

Mindfulness Activities for Children and Young People

GHLL Lead Teachers have put together a selection of mindfulness activities which can be used with individuals, groups or classes of children and young people. They are suitable, or easily adaptable, to be used with students of any age.

The following mindfulness exercises are designed to be stand-alone activities and can be used at any time during the day in order to calm and focus the children and young people in your care.

Short Meditation

Ask the students to do the following.....

- 1. Stand up, pat Head and rub tummy*
- 2. Close eyes and picture your own front door*
- 3. Whisper to yourself your postcode*



Having explained to the class that mindfulness is not necessarily all about meditation ask them to reflect on the above exercise. In particular, ask them to consider if they were able to think of anything else whilst completing it?

FOF BOC versus Monkey Mind

Monkey Mind

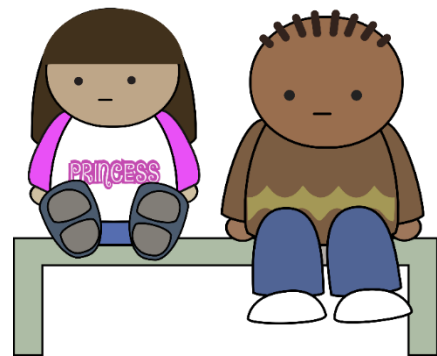
A lesson which focuses on learning to stay calm when the mind gets too busy.

Inform the class that their minds have a wild life of their own. Picture a monkey in the jungle frantically jumping from one branch to another. In the same way, our minds jump from one idea to another. This can lead to feeling very frustrated and even feeling mean about the monkey, what they might notice is that it gets worse and worse and needs calming down using mindfulness techniques.



Feet on Floor - Bum on chair

Ask the class to sit comfortably with their feet on the floor with uncrossed legs and their bottom back in the chair. Imagine a fine thread pulling your spine upright and either close your eyes or direct your gaze to the floor. Simply concentrate on your breathing. Ask the group to take a couple of cleansing deep breaths and then let them fall into their own rhythm.



Settle your Glitter



Demonstrate using a glitter jar to explain how our minds become so busy it is very difficult to concentrate or think straight. If we stop and let the glitter settle then our minds become clear and we can make better decisions, not become so angry or upset and also learn well. If time permits, students can create their own glitter jars using empty bottles, water, and glitter with colours preferably.



Mindful Eating

There are many ways in which individuals can become more mindful. One is mindful eating, some examples are given below. Instead of grabbing a quick bite to eat stop and focus upon what it is..... for example.

- Take a good look at it, what is its appearance like*
- What does it smell like?*
- Does it crackle or make any sound?*
- When putting it in your mouth savour the moment without biting or crunching it*



Mindful
Eating

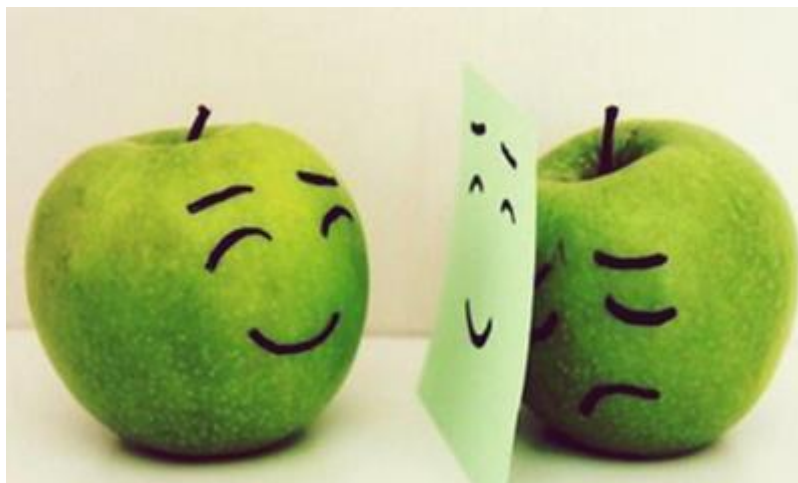
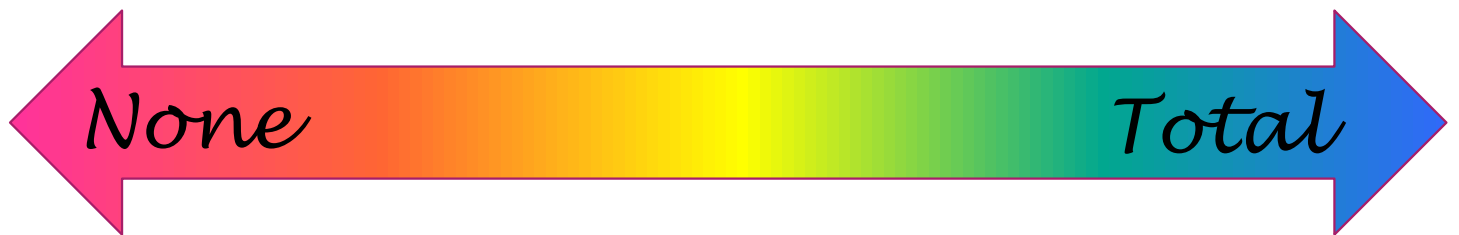


The Contentment Continuum

Ask the class to consider the following:

How much control do I have over my ability to feel happy and for feeling content or satisfied?

When they have completed this ask them to form a line to reflect their view and facilitate discussion



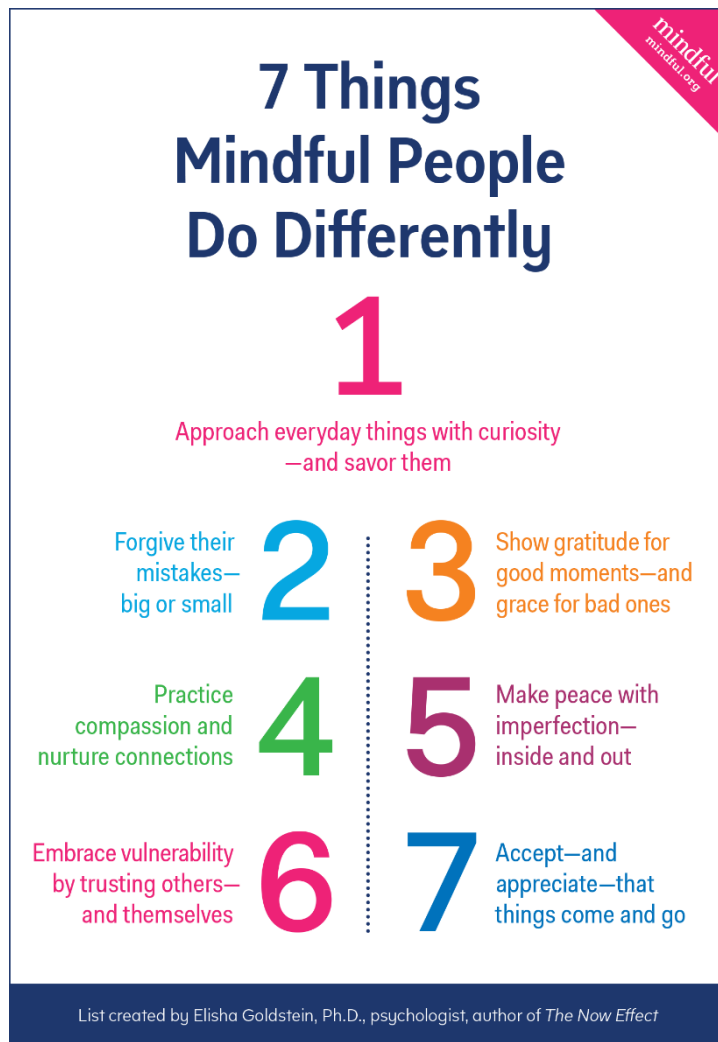
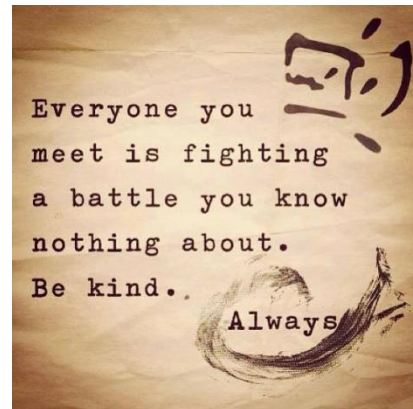
Strength Cards

Issue all the members of the lines with a "strength card"

Ask them to describe to a partner what they see and also how it makes them feel

Seven Pillars of Mindfulness

- Non-judging
- Patience
- Beginner's mind
- Trust
- Non-striving
- Acceptance
- Letting go



With older students discuss the principles above and ask them to give examples of how they may be applied in real life situations. Simplify the statements for younger pupils

Personal Weather Report

Go through the following exercise with pupils on a regular basis:



Sit down comfortably and close or half close your eyes, take some time to think about how you are feeling right now. What is the weather like inside you? Do you feel relaxed and sunny inside or does it feel rainy and overcast? Is there a storm raging, perhaps? What do you notice? Think about these things quietly to yourselves.

Without really thinking about it too much, summon the weather report that best describes your feelings at the moment. Once you know how you are doing right now, just let it be... just as it is...; there is no need to feel or do anything differently. You cannot change the weather outside either, can you? Stay close to this feeling for a while.

Direct your friendly and curious attention to the clouds, the clear sky, or the storm that is brewing...this is how it is right now...; like the weather, you simply cannot change a mood. Later today the weather will be completely different again... but right now this is how things are. And that is absolutely fine. Moods change. They blow over. There is no need to take any action.

Ring the Bell

Ring a bell or strike a chime. Ask the class to listen closely to the vibration of the ringing sound. Ask them to remain silent and raise their hands when they can no longer hear the sound of the bell or chime. Ask them to remain silent for a minute and pay close attention to the other sounds they hear once the ringing has stopped. Afterwards, ask the children to discuss all the different sounds they heard.



Breathing Buddies



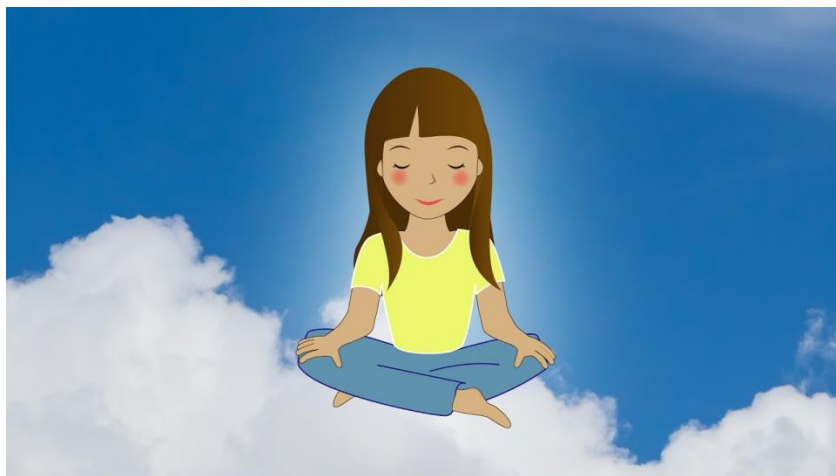
Each pupil has a cuddly toy (or another small object) and they lie down on the floor with the toy on their tummy. Ask them to breathe in silence for one minute and notice how their Breathing Buddy moves up and down, and also any other sensations they notice. Ask them to imagine that the thoughts that come into their mind turn into bubbles and float away.



Squish and Relax Meditation

Ask the pupils to sit or lie down comfortably, with their eyes closed if they are comfortable with this. Tell them they are going to squish and squeeze every muscle in their body as tight as they can.

Ask them to squish their toes and feet, tighten the muscles in their legs all the way up to their hips, suck in their tummies, squeeze their hands into fists and raise their shoulders up to their heads. Ask them to hold themselves in their squished up positions for a few seconds, and then fully release and relax.



Smell and Tell

Give something fragrant out to each pupil, such as a piece of fresh orange peel, a sprig of lavender or a rose. Ask them to close their eyes and breathe in the scent, focusing all their attention only on the smell of that object. Ask them to try to empty their minds of all other thoughts and just concentrate on what they can smell.

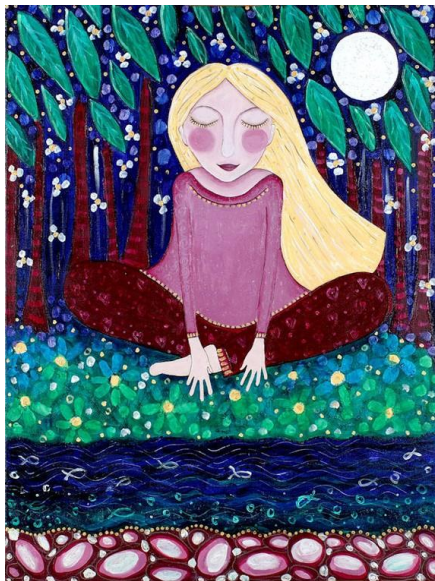


NB: Scent has been found to be a powerful tool for anxiety relief.

The Art of Touch



Give each pupil an object to touch, such as a ball, a feather, a soft toy, a stone etc. Ask them to close their eyes and describe what the object feels like to a partner. Then ask partners to swap places.



NB: This is a simple way to help pupils isolate their senses from one another, and tuning into distinct experiences.

The Heartbeat Exercise



Ask the pupils to jump up and down for one minute. Then ask them to sit back down and place their hands on their hearts. Ask them to close their eyes and feel their heartbeats, their breath, and to see what else they notice about their bodies.



Mindful Posing

One easy way for children and young people to try mindfulness is through simple body poses.

Tell the students that they are going to do fun poses which can help them feel strong, brave and happy.

- 1) The Superman pose: this pose is practised by standing with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out, stretching the body out as long as possible.*
- 2) The Wonder Woman pose: this pose is struck by standing tall with legs wider than hip width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips.*



Spidey Senses

Ask the students to turn on their 'Spidey Senses', the super-focused senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste and touch that Spiderman uses to keep tabs on the world around him. This will encourage them to pause and focus their attention on the present, opening their awareness to the information their senses bring in.

Ask them to concentrate carefully on what they can see, hear, smell, touch, taste. Try not to think about what the names of the things are, just what you can sense.



Mindful Breathing Strategies

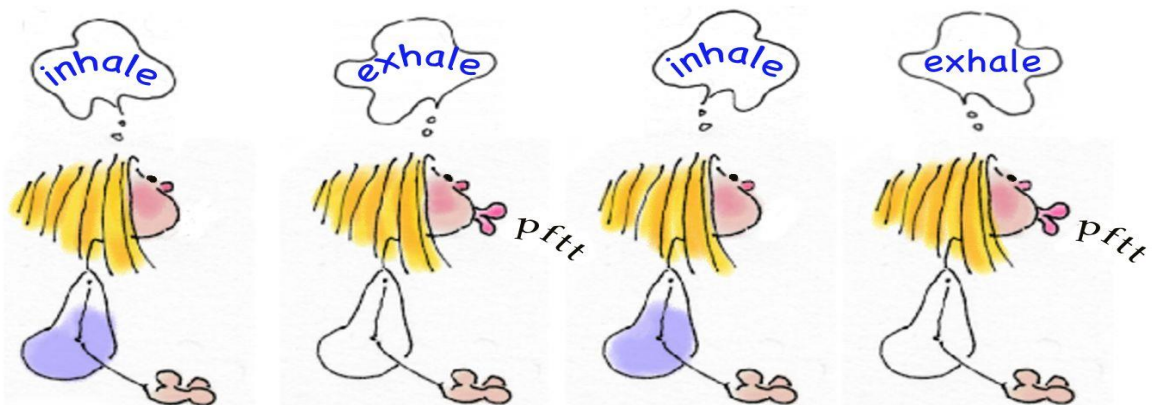
Mindful breathing is an important building block in developing a healthy mindfulness practice. Children and young people often benefit from focusing on their breathing when they are confronted with emotions that are difficult to manage. Three useful techniques are below:

1. Noticing the breath: this involves simply paying attention to what breathing feels like.



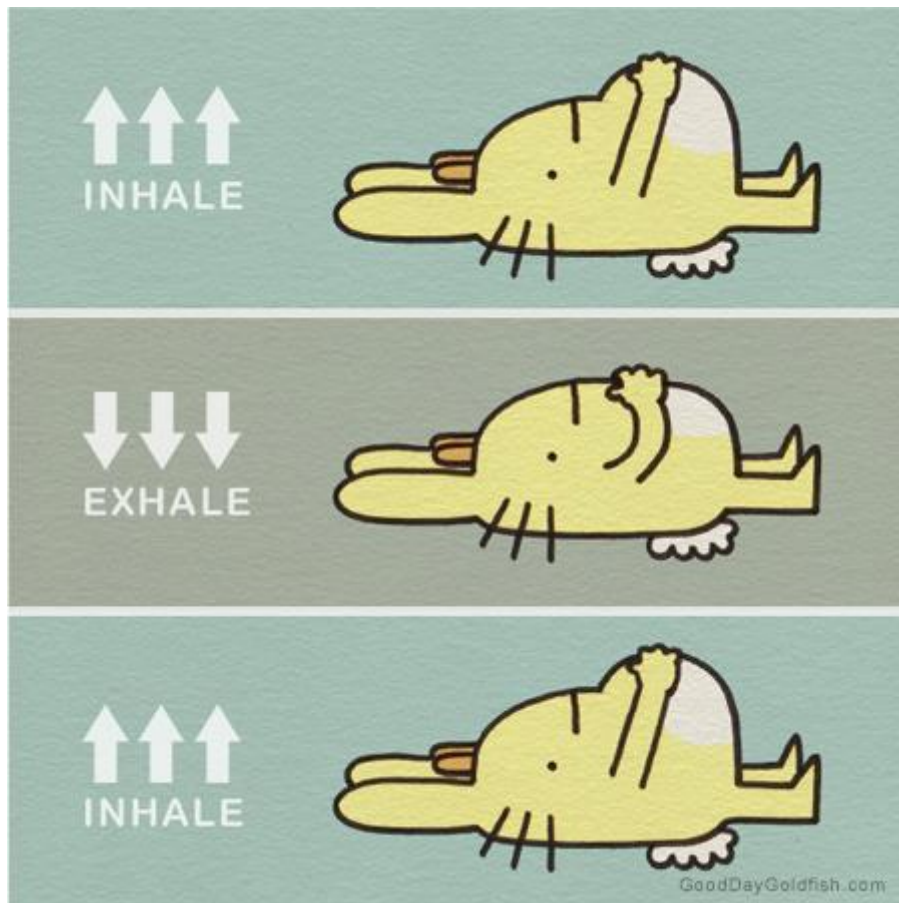
2. Five-finger starfish meditation: hold up one hand in a starfish position (fingers spread wide) while they gently trace up and down each finger with the other hand, focusing on regular breathing at the same time.

3. Counting the breath: ask them to pause and count their breaths.



Tummy Breathing Exercise

Ask the students to lie flat on their back or sit up straight in their chair and put their hands on their stomach. As they breathe in and out, ask them to notice how their hands move up and down. Ask them to focus all their attention on the movement of the tummy and hands; let everything else fade away, and ask them to pay attention to their breathing.



Hand Breathing Game



Stand opposite the students:

- 1. Slowly raise both your arms, elbows slightly bent like conducting an orchestra. Ask them to breathe in as you raise your arms upwards.*
- 2. Slowly lower your arms and ask them to breathe out as your arms lower.*



The students can either be still or raising their arms with you.

Start with at least three slow, calm rounds. Then you can start to vary the speed and height of the arms. You can pause the arms mid-raise; the breath is held in. You can stagger the breath by climbing imaginary stairs with your hands. Vary it in any way you can think of.

Are You Listening to Me?

Listening to a sound without immediately wanting to label it strengthens our ability to listen to one another.



Ask the students about what sounds they can hear right now? Are they high or low pitched, humming, or buzzing sounds? Can you detect some kind of rhythm? Are the sounds behind you or in front of you? Far away or close by? Are they outside you? Can you hear any sounds inside yourself?



Listening to One Another

Everybody is given two minutes to talk about his or her day or to share an important experience, while the others listen without passing judgement.



Taken from *Sitting Still Like a Frog* – Eline Snel

Playdough and Mindfulness

Playdough has been known for its therapeutic properties. The squishing and pounding, pinching and moulding provide a kinaesthetic learning opportunity that can be used to enhance the development of mindfulness.



- 1. Give each student a small ball of the play dough and ask them NOT to play with it, roll it or squish it.*
- 2. Once everyone has their Playdough, ask them to look at it. Ask them to notice the urge to squeeze it. Is the Playdough hot, warm or cold? How would you describe the colour of it? Ask the students to move it from hand to hand. Does the shape change? Notice the smell of the Playdough. Push a finger into the Playdough. Can you see your finger print? What does it look like?*
- 3. Ask the students to continue to squeeze, roll and make the playdough into shapes. Remind them to concentrate only on the Playdough, how it feels in their hands and the smell of dough.*

Breathing Bubbles

Ask the students to take a deep breath and notice how it feels. Now take another, but this time think about how you are feeling in your heart and in your head. As you blow out this breath, blow out any colour that you see. Pretend that as you breathe out you are creating a bubble of colour that has all of your feelings in it. It is a safe place to put your fear and anger, or anything else. Only you know what is inside the bubble, it is your secret. Your bubble can contain what you don't want in your body anymore or it can contain thoughts that you want to send out into the universe.

With each breath, grow your bubble bigger and bigger, until it is so full that you cannot fit anymore in it. Now that your bubble is full, take one more really deep breath, feel the breath all the way down in your tummy. Now breathe it out and blow your bubble far, far away.

Now that your bubble is gone, think of a colour that brings you happiness. Picture a beautiful, fluffy cloud of that colour that comes down and surrounds you like your favourite blanket, keeping you safe and protected.



Finger Painting

Before starting the activity, start with a mindful breathing exercise.

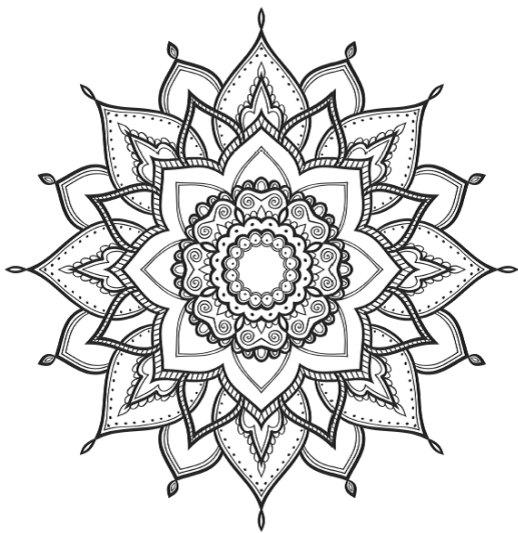
As they play with the finger paints, guide them to be fully present in the moment whenever they get distracted. They can bring attention to their senses - what they see, hear, feel and smell. Ask students to notice how the colours of the finger paints swirl together to make new colours.

End the play session with another mindful breathing exercise.



Mindful Colouring

Mindful Colouring asks us to focus on how we choose and apply colour in a design to bring our awareness to the present moment. We let go of any thoughts about tomorrow or yesterday, or what we are going to do when we finish. There are many mindfulness colouring activities available.



Ask students to focus on the current moment and on colouring in. If they catch themselves thinking about the past or the future, gently bring their awareness back to what we they are doing in the present moment by describing what they are doing. For example, "I am picking up a red pen and will use it on all of the hearts in the picture."

Tell students we are not judging whether the colouring in is good or bad, amazing or terrible and whether we are good at it or not. There is no right or wrong way to colour in; it is a form of self-expression.

Try with scented pens and ask focus on what they can smell as well their colouring.

Balloons

Ask students to take a balloon and notice how it feels in their hand. Focus just on the balloon.

Ask them to slowly start blowing the balloon up. How does it feel and what does it taste like in your mouth? Notice your breathing as you slowly breathe out into the balloon. Watch the balloon getting bigger as you breathe in and out. Use all your senses to notice the balloon; how does it feel, taste, smell, look, what sounds can you hear as it blows up?



Once the balloon is blown up, ask students to gently release the air from the balloon. Notice all the time what you can see, hear, smell, feel.

Recommended Reading

1. *Mindful Movements 10 exercises for Well-being* - Thích Nhất Hạnh
2. *A Mindfulness Guide for the Frazzled* - Ruby Wax
3. *S.U.M.O* - Paul Magee
4. *Sitting still like a frog* - Eline Snel

Ten Keys to Happier Living



Giving
Relating
Exercising
Appreciating
Trying out
Direction
Resilience
Emotion
Acceptance
Meaning