

1. WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

In October 2015 an All Party Parliamentary Group on Mindfulness reported their findings on what mindfulness is, where it might be used and whether it can help. The report was a landmark for those hoping to bring mindfulness to a whole range of situations where the public might benefit - including the workplace, the NHS and in schools. The report included a wonderfully straightforward definition of Mindfulness.



Mindfulness means paying attention to what's happening in the present moment in the mind, body and external environment, with an attitude of curiosity and kindness.

However, most of us pay most attention to our thoughts and much less to ...the body and external environment...and often not with an attitude of curiosity and kindness. We are mostly 'in our head'.

Being in our Head

More often than not during the day we are 'in our head'; meaning that we are often thinking about what is coming up, our 'to do' list, or mulling over things that have happened earlier. We may walk along the corridor in a hurry and not notice the display that has just been put up, or we may quickly have forgotten the coffee we hankered for a moment ago, as we become absorbed in a conversation. At times, we may not notice that we are tired and feeling a little edgy. If we could perhaps be more aware of how we feel and what's going around us right now, then we might as it were, 'wake up and smell the coffee'.



Whilst the ability to think and solve problems is obviously a marvellous capacity, at the same time, we may perhaps often struggle to give our minds a rest and just engage with what's happening now. Rather like a smartphone that is hard to put down, the mind wants to be centre stage at all times, sending constant 'urgent' texts about how we are doing, what might go wrong, guessing what others are thinking, and so on. Psychologists have studied this activity of the mind - and particularly the mind's capacity to bring up thoughts unrelated to what



is happening right now. This is called Mind Wandering. We may be driving the car, but we are often thinking about something else and are 'miles away'. Studies of mind wandering found that people's minds wandered frequently, regardless of what they were doing, finding that about half the time our mind may be 'elsewhere'.

Mood Congruence

A wandering mind may be no problem at all. However, if we are *in a bad mood* or feeling low, then the mind will tend to *wander to negative thoughts and memories*.

Psychologists have known for many years that if you are feeling sad, then sad memories and thoughts more readily spring to mind, and if you are happy, then happy thoughts and memories will be more accessible to us. This is called Mood

Congruence. When combined with a wandering mind we can see that once we are in a low mood, our thoughts are likely to get stuck in the negative. We fail one test, feel rather downhearted, and then suddenly we can remember all those other tests we've failed, or situations where things didn't seem to work out. We can get stuck. But what can we do about it?



Mindfulness - taking a step back

Mindfulness means being aware of our mind, and our current mood, physical sensations, energy level. Noticing this bigger picture allows us to take a **step back**. We might just be able to see that we are getting worked up or getting sucked into a familiar pattern of thinking. We might then be able to take a moment out, let the mind be for a while, and perhaps do something more helpful.



- Sometimes this might be just to slow down a little.
- Often taking a step back can allow us to see the big picture - to recognise that what is bothering us may not be worth all the stress we seem to be experiencing, and we may be able to accept what is happening.
- At other times, a mindful moment may allow us to savour an everyday moment (e.g., that coffee you were hankering for a little earlier).
- It may enable you to respond how you would like to rather than automatically, before you have even realised it.
- Being mindful might just help you see the wood for the trees.

So being more aware of our energy level, our mood, what's happening right now around us, can help us manage the ups and down of everyday life.

2. HOW CAN MINDFULNESS HELP CHILDREN?



There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that mindfulness programmes for children can be highly effective in making important changes, including:

- reducing stress
- improving wellbeing
- cultivating empathy
- increasing emotional control.

Information on a variety of research studies with adults and children can be found at www.psychologyforchildren.com

Mindfulness when well taught and practiced regularly has been shown to improve:

- Mental health and wellbeing
- Mood
- Self esteem
- Self- regulation
- Positive behaviour
- Academic learning

Practising Mindfulness techniques can help you to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment with curiosity and kindness. Developing the skills and attitudes that make up Mindfulness enables children and adults to notice more and learn about how they react to everyday situations. These skills can support them in responding more helpfully rather than simply reacting to what is happening in their lives.



3. MINDFULNESS AT HOME

Some useful links for you to explore Mindfulness further:

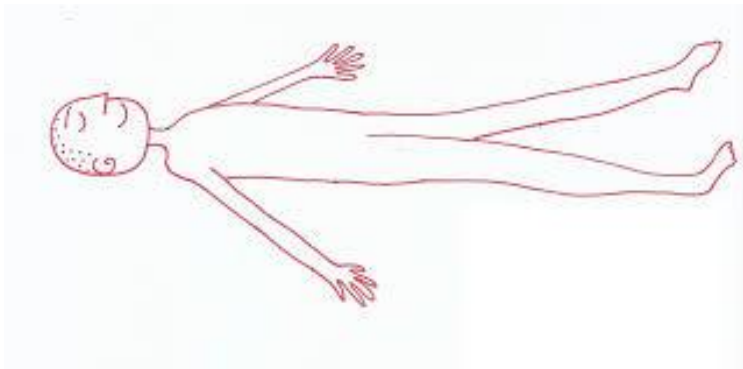
<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-children-kids-activities/>

<https://blissfulkids.com/mindfulness-and-the-brain-how-to-explain-it-to-children/>

<http://www.mindfulgnats.com/>

<https://cosmickids.com/mindfulness-meditation-videos-kids/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>



4. MINDFULNESS AT BROCKWELL

Helen Moulder (SENCO) herself practices mindfulness and following an 8 week 'Breathworks' course in 2017, went on to train how to teach mindfulness to children. She has completed the Paws .b course run by the Mindfulness in Schools project, as well as the Derbyshire run Mindful Attention Programme.

During the course of life at Brockwell, children are taught a variety of mindfulness techniques and how it can positively affect self – awareness and self -regulation.



Children are taught about:

- Specific areas of the brain and how these affect our ability to **focus, make good choices, recognise when we need to steady ourselves** when our body or mind is busy or out of balance.
- Ways that mindfulness can support them in many day-to-day activities, including **concentration and memory, behavioural self- management, and in relationships with family and friends.**
- Ways to respond rather than react – and therefore make better choices and take best care of ourselves.

If you need any further information, please contact Helen Moulder via the school office.

