

9 fun mindfulness exercises

Practical mindfulness guidance for
expat parents and children



Mindfulness can be a great way to help expat kids reduce relocation anxiety and these exercises will make mindfulness easier to practise



We know that the well-being of your children is of paramount importance when moving abroad. [Our own third culture kids research](#) with more than a dozen expat children shows that the experience usually results in successful, well-adjusted global citizens, but relocating internationally can be stressful in itself and living in a new country brings its own set of new challenges for children who may react differently. For example, children's fears around moving to a new country can include separation from friends and new social situations, school, routine and environment. The impact of the move and subsequent feelings can make children anxious, stressed, demanding, withdrawn or even naughty.

Jo Bradshaw is a fund and awareness raiser for [Place2Be](#), a UK-based charity who help children's mental health by providing support for teachers and children in schools.

"Mindfulness can be a great benefit to children," she explains. "It helps them focus on themselves and not their environment which enables them to take a step back and find peace in what can be a full-on world. In a time of social media and the feeling of needing to respond to external stimuli immediately, it is good to give them the tools to deal with what's going on around them and not just instantly react.

"There are obvious challenges in getting children to practise and benefit from mindfulness," she continues. "For example, if they are troubled, they may express that differently and getting a child into a peaceful state when they're anxious can be difficult.

"With Place2Be, many of the schools create rooms that children know are 'safe spaces' and often include art and music facilities to help kids express themselves."

“The key to practising mindfulness with children is to do it a little and often – don’t overload them.”

Mindfulness for children of all ages can help reduce relocation anxiety by helping them deal with emotions when they arise. Mindfulness can also:

- Mitigate the effects of bullying
- Reduce attention problems
- Improve mental health and well-being
- Improve social skills when well taught and practised in children and adolescents
- Provide sound mental health and cognitive benefits that can be carried through into adulthood.

Depending on the age of your child(ren), practising mindfulness can be a challenge, so this article aims to provide you with ways to help them master it.



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How to explain mindfulness to a child

The following sentences are great ways of describing mindfulness to a child:

- Mindfulness is about stopping everything we’re doing to notice what is happening right now – the sounds, the smells and the feelings of our own body working
- Mindfulness is concentrating, but instead of concentrating on toys, computer games, friends or schoolwork, we just concentrate on what is happening right now
- Because our eyes are looking outwards, we often forget that we are actually here. Mindfulness means we close our eyes and just notice what our body is sensing – the sounds, smells, tastes and feelings of our body
- I wonder what it feels like to just think about this moment. I’d like to try it. Would you like to try it with me and see what it feels like?

For older children and teens, you might add this approach:

- Sometimes things can be overwhelming – school, friends, girls/boys, our new home – but there are ways to help that, for example mindfulness. It’s a simple technique to help us take control of our mind and deal with certain situations without judgement. Does that seem like a useful thing to be able to do?

Stress in teenagers can manifest itself in many ways and it can be very easy to think that mental health issues are something that affect other families. It’s not uncommon for parents to wonder whether their child is ‘just being a teen’ or showing symptoms of mental health issues. Find out more in [‘Maintaining good mental health for teenagers when you’re moving abroad’](#)

9 fun mindfulness exercises for expat children you can do today!

The chances are you've meditated before and want to see if your children could benefit from it like you. All they have to do is focus on their breathing, like you do. But if you're reading this you don't need to be told that getting your kids to do exactly what you want them to is far from easy or straightforward, so check out our top tips on page 7 to encourage their participation.



1. Take a breath

Tell your child that you're going to think about your breathing while you do it. "I'm pretending to smell a freshly baked cake [breathe in] and blow out the candles on the cake [breathe out]". Try it 10 times to start with and increase the time, getting them to focus on their tummy and chest rising and falling, and the sensation of air rushing in and then out.

The foundation of much meditation, this is a great beginner's exercise as they can do this when they're alone once they know how to do it.

2. Nature safari

Sit outside with your child, preferably in a park or garden, but almost anywhere with a bit of nature will do. Get them to choose and pick two different leaves. Ask them: "How do the leaves feel? How would you describe their textures? How are they different? What do they smell of? How are they different from leaves at home? How do the leaves make you feel? Why do you think that is?"

This exercise puts kids right in the moment, removing external pressures and stresses. It's also a great way to familiarise and feel settled in a new home.

3. Superhero senses

Ask your kids to turn on their superhero senses: smell, sight, hearing, taste and touch. If they put all their powers into hearing; what can they hear? Have them describe every sound that they can hear – describing, listening, describing, listening. Tell them to put all their powers into touch; what can they feel? In their hands and fingers, on their faces, their clothes against their skin? How does it all feel?

This is a classic mindfulness exercise that encourages observation and curiosity, encouraging children to pause and focus their attention on what they sense in the present moment.



4. Striking a pose

Take your children somewhere quiet, familiar and private. Ask them to strike a pose that makes them feel strong and/or happy. Once they've got their pose, tell them to tense specific muscles in the body for five seconds then release slowly. Ask them how they feel after each pose: each limb, their whole body, their general feelings.



5. A mindful mouthful

Mindful eating is a growing trend – especially for those seeking to lose weight and/or eat more healthily. It's also a perfect way to help children practise mindfulness. Getting a child to eat a mindful meal may be out of reach, so try one mindful mouthful. Say that you are going to choose one mouthful of your meal to be a mindful mouthful and that they can tell you which one you should do so you can both do one together. Tell them that before they take that mouthful, they should describe what it looks like, what it smells like, is it hot or cold. Tell them that once they've put it into their mouth, they should feel their teeth biting it and slowly chewing, their tongue tasting it, all the textures and tastes of that mouthful. They should think of all the ingredients and how the whole mouthful makes them feel.

You can also do this with snacks. The slow-motion mouthful is also another approach to this method.

You might choose to do this with a new food from the new country to help them become more aware of themselves and their environment.

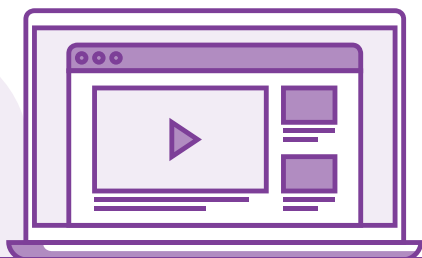


6. Sounds

Find a pot, pan, dish, bowl or glass that has a nice sound when struck (you may even have a windchime or bells in the house). Bang on an item with a piece of cutlery or a pen and ask your child to move their hand when they no longer hear the sound at all. Hit the item harder and softer to get different lengths of 'ring out'.

7. What's inside the music?

Find a piece of local music (YouTube is a good place to look). Play the piece of music and ask your child to name as many sounds and/or instruments as they can. Ask them to describe the shape of the sound, it's mood and what emotion it might be feeling. This is a great exercise for kids who need a little more stimulation and you can introduce elements of their new home at the same time.



8. Reasons to be thankful

It's polite to say your please and thank yous, and you've doubtless taught your children this. But really thinking about the things for which you're grateful can be a great mindfulness exercise. Ask your children to think about the people and things and places in their life and pick the things they're grateful for.

To start with they may choose simple or even selfish things, but as you do it more and more their ideas of gratitude should start to become more sophisticated and nuanced. You can also start to ask them why they are grateful for those things – really explore what gratitude means and how the things they list have affected how they feel.

For expat children this can be a great way to think about the things in their new life that they enjoy. By focusing on the things that bring us joy and happiness, that happiness expands.



9. The glitter jar

This activity is particularly useful for children with strong emotions. With practice, this exercise can provide children with a great way to take control of raging emotions and find calm.

First, [create a glitter jar](#) by mixing glitter and glue in a clear jar of water. Shake the jar and hold it, saying: "This is a jar full of glitter, glue and water. It's a bit like our thoughts when we're frustrated or angry – everything's whirling around and it's hard to see clearly." Pass it to your child and say: "But see what happens when the jar is still for a few moments". Wait as they watch. After a few moments ask them to describe what's happening inside the jar. Ask them how that makes them feel. If your child is particularly angry, you might add: "Can you see how the glitter is starting to settle and water is clearing? It's a bit like how our minds work. When we just take a moment to be calm, our thoughts and feelings start to settle and you start to see things more clearly."

Top tips

- Make sure your child is ready to try mindfulness. If they're full of energy, you may not get the best results.
- Start to build a calm space with soft lights, music and cushions. This can make your child intrigued and therefore more likely to engage with whatever is coming next.
- Try not to expect a particular outcome, especially in the short term. See mindfulness practice with your child as the start of a learning process, not a fix for a momentary problem you can turn on and off. Accept the outcomes each time and keep trying.

If you enjoyed this article, you may also like:

- [Kids and anxiety: What's normal and when to seek help](#)
- [Mindfulness tips for expats](#)
- [How to practise mindfulness](#)

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