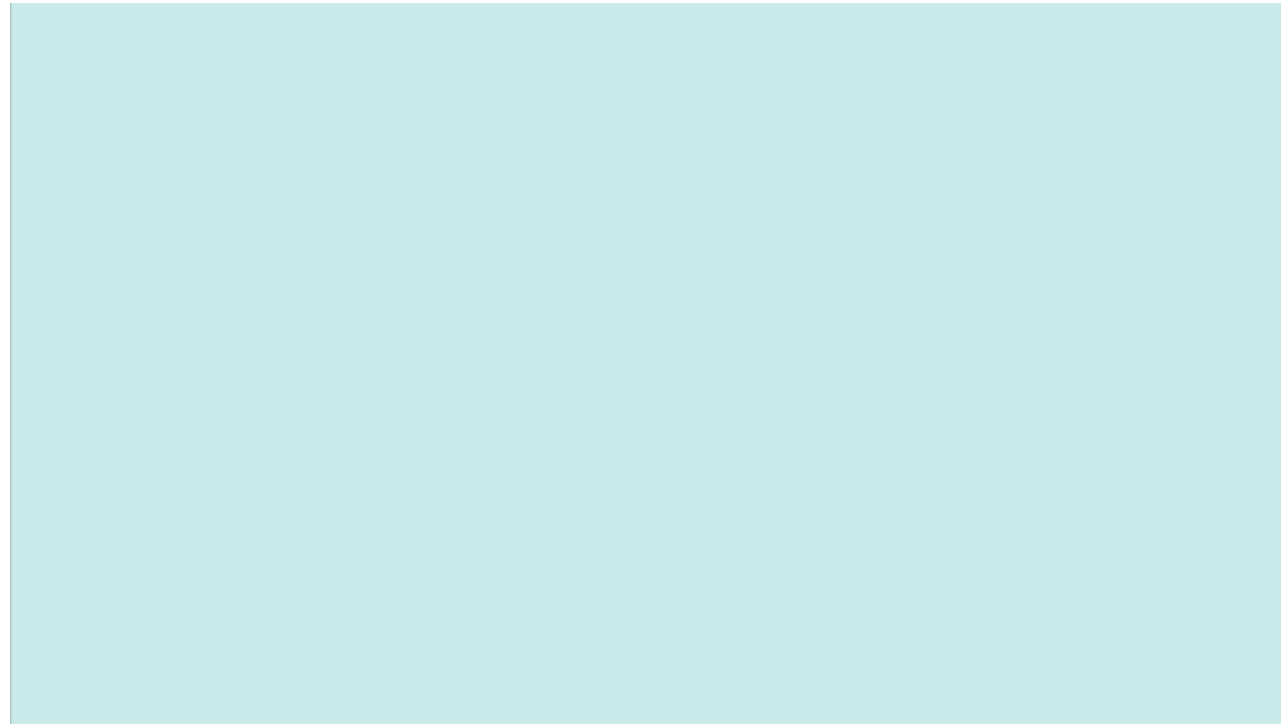
This almond-shaped structure is part of the Old/Downstairs brain and acts to protect us at all costs. Its function evolved over millions of years, from the time of the saber-toothed tigers when we had to make decisions on whether to fight, take flight, or freeze.

You might make a list together with your child of some of the sensations she might feel when her amygdala is "barking":

- ➡ Sweating or shaking
- ➡ Breathing faster
- ➡ Pounding heart
- ➡ Feeling the urge to cry.
- ➡ Feeling a tummy ache or thinking she might throw up
- ➡ Fists tighten



Prefrontal Cortex + Amygdala



<https://youtu.be/0k99wvyNKFQ>

Technology and the Brain



Technology and the Brain

In-person social interaction and connection have tremendous emotional and physical benefits.

Prefrontal cortex development

appears to be profoundly influenced by interpersonal experiences. Instead of talking to people directly, we find ourselves sending texts and emails. This puts children at risk of becoming unable to fully experience true emotional connection.

Reduced attention span

With a diminishing attention span in the face of such bombardment, we have developed the tendency to skim rather than go deep.

Poor recall & memory

if we do not limit our digital media input.

A brain accustomed to static and noise while taking in information will develop the *need for fast-paced input* to even register in the future. A young brain made restless by so much technology use will not be so easily satisfied by an environment that seems flat or boring by comparison,

Screen Time and the Brain

- “Only 16% of pediatricians actually talk to families about their media use with their children, their children’s media use and as a family.
- “Pediatricians who were most likely to restrict their own screen-time, were more likely to talk to parents and have this conversation with parents.
- “But if pediatricians kind of had a lot of screen-time themselves, then they would be less likely to have this conversation with parents during well-check visits” (Landberg, 2019).



https://youtu.be/wtbdqlds_3c

Screen Time and the Brain

Constantly Connected: Adverse Effects of Media on Children & Teens

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Adverse-Effects-of-Television-Commercials.aspx>

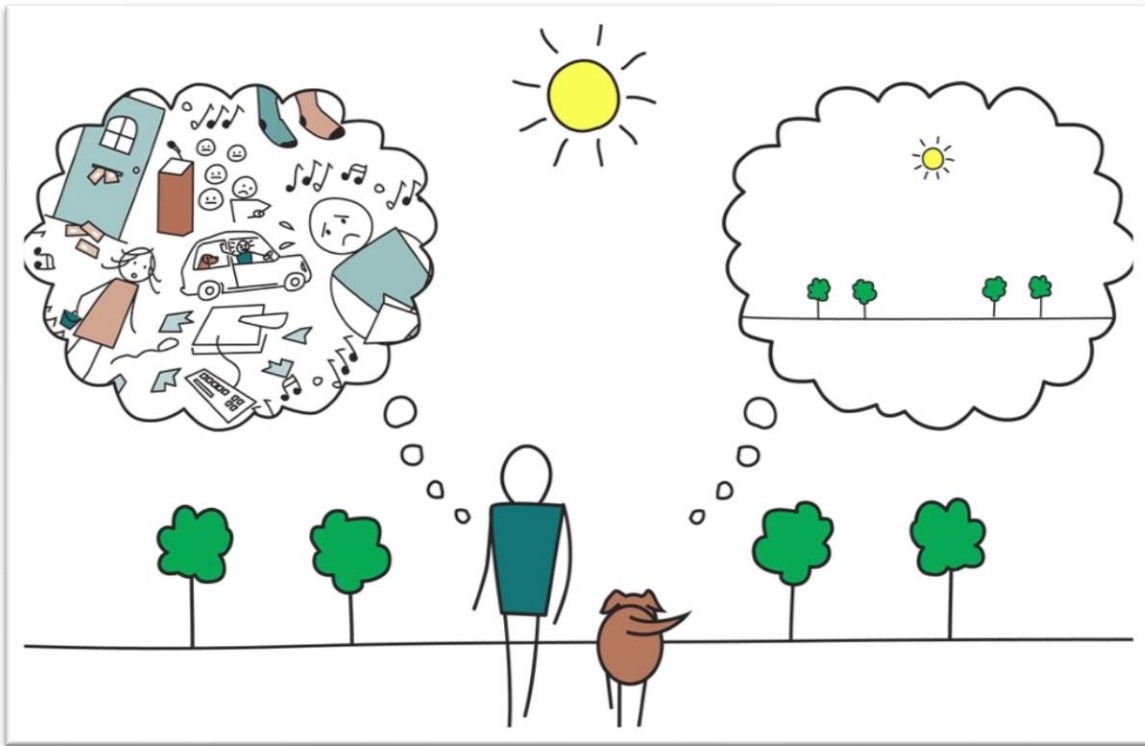
Healthy Digital Media Use Habits for Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Digital-Media-Use-Habits-for-Babies-Toddlers-Preschoolers.aspx>

American Academy of Pediatrics Media Use Guidelines for Young Children

Age	Description	Media Use Guidelines
Younger than 2	Children younger than 2 learn and grow when they explore the physical world around them. Their minds learn best when they interact and play with parents, siblings, caregivers, and other children and adults.	For children younger than 2, <ul style="list-style-type: none">Media use should be very limited and only when an adult is standing by to co-view, talk, and teach. For example, video-chatting with family along with parents.
	Children younger than 2 have a hard time understanding what they see on screen media and how it relates to the world around them. However, children 15 to 18 months of age can learn from high-quality educational media, IF their parents play or view with them and reteach the lessons.	For children 18 to 24 months, if you want to introduce digital media, <ul style="list-style-type: none">Choose high-quality programming.Use media together with your child.Avoid solo media use.
2 to 5 years of age	At 2 years of age, many children can understand and learn words from live video-chatting. Young children can listen to or join a conversation with their parents. Children 3 to 5 years of age have more mature minds, so a well-designed educational program such as Sesame Street (in moderation) can help children learn social, language, and reading skills.	For children 2 to 5 years of age, <ul style="list-style-type: none">Limit screen use to no more than 1 hour per day.Find other activities for your children to do that are healthy for their bodies and minds.Choose media that is interactive, non-violent, educational, and prosocial.Co-view or co-play with your children.

How Mindfulness Can Help



Mind full?

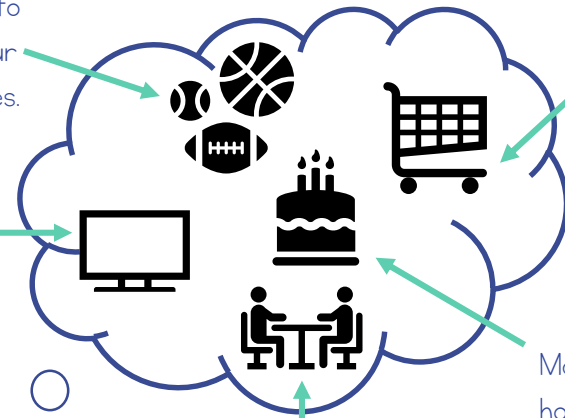
...or mindful?

Our minds can easily be filled with busy thoughts.

Even if they are pleasant, too many things going on in your head can be *distracting*, or *feel overwhelming*.

You could be brainstorming how to balance each of your child(ren)'s activities.

You might be distracted by thinking about a newly-released episode of your favorite show that you can't wait to watch.



Perhaps you need to go grocery shopping and you're thinking about when to do it.

Maybe you're thinking about how to get a night out to celebrate your spouse's upcoming birthday.

We often think about conversations with friends and coworkers or replying to emails and texts.

How Mindfulness Can Help



Altruism



Stronger relationships



Improved health



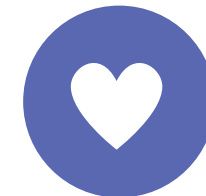
Improved impulse control



Better sleep



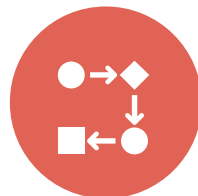
Improved focus & awareness



Increased compassion & kindness



Decreased stress & anxiety



Better problem solving



Higher life satisfaction



What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is *awareness* that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

“

Mindfulness is paying attention, *here and now*, with kindness and curiosity, and then choosing your behavior.

Amy Saltzman

What is Mindfulness?

Child-friendly version



<https://youtu.be/w6T02g5hnT4>

<https://youtu.be/1msO9hn0iLU>

What is Mindfulness?



Thoughts will arise. The key to mindfulness is to observe them without judgement.

Standing in the kitchen making coffee?

Pay attention to what you can hear, smell, taste.

Pay attention to your breath as it passes in and out of your nose.

Feel the sensation of your feet on the floor. Hear the sound of the hot water as it fills your cup.

Commuting on the train?

Put on some music. Sit with your eyes closed; feel the gentle rocking of the car as it moves you toward your work or home.

Listen, truly listen, to the music. The lyrics, the change in tempo.

What does it make you feel? What memories does it bring up?

Waiting in line at the grocery store?

Get your head out of your phone and pay attention.

How are your shoulders?

Are they slumped?

Straighten them up.

How does that make you feel?

What about the people around you?

What are they doing?

Are they chatting?

Are they ignoring each other?

Smiling, making eye contact?

How about the cashier at the register?

Did you say hello?

Getting Started with a Mindfulness Practice



Take the journey together; build a family culture around these ideas.



Repeated practice is *crucial* for learning and *vital* for building new pathways in the brain.



Success can be measured in many ways.



Keep it in the spirit of play. An open, optimistic environment is ideal for healthy growing and learning.



Figure out a time and place where mindfulness practice can fit into your routine and schedule it.



The goal to become more mindful with our children does not have to become another chore or item for the to-do list.

Mindful Parenting Habits



Don't Hurry, Be Happy

"We're a nation of exhausted and over-stressed adults raising over-scheduled children."

-Brené Brown

Slowing down looks like:

- **Single-tasking:** mindfully completing one task at a time.
- **Unplugging:** setting aside at least 15 mins per day to truly disconnect.
- **Emptying your mind:** set aside 5-10 mins to "brain dump." Write out all your worries, distractions, to-dos, etc.
- **Three things:** using your brain dump, choose the three tasks that are most important to complete each day.
- **Less over-scheduling:**



<https://youtu.be/uCsMvY18BMg>

Mindful Parenting Habits



Self-awareness and self-compassion

“First and foremost, we need to be the adults we want our children to be. We should watch our own gossiping and anger. We should model the kindness we want to see.” -Brené Brown

The STOP practice

**Feeling alarmed?
Stressed? Reactive?
Stop!**

**S – stop, pause, set it down,
look away, disengage**

**proceed – P
what feels
like a wise
next step
now?**



**T – take a
breath,
feel the full
cycle of
breathing
in the body**

O – observe first bodily sensations, then thoughts and emotions. Be curious.

Feeling Overwhelmed? Remember “RAIN”

Four steps to stop being so hard on ourselves.

R

Recognize what's going on

A

Allow the experience to be there, just as it is

I

Investigate with kindness

N

Natural awareness, which comes from not identifying with the experience

Be aware of your own emotions.

Even when we are hijacked and respond inappropriately, it isn't the end of the world. Never be afraid to admit your mistakes to your child, for when we do, our children will feel free to come to us when they make mistakes.

John Gottman suggests:

Calm down: Don't do anything until your amygdala is off guard duty and your PFC is functioning again.

Apologize: Tell your child, “I got hijacked and lost my mind. I'm sorry. It's back now.”

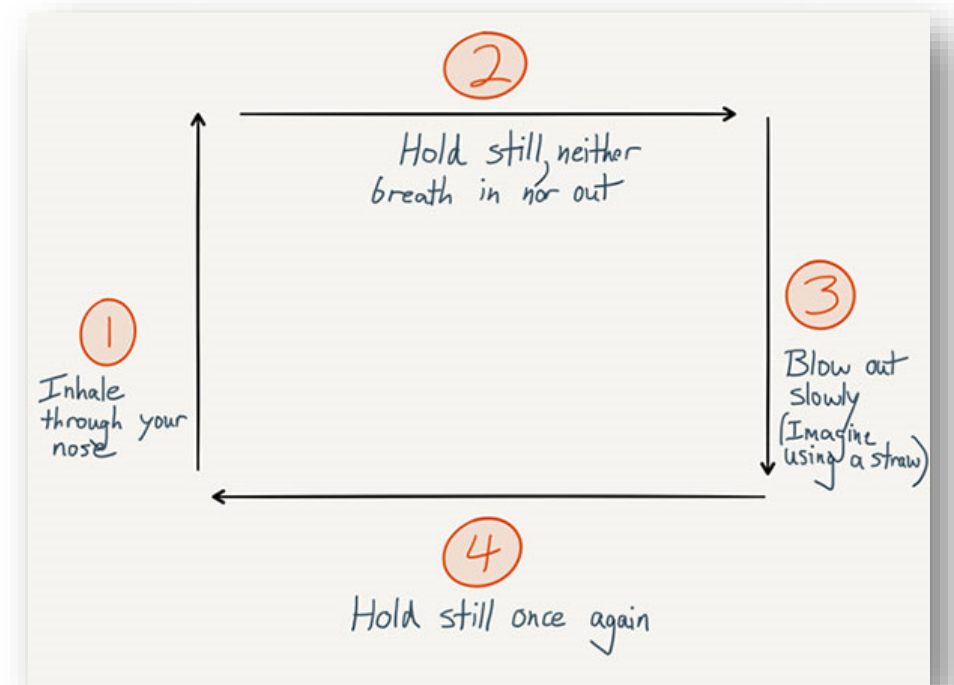
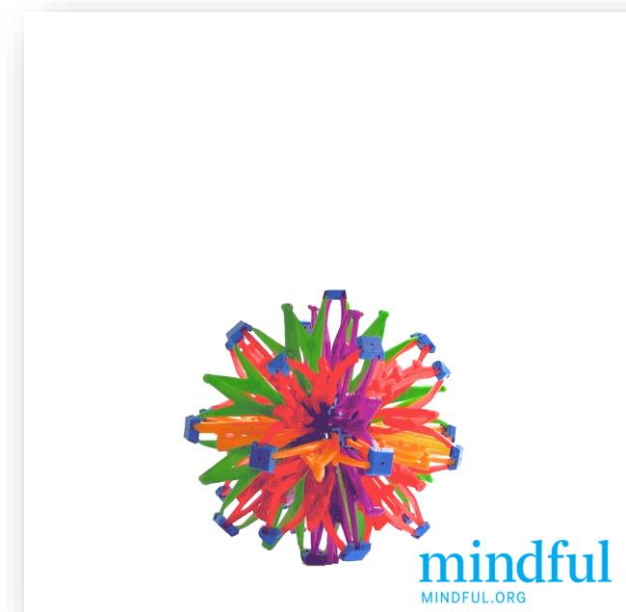
Reestablish connection: With young ones, you can console or hug, or have them draw or write about how they feel. With older ones, you can discuss both your roles in what happened.

Mindful Breathing



Benefits of mindful breathing

- ☀ Calms the stress response
- ☀ Strengthens attention
- ☀ Promotes brain integration
- ☀ Fosters better sleep
- ☀ Strengthens self-awareness



Alternate Nostril Breathing

<https://youtu.be/ub7JEN1V7JE>

Gratitude Practice



<https://youtu.be/sCV-mEsASLA>

Gratitude Practice

What are some things you are grateful for?

- Our automatic responses are usually positive things.
- Part of cultivating a gratitude practice is looking for the good in everything- even things that on the surface seem negative.
- Pick one of the things on this slide. Take a minute or two to come up with at least 2 reasons to be grateful for the topic of your choice.

Rain

Exercise

Vegetables

Having
nothing to
do

When your
home
temporarily
loses
electricity

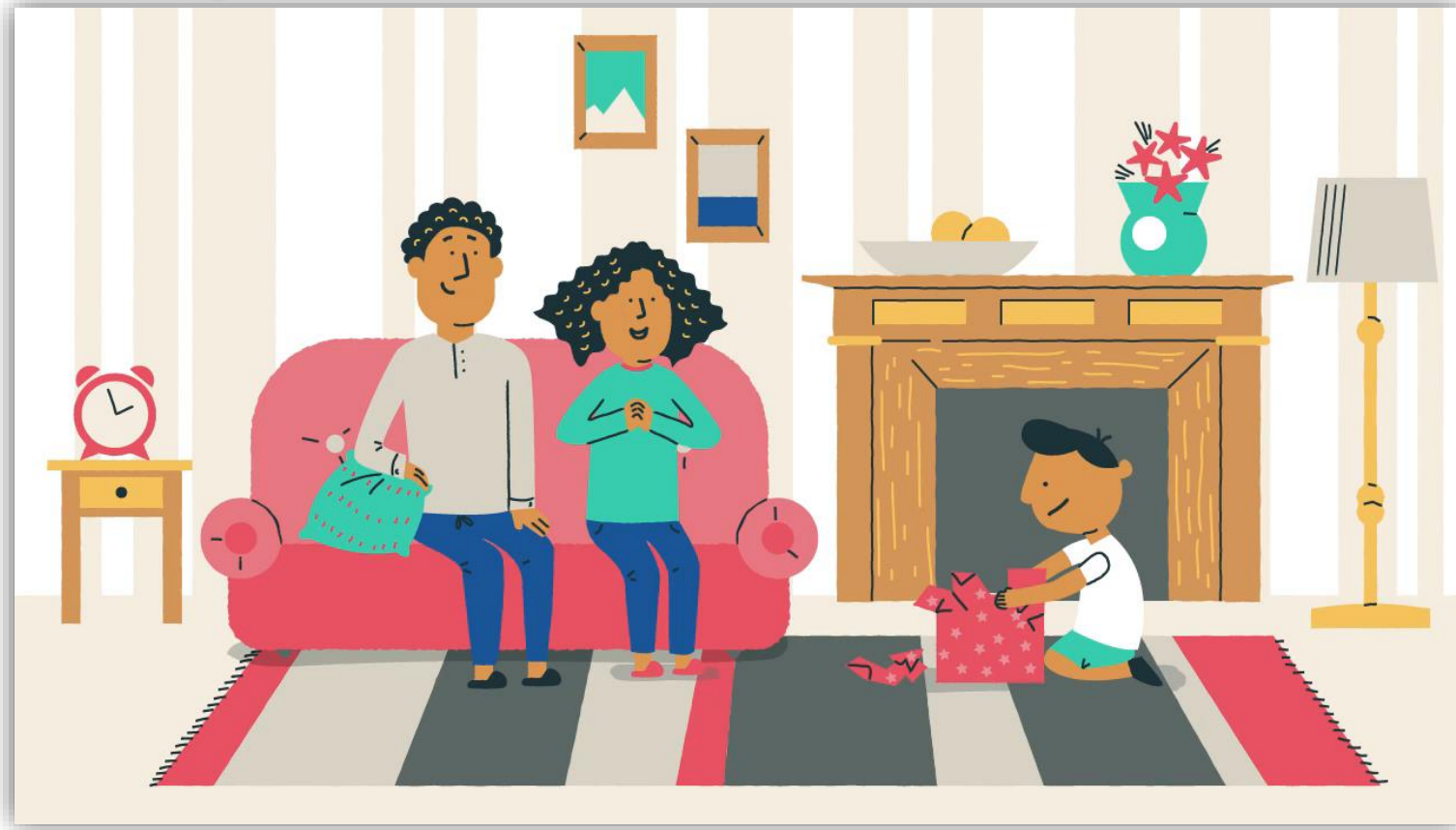
Waking
up early

Grocery
shopping

Spiders

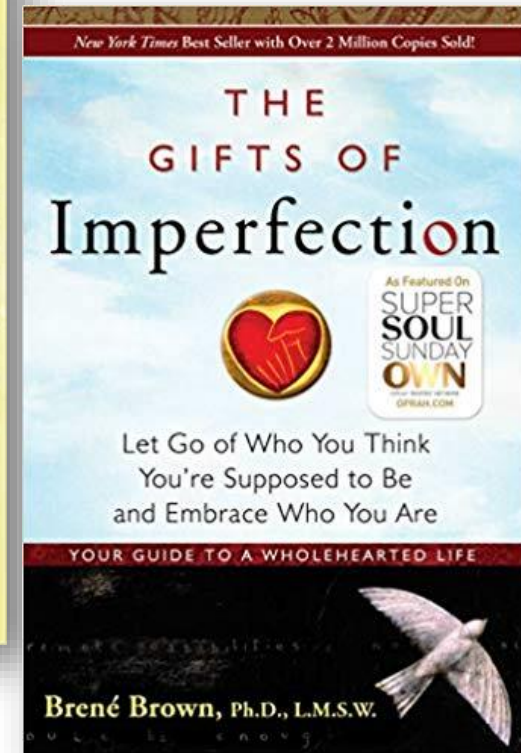
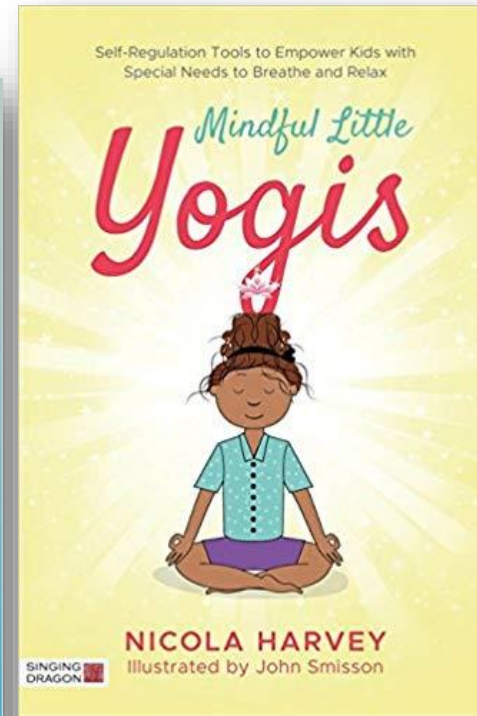
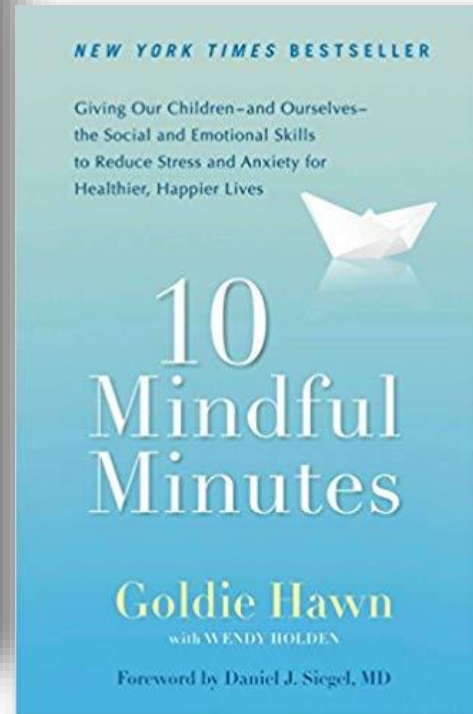
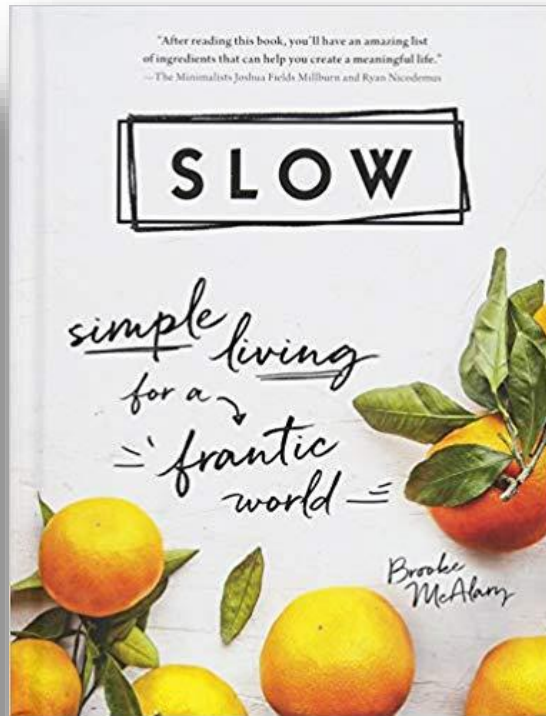
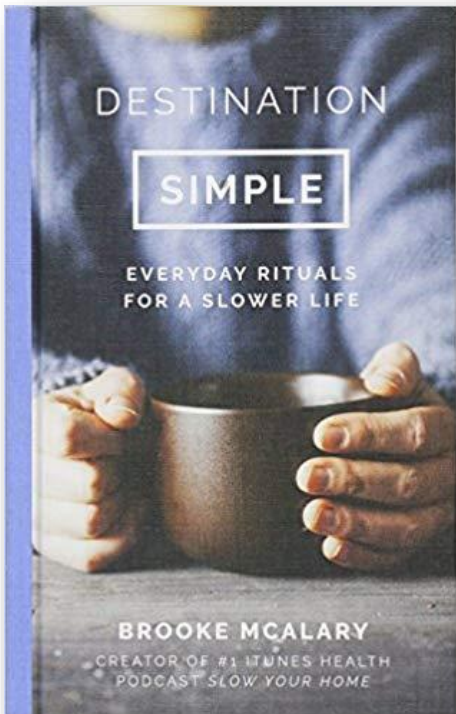
Rules
and
laws

Cultivating Gratitude in Children



<https://youtu.be/4dBk-3SmoJ0>

Recommended Reading



Mindfulness Apps Worthy of Your Attention



INSIGHT TIMER

- ✧ **Available for:** iOS and Android
- ✧ **Cost:** Free; offers in-app purchases
- ✧ **About:** The #1 free meditation app. Guided meditations and talks led by the world's top meditation and mindfulness experts, neuroscientists, psychologists and teachers. Join millions learning to meditate on Insight Timer to help calm the mind, reduce anxiety, manage stress, sleep deeply and improve happiness.



10% HAPPIER

- ✧ **Available for:** iOS and Android
- ✧ **Cost:** Free 7-day series; offers full-access for an annual fee.
- ✧ **About:** The tagline for 10% Happier tells you the most important thing you need to know about the app. It's "meditation for fidgety skeptics"—a relatable, no-nonsense way to learn mindfulness for people whose goals veer more toward sharpening their brains than befriending their souls.



STOP, BREATHE & THINK

- ✧ **Available for:** iOS and Android
- ✧ **Cost:** Free; offers full-access for an annual fee.
- ✧ **About:** This app is ideal if you need to understand why you're meditating and see how it's benefitting you in order to keep up the habit. Most of the meditations are short and feature simple introductory practices like *Being Kind to Your Body*, *Forgiving Yourself*, and *Joy*. You can also simply set a timer and sit in silence, learn different breathing techniques, or listen to relaxing forest sounds.

Apps For Well-Being & Focus



SLEEP TOWN

- ✧ Available for: iOS and Android
- ✧ Cost: \$1.99
- ✧ About: Do you often stay up late scrolling on your phones? Hit the snooze button until you're late? If you have trouble putting your phone down at bedtime, or suffer from insomnia and want to attain a healthy, regular sleep schedule, SleepTown can help. Construct buildings by achieving your bedtime and wake-up goals every day. Put down your smartphone before going to bed and build your own town while you sleep.



FOREST

- ✧ Available for: iOS and Android
- ✧ Cost: \$1.99
- ✧ About: If you want to temporarily put down your phone and focus on what's more important in real life, plant a seed in Forest. As time goes by, this seed will gradually grow into a tree. However, if you cannot resist the temptation of using your phone and leave the app, your tree will wither. The sense of achievement and responsibility will encourage you to stay away from your phone, and will help you make better use of your time.



ACTION FOR HAPPINESS

- ✧ Available for: iOS and Android
- ✧ Cost: Free
- ✧ About: This app is your daily companion for a happier life. You'll receive simple, daily action ideas designed to help you boost your own wellbeing and spread more happiness to others around you too. Each month's actions follow a specific theme, all based on the latest scientific research about happiness.