

# The Miracle of Parenthood Mindfulness for Parenting

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*“Enjoy the little things in life because one day you`ll look back and realize they were the big things.”*

-Kurt Vonnegut

Parenting is a wonderful mix of happiness, laughter, worry, frustration, joy, fear, excitement, chaos and delight. Pregnancy and parenthood is the most significant, challenging, meaningful and transformative period in the adult life. It is a journey where you learn as you go along; it has no finish line and one with many heartfelt emotions. This magnificent journey is one to be fully present in and embrace each precious moment.

Mindfulness is core to parenthood because it allows us to be present, awake, aware and connected to the present, to ourselves, our partners, and to our children. In addition, Mindfulness gives parents the inner resilience and nurturing to care for themselves and in turn their children.

Many parents ask themselves – How can we raise our children to be happy and healthy? However, parenthood is not a skill but a relationship and core to this relationship is a deep connection, which is brought about, by being fully present.

In the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, “The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers”. — Thich Nhat Hanh

The journey of parenthood often brings with it significant life changes, adjustments and responsibilities. As a result, the mind tends to wander to worries about the future even though we can never really tell what lies ahead.

Our minds also tend to hold tightly onto the past and sometimes we deny what is actually unfolding in the present due to judgements, self-criticism and often wanting things to be different. Approximately 50% of the time our minds wander. When we do engage in 'wandering' or distraction, avoidance, worry, rumination and analysing we disconnect from the present, which can often lead quick reactions and impatience. Mindfulness encourages us to *slow down* and to reflect on ***what is important to us***. When we look past the 'not so important upsets' and truly connect with what is important, we become present and respond effectively to life's bumps and contractions.

Parenthood takes work, patience, attention and nourishment. Mindful parenting is not about becoming the 'perfect parent,' but rather being present in our parenting, with all the ups, downs, and imperfections, letting go with compassion and kindness.

As a parent, you will know all of these skills but here is a reminder of some core mindful parenting skills to support and bring to your daily parenting life and magnificent journey.

#### 1. Focus on the breath:

Establishing a daily mindfulness practice is key to mindful parenting, therefore making space for mindfulness practice is important. Mindfulness of the breath is an excellent practice and one that fully connects us to the present and brings self-care. The breath is with us all the time and thus is free and can be practiced anywhere. It gives us a place to ground ourselves in the midst of chaos. And so, provides a place of calm, clarity and focus which in turn helps us to respond effectively to stress as opposed to reacting to stressful situations. Your breath is important for your mind and body and for your children as they too can sense their parents anxiety.

For some, connecting with the breath can be difficult as we are conditioned to be 'doing' and 'striving' and therefore when we stop to attend to the breath, it can be uncomfortable as we are just 'being'. However, with practice and compassion we can learn to just "feel the sensations of the breath, observing them and letting the breath be as it is, coming and going. Simply sit for as long or short as you like and re-focus on the breath.

#### 2. Reflect on what is most important: Connect with your values

Make time everyday to ask yourself – "what is most important now?". When we ask ourselves this question, it helps to ground us back in the present and with our values. Too often we can get caught up in stressful situations, which can blind us from what is truly important and can take us away from the precious moments that lie in front of us.

Take a few breaths, stop and pause. This will help to give clarity and respond effectively to stress, in addition to connecting with that is truly important in those moments.

### 3. Self care

Being a parent can be hard work and with that often comes a deprioritising of one's needs. Mindful parenting encourages each parent to be 'mindful of their needs' and with compassion and kindness to take active steps in self-care.

Self-care has been linked to the experience and metaphor of flying. When flight attendants go through the safety procedures and say 'place the oxygen mask on yourself before those around you', the immediate response is, "No way, if that happened, I would need to take care of my loved ones first". Our natural instinct is to do for others. However, just like the oxygen mask, we need to take care of ourselves so we can effectively take care of the people we love. Your children are in need of your attention and unconditional love; therefore it is important you show kindness, compassion and self-care so that you can give all that you can to your child. Your self-care is an important part of parenting.

### 4. Embrace the model of the "good enough" parent

Often, we place very high standards on ourselves, striving to be the "perfect" parent. Mindful parenting embraces the reality and wisdom of the "good enough" parent, acknowledging that regardless of our best intentions, we are only human and as such, we are fallible. This also, is important for your children to learn so that they too can see the healthy reality that we are all "good enough". Cultivating compassion in these times is important as it allows us to learn, to forgive and re-connect back to what is truly important.

### 4. Be present with your children

Make a commitment to put away your laptop and mobile phone and embrace the moment. Live as it is your last day or the first day! Slow down, pause and like a camera take a moment to capture each unique moment with your child.

Let go of unhelpful, judgemental thoughts and come back to savouring each moment.

[CLICK HERE FOR 12 MINDFUL PARENTRING EXERCISES BY MYLA & JON KOBAT-ZINN \(1997\)](#)

### Book

['Everyday Blessings: The inner work of mindful parenting'](#), Myla & Jon Kombat Zinn (2014)

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This article is available to view on the First 1000 Days website.

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