

MANAGING MONKEY SELF & MONKEY CHILDREN IN DIFFICULT TIMES



*Life isn't perfect and it never will be
because that's the way it is.*

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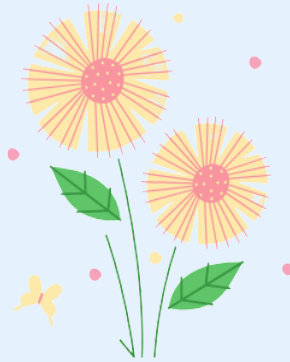
Introduction

At present, life is upside down and inside out. Everyone is at home or working very hard to keep people safe, fed and well. For those who are at home working, it helps to keep in mind that you're not only at home but at home perhaps with others too, all vying for attention.

Your normal idea of working from home is not the same and you shouldn't expect to carry out all your work responsibilities in the same way. There are also home responsibilities and those relating to your safety and that of your family, whether homeschooling, pets, limited resources, and many other issues. Recognise this and take the pressure off yourself.

What follows are some thoughts and a number of mindfulness practices and practices that I've created, that you can use for yourself and your children. Some have been specifically adapted and written so that children can either read them for themselves or parents can read them out and do them too. They can be adapted for younger children too.

The resources are not only for parents but can be used by carers, teachers and anyone finding their psychological wellbeing tested. Even if it isn't, using these practices can help you to keep balanced. There is nothing strange about them: they are things that we do every day, or most days, with an added focus.



A few thoughts on life

- Life happens, it is often difficult but also wonderful.
- Life is transient and moments of both despair and happiness naturally shift as time moves on.
- Learning to move with time rather than struggling against it is helpful as life shifts and changes over time.
- Mindfulness is one way of helping to manage life, for all that it brings.
- Mindfulness is about being alert and aware of what is happening within you and around you, in this moment, for whatever it is. No judgement, no criticism.
- It's not about stopping or changing your thoughts or emotions but about forming a different relationship with them.
- Take life one breath at a time.

A note: *The practices here are all written down which makes them immediately accessible. At the end of this resource, you'll find links to free audio meditations and other material. Please respect that all the material within this pack and the links is copyrighted.*

Mindfulness

Many mindfulness practices are based on breathing. Breathing keeps us alive but it can also be used to manage difficult times and calm the stress response when it's not needed.

When we're scared, nervous or crying, our breathing can become fast and shallow. You may have been told to 'take deep breaths' when you've been panicking or in pain. This is because breathing deeply can help to calm us down.

By breathing in a calm way, we can also learn to concentrate more, to learn more and to have more control over our feelings including those restless or jumpy ones.

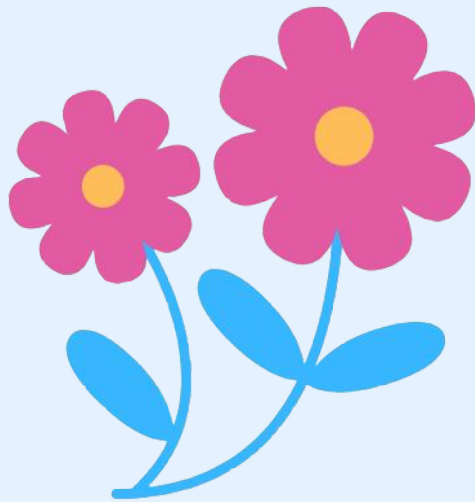
One of the useful things about mindfulness is that you can learn to step away from yourself. Developing this ability, through doing the practices, opens you to the possibility of using those split-second moments between thoughts, actions or emotions to choose what you want to do.

Do I choose to go down this path or that one? Do I wish to impulsively react, or to respond in a way that I would like to? There are many moments in our day where we

have a choice; a choice to self-criticise or a choice to accept; a choice to sink or a choice to use humour to cope.

This links to the idea of intention. It's about having an intention about which choice you want to make in this moment, and in those other moments of your life.

Let's start with our posture as it can affect our mood, just as mood can affect our posture.



A practice: Posture

- ❖ *Sit in a chair in a slumped and hunched position for two minutes. Become aware of your breathing and observe any sensations that come to mind. Can you feel any aches and pains? How is it affecting your breathing? What emotions can you identify?*
 - ❖ *Now sit up straighter with your shoulders back. Your posture should be open and relaxed; try to soften your facial muscles and jaw and nurture a feeling of confidence and calm. As you continue to focus on your breathing, notice any changes that occur either physically or emotionally. Do you feel more alert, more confident or less anxious? If no changes occur, that is fine too.*
 - ❖ *Make a mental note of your experience and throughout the day become aware of your posture when you feel anxious or distressed. At these times, gently and kindly adjust it if you are hunched, on the edge of your seat or sitting restlessly. Take a moment to think about how these small changes may affect your physical and emotional wellbeing.*
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Mindfulness is about developing awareness of what you think, do, feel and believe when you go through an experience. It's like seeing a daisy as a whole flower but also being able to recognise that there are different parts of it (the petals, their colour

variations, the stem, the stamen, the stalk and leaves) that can be separate but that come together to form the flower.

This awareness of the process of how these parts work separately and together doesn't make the daisy any less of a flower or alter it in any way; it simply gives you a greater knowledge and perspective of it.

When you take the time to sit quietly or in stillness, often your mind starts to fill with thoughts, ruminations, anxieties and fears around your situation.

What follows are some mindfulness practices that can help to develop your focus allowing you to take a step back from these worries. This process involves thinking beyond your thoughts, feeling beyond your feelings, i.e. a meta-view or viewing from another angle.



Metacognition

You may be interested to read a bit more about metacognition, but if not then you can skip this section.

The ability to think about one's thinking is what is referred to as metacognition. It refers to the process of thinking about your thinking, of stepping back to see what you are doing, as an observer, watching and noticing your responses. Metacognition involves two distinct but interrelated areas – metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation or control. Metacognitive knowledge involves awareness of your thinking, knowledge of yourself as a learner, knowledge of the aspects of the task and strategies needed to carry it out.

Metacognitive regulation involves your ability to manage your thinking processes, which strategies you actually use in order to make cognitive progress such as planning your approach to a task, evaluating its progress and, importantly, being able to change tactic or direction if there are difficulties.

Let's get out of our heads and into a practice. This one sets the scene for other, more specific ones.

A practice: Breathe and Observe

- ❖ *Breathe into your distress.*
 - ❖ *Breathe into the centre of the distress.*
 - ❖ *Breathe and release.*
 - ❖ *Breathe and observe what is happening.*
 - ❖ *Notice the tension in your body where the distress sits.*
 - ❖ *Notice the tension in your body around the distress and beyond it.*
 - ❖ *Simply observe it.*
 - ❖ *Breathe and observe.*
 - ❖ *How far does it extend?*
 - ❖ *Where is the pain or discomfort whether physical or emotional?*
 - ❖ *Breathe and observe what is happening.*
 - ❖ *Breathe – observe – breathe – release – breathe.*
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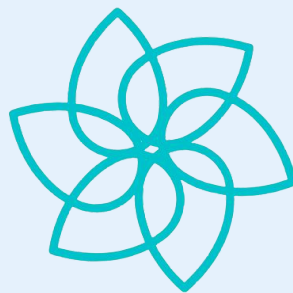
At another time, you can move onto the next practice which is a 2-minute practice. It is also a very short one, but it does shift any negative, anxious or distressing thoughts or feelings. It helps to remember that we are mind and body, not mind or body. So, our emotions affect our physical bodies and our physical sensations affect our mood.

Don't get trapped by the belief that now is forever.

A Moment of Calm in 2 minutes

This two-minute breathing practice is an excellent introduction to how focusing on your breathing can help to settle and ground you. It is particularly useful when your chest or stomach feels tight, your heart is pounding, or you are feeling bombarded by distressing thoughts. It isn't a mindfulness practice but it does work.

It can be done at any time and in any place when you feel off-balance or anxious; during the day or night when fear or sadness strikes, when feeling angry or after a difficult conversation. It can also be used in those moments when you're feeling overwhelmed or simply wish to come back to yourself and find a sense of quiet within yourself.



A practice: A Moment of Calm in 2 minutes

- ❖ *Sit in a chair with your eyes open or closed and place one hand on your stomach, feeling the rise and fall of it. Without forcing your breath in any way, silently count ‘in, 2, 3, 4’ on the in-breath and ‘out, 2, 3, 4’ on the out-breath. Repeat this 3 times.*
 - ❖ *Breathe in for the same amount of time as above, but count only ‘in, 2, 3’ on the in-breath and ‘out, 2, 3’ on the out-breath. Repeat 3 times.*
 - ❖ *Continue breathing but reduce the counts to ‘in, 2, out, 2’ and repeat 3 times.*
 - ❖ *Now take one breath in and one breath out, without counting. If this feels difficult, think ‘in’ and ‘out’ to the rhythm of your breathing. Repeat 3 times.*
 - ❖ *Take a moment to think about how you feel. Do you feel calmer? Is your breathing more regular? Do you feel less tense and have your physical symptoms of anxiety subsided a little?*
 - ❖ *Take this moment of calm with you, knowing that returning to a calmer and more balanced state of mind can be as simple as breathing.*
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Stress & Worry

It's unrealistic to think that during stressful times you won't or shouldn't worry. However, it is the ongoing worrying, the surges that feel so powerful and the ruminating (going over and over things) that wear you down. None of these are helpful to your emotional wellbeing nor to your physical health as they overactivate the stress response.

Stress is a biological and psychological response experienced when you encounter a threat, whether that threat be real or thought to be real. Your body's response to stress is a primitive, automatic mechanism to ensure your survival. It is activated at the smallest hint of danger and is always on alert for any threatening situation, which is essential for your survival.

However, your brain cannot distinguish between the different types of stressful or distressing situations that occur in life. It doesn't know that the tension you feel when you're feeling a sense of panic or anger is different from you being in a potentially life-threatening situation. It interprets both as one and the same thing, in that it thinks you're in immediate danger even if you're not. Your fear or being distressed is perceived as a potential threat to your survival, and this is what is referred to as a *perceived threat*

because you aren't actually in true danger. The fear and anxiety of what is happening during this heightened time of danger is very real but here the discussion is about what is taking place *within* you when you're enclosed indoors.

Your brain kicks into gear at any actual or perceived signal of danger. Threat sets off a physiological reaction via the sympathetic nervous system which switches you into 'go' mode. Once the situation of threat has passed, your body should return to its normal state. The method of the body returning to its normal state is via the parasympathetic system which puts you back into 'rest' mode.

Sympathetic System – go mode	Parasympathetic system – rest mode
<i>Adrenaline and cortisol release into the blood</i>	<i>Noradrenaline released into the blood</i>
<i>Breathing rate increases</i>	<i>Breathing rate decreases</i>
<i>Heart rate levels rise</i>	<i>Heart rate levels lower</i>
<i>Energy directed to heart, muscles, and breathing</i>	<i>Energy redirected to other organs in the body that help with absorption, excretion and other essential functions</i>
<i>Digestive process shuts down</i>	<i>Digestive process is active</i>

However, when mental or emotional stress activates a physiological response in your body, it is interpreted by your brain as a perceived danger. When this response is continually experienced by continual stress, your sympathetic nervous system remains in a more active state than it should be. This phenomenon is extremely important because, over time, it can bring about both physical and psychological problems due to your mind and body becoming exhausted.

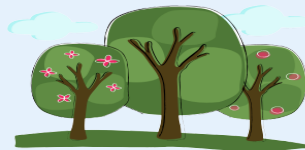
Let's put this another way. What happens during this overactivation of anxiety, anger, fear, etc. is that your body secretes cortisol, the stress hormone, and adrenaline. These prepare your body for fight or flight as though there was an actual lion that jumped out at you from behind a bush and you now need to be brave (or crazy) and fight it, or else you need to run as fast as you never believed you could.

It's unlikely that on your daily walk you'll encounter a lion jumping out at you, so such a physical response is unnecessary and detrimental to your health. Once your brain realises there is no lion, it tells your body to go into reverse mode and settle down. In this time of rebalancing, you may start to feel tired or low in mood. The real danger then becomes your thoughts repeatedly reactivating this stress response so you're caught in a loop where your body can never really recover from being activated as it is reactivated soon after by another form of stress or reaction. Over a prolonged period, this ongoing secretion of cortisol and adrenaline, and the activation of the sympathetic

system and then the parasympathetic system begins to wear down your organs and leaves you emotionally exhausted.

Overload

During difficult times, it's almost impossible not to have intrusive thoughts about them. However, such distressing thoughts and ruminations (repeated thoughts) can be very unhelpful and can take on a life of their own, often leading you to darker and darker places and feeling emotionally overloaded. Consequently, it's important to contain these thoughts as it's unrealistic to think that you won't have any harsh or frightening ones at times like this. Trying to put a boundary around them is necessary and helpful. Give yourself, for example, half an hour in the morning or afternoon to think about these things and make notes on them too if that helps. You can even think about or write down what you might be able to do about them. If your worrying keeps you awake at night, tell yourself you can't resolve anything right now so ruminating on it won't help, that you need sleep in order to stay healthy and you'll put your worries on the bedside table until morning. You can then think about them.



Negative bias

You may have heard about the negative bias. As humans, we tend to look towards negative possibilities and outcomes as part of our survival. If we lived in the jungle, we would need to anticipate that something might well jump out at us. In this current situation, our very survival too is under threat, so our negative bias will become more evident.

Having said that, it is also at this time that balance is needed. It is all too easy to lean too much towards the negative so the practices and philosophy of mindfulness can help you to keep some balance and equilibrium.

Fear is part of our makeup, as is our primitive drive to survive. It is the fear of not knowing the outcome that can be destructive and overwhelming.

Draw it in and say, 'I'm here for now, that is all I can know'.

- ❖ *Breathing in – I calm*
- ❖ *Breathing out – I smile*
- ❖ *Being in this moment*
- ❖ *Is all I have and know*

The following practice is so simple and can be done anywhere. It is remarkable in how effective it can be in such a short space of time. It can help to ground you, to ease agitation and to rebalance you when everything feels like it is getting out of control. You can do it anywhere, and it's a very good way of engaging your children.

Mindfulness practice: Soles of your feet

When sitting, place your feet firmly but gently on the ground. Bring your attention to the bottom of your feet, to the soles of your feet.

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- ❖ *Feel the sensation of your foot against your sock, your sock against the bottom of the shoe and your shoe touching the ground. If your feet are bare, then feel the sensation of your bare flesh on the ground.*
 - ❖ *Focus all your attention on the soles of your feet.*
 - ❖ *In your mind's eye, imagine you are breathing in and out of the soles of your feet.*
 - ❖ *Feel each of your feet expanding and then softening with each breath.*
 - ❖ *Imagine a sense of weight coming into your feet and this weight is firm, strong and stabilising.*
 - ❖ *Let this sensation ground you as you breathe in and out.*
 - ❖ *Bring your attention back to whatever is happening around you.*
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Walking Meditation

Now that you've become more familiar with the soles of your feet, this meditation is worth a try if you've never done it before.

Focusing on walking can be a strange but effective way of shifting your emotional energy. You can do it in the lounge, garden or as part of your daily exercise. Walking is a whole-body exercise and it's easy to include children in this practice as it's quite a novel way for them to engage with an everyday activity.



Mindfulness practice: Let's Go for a Walk

This practice is an example of an activity that you do all the time, frequently without paying any attention to what you are doing. It has been adapted from the traditional walking meditation to include a broader perspective.

Focusing your attention onto your automatic functions can ground and balance you, and this walking practice can be used when anxieties and stresses seem to be getting on top of you. Try it as a short break from work, studying or activities or when you can feel your frustrations growing, or integrate it into your daily exercise.

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- ❖ *Take a walk in the garden, along the road or wherever is convenient. You can even do it in your lounge. Keeping your eyes lowered, bring your attention to the physical sensations of walking. Feel the changes in pressure as you place your feet on the ground, be aware of your breathing, pay attention to the rhythm of your footsteps and the slight swinging motion of your arms. Acknowledge any emotions or sensations that come into your mind.*
 - ❖ *Lift your eyes to the world around you. Little by little, pay special attention to the sights, sounds and smells of your environment. Take everything in – the movement, the stillness, the light, the shade, the chaos, and the peace. Allow yourself to be open to your environment and its effect on you.*

- ❖ *Shift your focus to your connection to the outside world and the impact you are having on your environment. Let your breathing flow naturally, becoming part of the world around you. Feel the stability of the ground beneath your feet and let it strengthen you. Notice any changes in the sensations and feelings you are experiencing and acknowledge that the world around you is having an impact on you, just as you have an influence on the environment.*
 - ❖ *Finally, take a mental step back from such an active involvement in the sensations of the environment. Continue to observe your breathing gently as space forms between you and the outside world. You are aware of your surroundings, sensitive to them and appreciative of them, but the sensations arising from them are not the entirety of your experience. Take a moment to appreciate this moment, knowing you can take this sense of peace and clarity with you when you step back into your everyday activities.*
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Managing Your Expectations and Boundaries

You may be feeling that you are defined by your current problems and the crisis surrounding you but that's not true. You are still you for all of your feelings, and each part of you needs to learn to coexist with the other parts of you, to live together without trying to avoid or deny one part in favour of another.

You may start to think that you're not as capable as you thought, or as organised, or as caring as you imagined now that you're living through a crisis. You can gradually develop your ability to care about all of yourself, as you are now, and to appreciate your present moment for all that you are even if you view some of it as flawed.

It does help, especially in such stressful times, to manage your expectations both of yourself and of others. Working remotely, being at home all day every day with yourself or others, cooking, cleaning, trying to adapt to such a strange time, all these things can create a lot of discomfort and heightened emotions and reactions.

Recognise that what worked in other times might need to be adapted and that it's not an issue if you can't meet every expectation. If the children don't do all their homework or you're getting dressed later than usual or eating more randomly, that's fine. Yes,

keeping some routine is important and having some type of structure to your day certainly helps but don't be too hard on yourself if you're not meeting all your expectations or you find yourself being someone different from whom you thought you would be during a crisis.

Simply getting through the day intact is sometimes the best you can ask of yourself, and an achievement in itself, especially in the turmoil and uncertainty of life right now.

One thing that is necessary is to set boundaries. Keep, or insert, boundaries around your time, physical space and time out, if possible. It is at times like this that it becomes all too easy to think that you'll say no tomorrow, or you'll ask someone else to help with the washing another time.

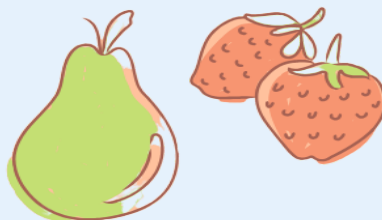
You need those boundaries as much as others around you do. If things get too heated, step away, and have a set word or phrase so that if tensions are getting too high and likely to lead to a blow-up, you all know, for example, to disperse and go into individual rooms.

Such times as these are ideal for power-struggles, accusations, asserting one's authority and so forth. If you find yourself getting into these, then step aside, breathe

and know that now is not the time to get into something that can easily escalate beyond what it's worth arguing about.

Step back and if it's important, raise it when tensions have eased. Talking in a more relaxed and less angry or threatening way when walking or doing a task at home sometimes gets the message across in a better way. It may also provide the opportunity to apologise and discuss how both, or all, of you can handle things differently. This becomes such a good way of role modelling how to manage eruptions of emotion.

The following practice is an easy one to do, although not always easy to remember to do. It can be used with others too either at a meal or anytime during the day. It is also an excellent way of showing children how a slower pace to something can change the experience of it.



Mindfulness practice: Mindful Eating

When we are eating, we often hardly pay attention to what the food tastes or feels like. Sometimes we eat while watching TV or playing games, or we rush our food so that we can go back to playing or doing something we think is more enjoyable. Focusing on eating can help you to enjoy your food in a different way.

- ❖ *Take some fruit, chocolate or other food which is easy to chew.*
 - ❖ *Hold it in the palm of your hand and concentrate all of your attention on looking at it. What do you notice about the colour, shape and feel of it? Do you notice anything about the way it looks that you haven't noticed before?*
 - ❖ *Now smell the food – is it a nice smell, does it smell sweet or sour? Does it make your mouth water?*
 - ❖ *Place the food on your tongue and leave it there for a few seconds... what does it feel like in your mouth? Is it rough or smooth on your tongue? What does it taste like?*
 - ❖ *Slowly start to chew the food, paying attention to all of the tastes and sensations that arise. Does it taste different when you chew it so slowly?*
 - ❖ *Chew it properly and then swallow it.*
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By this stage, you've eaten slowly, gone for a focused and measured walk, watched daisies grow and maybe even found a few moments to breathe. Your next adventure is to go outside or sit by a window and enjoy this gentle and easy practice where you can include the whole family.

Mindfulness practice: Cloud Watching

- ❖ *Find somewhere quiet and calm to sit or lie down. Go into the garden and lie on your back on a blanket if you can.*
- ❖ *Close your eyes and place your hands on your stomach.*
- ❖ *Feel your hands rising and falling as you breathe in and out and your body starts to relax.*
- ❖ *Look at the sky or picture a blue sky, with fluffy white clouds gently passing by. If any thought comes into your mind, imagine it written on the cloud like a label.*
- ❖ *Watch as the cloud and the thought slowly fade away, leaving just blue sky.*
- ❖ *If you start thinking about other things or daydreaming, that's fine – gently remind yourself that thoughts are just like clouds and will fade away in their own time. Now concentrate again on your hand on your stomach.*
- ❖ *When you breathe out, you can watch or imagine the clouds gently floating away. You can stay in this calm, quiet place, watching the clouds and thoughts come and go, for as long as you feel comfortable.*

A gentle way of helping children to learn about their breathing, and specifically abdominal breathing, is for them to lie on the floor with a toy placed on their stomachs. They can breathe in and out watching how the toy moves up and down.

Our senses give us ongoing clues and messages about where we are, what is happening around us, what someone looks or sounds like and a host of other things. We often take them for granted but when we pay attention to something in a different way, we begin to experience it in an enhanced manner. The following practice can be done alone or with others and it's a lovely one to help children slow down and become familiar with different sensations. It can be quite a lot of fun if you all compare your experience of the individual pieces.



Mindfulness practice: Paying Attention to Your Senses

- ❖ *Find a piece of music you enjoy. Sit quietly without any other gadgets on.*
 - ❖ *Listen to the music, trying to hear each instrument and as many different notes or voices as you can.*
 - ❖ *Find two different items, such as a fluffy toy and a rubber ball. Close your eyes and feel them, paying attention to the way they feel in your hands – whether they are rough or smooth, hard or soft, large or small. Notice the differences between them.*
 - ❖ *Find something in the garden or outside when on a walk. It could be a plant, a snail shell, an acorn or anything else you can find. Look closely at it – how many new things can you spot that you hadn't noticed about the object before?*
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Children's Responses to Change

It's important to recognise that children too can feel stressed by what is happening around them. They may not have the adult words to describe their feelings or sensations, or the cognitive ability yet to process the complexity of the situation, but they will have had a lot of changes too at this time.

Sometimes their fears and anxieties manifest in different ways from adults and theirs may show, for example, by complaining of stomach aches, headaches, feeling sad, being moody or angry, hitting out, being demanding, becoming withdrawn or reverting back to the behaviour and needs of a younger child.

If children complain that you're being strict, groan about you setting limits or reprimanding them for their behaviour, you can tell them that it is your job as a parent to worry about them, reprimand them, help them to learn what is acceptable and unacceptable and to learn that there are consequences to behaviour. So, if they do one thing then there is a consequence - if you do this, then that (and stick to it) whether it be fun or punishment.

What one can't ignore is that not only do children absorb the real emotion and tensions of what is happening, even when told everything is fine and will be alright, but they repeat the way their parents or role models react. Role modelling is highly influential on behaviours, and attitudes are absorbed by children at the most basic of levels, mostly unconsciously. For the most part, what you do will have more impact than what you say.

If you find your child or children are seeming uneasy or tense, then the practice below is written so that you can read it out to them. Even if they aren't anxious, it's worth them learning how beneficial it is to breathe in a good way and release any feelings that are lodged within them. The language is simple and easy to follow and older children can read it for themselves.



A practice: One Minute to Calm

This practice can be used whenever you experience any difficult feelings or when you want to relax and let go of the day. Always remember to breathe gently. If you breathe too hard, you'll feel dizzy.

- ❖ *Take a deep but gentle breath.*
 - ❖ *Really pay attention to how your breath feels as it comes in through your nose or mouth, down into your chest and fills up your lungs.*
 - ❖ *As you breathe out, in your mind say to yourself “letting go of all difficult feelings.”*
 - ❖ *Imagine all the worried feelings or tightness in your body flowing out from your body with your breath. You can repeat this two or three times until you feel a little calmer.*
 - ❖ *Be careful not to breathe too deeply or quickly as you could start to feel dizzy.*
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This next practice is very similar to the One Minute to Calm one. It works well with children as they can read it to themselves and practice it on their own. It is suitable for older children or can be adapted for use with younger ones.

A practice: A quick step to feeling quiet

This is a fast and easy way to help you to feel calm and back in control if you're anxious, angry or have lost concentration. You can even use it to help you to fall asleep. Best of all, you can do it anywhere, anytime and no-one else needs to know.

You can sit, stand or lie down to do this practice. You can even do it when you're sitting at your desk at home or when lying in bed at night. It doesn't matter where you are, you can use it and it will always help you to feel calm, settled and in control.

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- ❖ *Place your hand on your stomach – on that soft part under your ribs.*
 - ❖ *Feel it rise and fall as you breathe in and out. Don't try and breathe too hard, just keep it gentle and natural.*
 - ❖ *Once you are used to this you can slow it down and say 'in' as you breathe in and 'out' as you breathe out.*
 - ❖ *Keep your focus on your hand and breathe into it, feeling the rhythm of your breathing as your hand moves up and down.*

A Bubble

This isn't a mindfulness practice but something that I put together. It's so simple, yet so effective for adults and children.

When you have difficult feelings imagine yourself in a glass bubble. This is a special bubble that you can put around yourself as a protection. When you are inside this bubble you can see, hear, speak and feel everything as you would normally.

Things can come into it and out of it, so nothing is different except that you have this special bubble around you that protects you and keeps you safe.



Kindness and Loving Kindness

We all know how important it is to be kind and how wonderful it feels when others are kind to us. Here's something you can set up very quickly:

- ❖ *Get an empty jar and some pens and paper.*
 - ❖ *Let everyone write down tasks or activities he or she can do that are kind (and realistic within the current constraints). For example, make my bed and someone else's, put the washing in the machine, clear the dishes from the breakfast table, water the plants, give someone a hug, be nice to my brother/sister/parent for the morning, share my games this afternoon and so forth. Let them be small things so they are achievable.*
 - ❖ *Fold each suggestion and place them in the jar.*
 - ❖ *Write a label for the jar (someone can do a colourful design on the label) saying Kindness Jar.*
 - ❖ *Each day, everyone takes one activity from the jar and carries it out. You can return the activity to the jar but keep a record so that people don't keep getting the same one.*
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Loving Kindness is a well-known mindfulness practice that I've adapted. It's a way of quietly expressing kindness to yourself and to others. Again, older children can read and do it by themselves, or parents can change it or model it with younger children. It is also a lovely practice for parents to use for themselves.



Mindfulness practice: Loving Kindness

This practice is one way to be kind to yourself and to others. You can change the words to ones which mean more to you, if you like.

- ❖ *Sit somewhere quiet and comfortable and become aware of your breathing.*

When you are relaxed, try saying these words to yourself in your mind:

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I take care of myself.

- ❖ *As you think these words, concentrate on a feeling of love or happiness in your heart – this is ‘loving kindness’. Now think of your favourite colour and imagine your heart is glowing that colour and that as your heart beats, the colour spreads throughout your body leaving a warm, happy, relaxed feeling.*
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- ❖ *You can also send loving kindness to family, friends and people who need help. Just change the ‘I’ to their name, for example ‘May Sophie be happy’. Imagine your loving kindness leaving your heart and flowing into theirs.*

Being Thankful

Gratitude or being thankful for what we have in this moment is a very powerful antidote to our fears of the future. In any time of crisis or uncertainty, the only thing we can really know is that we are here right now. Within our 'now' we need to hold onto the good and focus the pathways in our brains onto that good no matter how large or small.

We know that a sense of contentment, and even happiness, can come from doing this even when we are in distressing situations. We all know that the present is all that we really have but we forget to see it when our thoughts are clouded by fear and discontent.

When you find yourself feeling annoyed at the lack of something, wish you had more, feel disillusioned at what could or should be, stop and think about what you have right now that is good.

By having a willingness to see your life with eyes that can see the good and the harsh and feel a sense of thankfulness for the good, no matter how small, you help yourself to keep perspective.

A smile from someone, a few minutes of laughter with a friend, a hug from a partner, a kind gesture from a stranger, a warm bath, a comfortable bed, food in your stomach –

there is never a shortage of things for which to be grateful and a few moments of acknowledging them helps you to recognise that the harsh and the good co-exist.

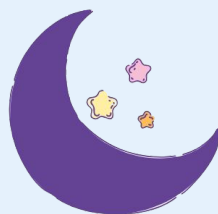
The practice below can be read by children or read by parents to children. When creating it, I never realised just how powerful it would be for both adults and children as it is a lovely way to end the evening and it helps children to go to sleep with something positive. Adults find this practice just as helpful, if not more so, as they we forget after a long day what good has come out of it.



A practice: Being Thankful

This is what we call gratitude and it means being grateful and giving thanks for what we have in our lives. Even when things feel difficult or we are worried or upset, there is always something, no matter how small, that we can be thankful for and remembering these things helps us to feel strong and happy. It also reminds us that even when things feel horrible there is always something, even if it is only one tiny thing, that feels alright. This is such an important thing to remember.

- ❖ *Each night before you go to sleep think of 3 things that have happened during your day that you are pleased about. They can be anything from someone being kind to you, receiving a hug from a friend, being nice to someone when you could have been unkind, feeling the sun on your skin, being able to have a warm bath or having someone you love kiss you goodnight. Say ‘Thank you for....’ for each one.*



Keep Perspective

It is in times like this that keeping perspective is so important. It can switch your mindset from a negative, despondent one to a more accepting and open one. It's quite easy to lose balance and to see one incident or experience as the only issue of concern. This can distort and dismiss the other aspects of your life and be harmful to your wellbeing and to that of others.

In the world of neuroscience, they say what fires together wires together. In other words, if you keep making associations and thinking about something your brain develops a pathway. The more you think about that issue, the deeper and stronger the pathway becomes (like a pathway in a forest).

Eventually, the smallest trigger will set you along that pathway. It is difficult to step off those pathways that are more negative, but you can if you begin to develop alternative pathways that are more positive.

When the trigger comes, you can choose which pathway to go down, or if you've already dropped onto a negative one, you can tell yourself to stop and switch your thinking to a more positive one that you've created. This isn't about denial or taking on a rose-tinted view of things. It's about learning to develop parts of your brain so that you can feel more in control of your thoughts, emotions and responses, and using your

natural resources, such as your breathing, to manage yourself both physically and psychologically.

Think of your brain as a highly complex set of lanes, roads and motorways. If you get on one that is going north and you want to go south, staying on it isn't going to help. You need to stop what you're doing,, navigate yourself to be able to change direction and only then keep going. Don't keep going north and then be upset when you haven't reached south. Think of this in terms of metacognitive knowledge (I'm aware I'm repeatedly thinking about this) and metacognitive regulation or control (I know what I'm doing, it's not helping, I must change tactic or strategy).

If you lose perspective you lose your equanimity, your balance in life.

The final practice, again written so that it can be read to older children (or they read it themselves) or adapted for younger ones. It can help everyone feel more grounded and secure. By feeling grounded in your body, you can also connect to that anchor inside of yourself that is there to use whenever the seas get rough or the winds blow harshly.

Use your internal resources, those abilities **you already have**, to manage yourself and help those around you. A time like this is not one where you want to go exploring unknown territories (metaphorically speaking) or making lists of what you should be like or how you ought to be coping. Now is the time to recognise your skills and resources that have helped you to get to where you are right now, and to let them flourish.

Mindfulness practice: The Mountain

This practice can help you feel strong and powerful. It is great to use if you feel worried, scared or when you want to build your confidence or try something different.

You can sit or stand for this practice, but make sure you are comfortable and won't fall over. If you are standing, then be on a carpet or somewhere you won't slip. Stand with your feet slightly apart and keep your eyes open so that you don't lose your balance. You can close your eyes if you are steady on your feet.

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- ❖ *Bring your attention to your breathing, how your chest rises when you breathe in and falls as you breathe out. As you are breathing, start to imagine a huge mountain. See all the details of the mountain – is there snow at the top? Are there trees, rivers or streams on the mountain? Is the ground flat or full of rocks? Try to make a clear picture in your mind, adding as many details as possible.*
 - ❖ *Keep the image of the mountain in your mind as you focus on your breathing. When you are ready, imagine that you and the mountain are becoming one, as you begin to feel strong, steady and made of rock. Let this feeling start in your feet, move up into your legs and then into your stomach and all the way up into your back and chest. Feel it in your shoulders, arms and neck and finally in your head that you can hold high. Notice how you stand firm and*

large, strong and stable. Breathe in this feeling of strength and power and let it fill your body. Hold onto this feeling as you breathe out.

- ❖ *Think about how mountains stay the same no matter what the weather. Storms, snow and hail come and go, as does the sunshine and the gentle breeze, but they do not affect the mountain. The weather may change but the mountain stays the same. You can be the same.*
- ❖ *When you are ready, open your eyes. Remind yourself that you can be as strong and steady as the mountain wherever you go and no matter what happens in your life.*

Remember that the practices are there for you to enjoy so there is no right or wrong way with them as long as you take care when doing them. You can't fail or get them wrong as they aren't tests. Some days they will feel easier to do than other days and that is fine. The important thing is to keep doing them and to have fun at the same time. The more you do them the more you'll feel their benefits. Invite your family and friends to do them too, if they would like to.

Take things one day at a time. There is enough to worry about and to get through for today, so keep it contained. If the day seems too long to manage, scale it back to 'just for this hour' or 'just for this minute in time' I'm going to By bringing this back into the present and what is here, right now, it helps you to feel that you have more control.

We can't predict what will happen in the next five minutes, let alone the next day, week, month or year. Focus on the now and do the best with it that you can. Go gently; life is hard but you have the resources within you to get from one moment to the next.

As you go along, don't forget to smile, to breathe, and to have fun. Sing, dance, shout, hop, grump, cry, it doesn't matter – you're alive and here right now, that's worth enjoying.

You are your own best friend so take special care, stay safe and always be kind to yourself.

LIVE YOUR LIFE ONE BREATH AT A TIME



Additional Free Resources

5-minute Mindfulness Meditation <http://bit.ly/39P3tKE>

20-minute Mindful Awareness meditation <http://bit.ly/39P3tKE>

2 Free Sessions from Monkey Mind & The Mountain: Mindfulness, Mental Health and Resilience for 7 – 11-year olds. It's a new children's programme developed for teachers, parents, counsellors and anyone interested in working with the mental health of children.

Calendars: This link <https://bit.ly/3dNBsVU> will take you to:

My Month of Mindfulness for Adults

14 days of Mindfulness for Children

A Short Mindfulness Quiz

On the website www.lifehappens-mindfulness.com there are also various articles and blogs that you can access for free.



Other Resources

Monkey Mind and The Mountain: Mindfulness for 8 – 80-year olds.

The book is written for children to read by themselves or with an adult. Adults found it extremely accessible hence the title. Many of the practices in this resource pack are taken from the book.

A PDF. version can be bought from Gumroad or by contacting me on the Contact Form on the website. <https://bit.ly/2ysHllh>

App: iMindfulness on the go (iOS and Android). <https://bit.ly/3dKlif4>

Books: See the website for a range of books ranging from the overall use of mindfulness to anxiety and depression, pain management and managing cancer symptoms. <https://bit.ly/3aDYVag>

Life Happens can currently only be purchased as a hard copy via the Contact Form, or as a PDF. with the guided meditations (3 Hours) via Gumroad. Here is the link to my website page on the book <https://bit.ly/2WV1yR4>

Monkey Mind & The Mountain: Mindfulness, Mental Health and Resilience for 7 – 11-year olds. This is a comprehensive 42-session programme written so that no training is required. It can be used by teachers, counsellor as well as **parents** as it is easy to engage with, all the ideas and questions are set out in a manual and it can be

done at your own speed. It comes as a Power Point programme and can be transferred to you via a link. All that is required is a computer with Power Point. 2 Free Sessions are available here <http://bit.ly/2FlqD8r>



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