

ACTIVITIES FOR INSTILLING MINDFULNESS AND RESILIENCE IN ADOLESCENTS

Mindfulness practice can help teens and tweens reduce stress, find relief in the moment, and support their well-being and growth. The following are some age-appropriate tools and exercises for instilling mindfulness in adolescents.

MINDFUL BREATHING: A MINDFUL CUP OF HOT CHOCOLATE

For this exercise, you can either prepare one of your favorite beverages or imagine that it's sitting in front of you. It might be a mug of hot chocolate, apple cider, or fragrant tea. Now, slowly and quietly breathe in through your nose as you smell (or imagine smelling) your beverage.

- Breathe in and notice the aromas.
- Close your eyes and keep breathing slowly. What other scents do you notice?
- Breathe out by blowing through your mouth to cool the beverage.
- Open your eyes and breathe in again. Does it smell any different now that it's cooled off?
- Repeat this four times.

INFORMAL MINDFULNESS: BREATHING THROUGH DISCOMFORT

Imagine that you're waiting in line. You begin to get impatient with how long it is taking for the line to move forward. You might be annoyed and can feel the frustration rising. The next time something like this happens in real life, acknowledge the discomfort in a nonjudgmental manner, noticing where you feel the tension in your body as you get in touch with the thoughts and emotions that surface. Then, take a few deep breaths to center yourself and allow the discomfort to wax and wane, all the while being nonjudgmental of any feelings that arise.

MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION: HAND GESTURES

Self-compassion means treating ourselves the way we would treat a good friend when we're going through a hard time. It involves self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity. The following activity helps teach these three components.

Stand up. Hold both of your hands out in front of you and make really tight fists. Squeeze as tightly as you can and slowly count to 30. Think about how this feels. It might hurt or feel uncomfortable, and you likely want it to stop. **This is what self-criticism feels like.** It's tight, hurts, is really uncomfortable, and isn't fun.

Now open your fists with your palms facing upward. How does this feel by comparison? You probably feel relieved, more open, and relaxed. **This is what mindfulness feels like.** It's noticing what is here in this moment and allowing it in.

Now stretch your arms out in front of you, keeping your hands open. Again, think about how this feels. Perhaps it feels like you're reaching out, maybe for another person or about to give or receive a hug. **This is what common humanity feels like.** It's a sense of being connected to others or feeling included or part of the group.

Now bring in your arms and place your hands over your heart. Allow them simply to rest there. Notice the warmth or the gentle pressure on your chest. Is it warm? Does it make you feel safe and protected, cared for, or loved? **This is what self-kindness or self-compassion feels like.** It's nice, isn't it?

SOUND, MOVEMENT, OR BODY AWARENESS OF BREATH

If your child or teen experiences sensory overload when concentrating on a specific sense/senses, help them identify other anchor points. Maybe instead of focusing on their breath, they can focus on their heartbeat or on a particular sound or body part. Here are three activities to try:

1. Sound Breath Awareness

- **Hold your hand in front of your mouth and exhale into the palm of your hand.** The breath should be a nice and loud “Haaaah” like you might do to clean the lenses of your glasses.
- **Concentrate on the sound of your breath.** Now close your mouth and continue breathing loud enough to hear the exhalation and the inhalation. Close your eyes if it’s more comfortable.
- **Take long and smooth breaths, maintaining the audible sound.** Concentrate fully and listen closely. The sound may be like the ocean tide, flowing in and out.
- **Continue to focus all your attention on the sound of your breathing for the next 5-10 breaths.** Let the sound be your anchor.

2. Movement Breath Awareness

- **Simply hold one of your hands in front of you.** Imagine your hand is a beautiful lotus flower that opens during the day and closes at night.
- **Open and close your hand slowly.** Do this several times, noticing the sensation of opening and closing, just like a lotus flower.
- **Now, synchronize your breaths with the opening and closing.** Breathe in while your hand opens and breathe out while your hand closes. Focus on this for five to 10 breaths.

3. Body Breath Awareness

- **Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.** Feel the rising and falling of your hands resting on your body.
- **Try to focus your full awareness on just the belly rising and falling. Then, shift your awareness to the chest.** Notice the movement and stay with it for five to 10 breaths.

TRAUMA-INFORMED MINDFULNESS

The practice below can help bring mindfulness to trauma survivors.

Mindful music

- Listen to a song and try to get inside of it. Instead of focusing on lyrics, pay attention to the music.
- Notice which instruments you hear and whether the song is loud, soft, fast, or slow.
- How do you feel physically when you hear the song? How do you feel mentally?
- What feelings does the song stir up in you and where in your body do you observe them?

Activities adapted from:

Beach, S. B. (2018, February 11). *Mindfulness for teens*. Left Brain Buddha. <https://leftbrainbuddha.com/mindfulness-for-teens> | Bernstein, J. (2018). *Mindfulness for teen worry: Quick and easy strategies to let go of anxiety, worry, and stress*. Instant Help. | Bluth, K. (2017). Hand gestures. In *The self-compassion workbook for teens: Mindfulness and compassion skills to overcome self-criticism and embrace who you are*. Instant Help. | Hutton, S. (2024, June 26). *3 mindfulness practices for neurodiverse meditators*. Mindful. <https://www.mindful.org/3-mindfulness-practices-for-neurodiverse-meditators> | Vo, D. (2022, August 14). Informal mindfulness. *Mindfulness for Teens*. <https://www.mindfulnessforteens.com/about/try-this-informal-mindfulness>