



Mindfulness made easy

<https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/health-and-community/enewsletter/mindfulness-made-easy>

Smiling Mind modern meditation for young people is a free web app-based program designed to make mindfulness meditation readily accessible to people of all ages. Dr Richard Chambers, clinical psychologist and mindfulness consultant, talks about the benefits for the whole community.

How does Smiling Mind work?

"Smiling Mind has been designed and promoted in a way that normalises Mindfulness Meditation and presents it simply as an everyday activity, like checking the weather or updating your Facebook status. The app includes a number of simple, yet effective, age-specific mindfulness meditation practices of varying lengths, adapted for different age groups. It includes both 'plug-and-play' mindfulness meditations and a more structured program for schools. We have even made a sporting version, in conjunction with Cricket Australia, to make the benefits of mindfulness more accessible and engaging to males. Smiling Mind is a great resource for the actual practice of mindfulness meditation - which is where the real benefits come from. It is a great resource for individuals, schools and families wishing to capitalise on the benefits of mindfulness."

How can Smiling Mind benefit primary schools specifically?

"Evidence shows that primary-aged children who practise meditation are more focused and resilient. As little as 5 minutes of meditation first thing in the morning, or after lunch, helps settle them down and improves concentration. Smiling Mind makes using mindfulness in the classroom simple. It includes a number of audio recordings of mindfulness meditations that can be simply played to students. More comprehensive resources are also available via the website. We are currently evaluating Smiling Mind with a randomised controlled trial in 8 partner schools. We are conducting pre/post evaluation of mindfulness, wellbeing and schoolwork engagement and 3 month follow-up to assess whether improvements are sustained over time. Reports from schools indicate that Smiling Mind has been readily and positively received by teaching staff and students and we regularly receive anecdotal reports that it creates positive academic and wellbeing outcomes."

Are mindfulness techniques beneficial in early childhood?

"There is mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of mindfulness for children. However, this is likely to reflect the lack of well designed studies since being fully awake in each moment of life is something that everyone benefits from, and children tend to exhibit this quality quite naturally. Young children can be taught to meditate, starting with small amounts and leveraging activities that they already enjoy such as exploring new things and playing. However even better, is for parents to embody mindfulness with their kids. Here are some examples of ways to do this:

- Give them your full attention when speaking with them
- Give them a mindful hug
- Take them outside, get them to close their eyes, place different objects in their hands and ask them to describe and name the object using only touch
- Move slowly and ask them to mirror your movements, then change roles."

How receptive are families to learning and following-through with mindfulness techniques?

"Families are generally quite receptive to mindfulness so long as it is explained to them properly and they have the necessary resources to implement it. It is vital to explain mindfulness clearly right at the outset. At Smiling Mind, we always emphasise that everyone has experiences of mindfulness at times - moments where we are fully awake and present, for instance while watching a sunset or playing sport. We then describe mindfulness meditation as a series of effective methods for experiencing this awareness during more mundane moments, such as studying or waiting for a train. We also explore the costs of 'unmindfulness' (eg operating on autopilot, judging and criticising everything). It is also useful to describe (in simple terms) the neuroscience of mindfulness, as this helps people make sense of their experiences and it can be very motivating to know that mindfulness practice actually changes the brain in ways that are extremely beneficial."

What is something about mindfulness that might surprise other health professionals?

"Many health professionals think that mindfulness is about focusing on the present moment. This is true, but barely scratches the surface. Actually, mindfulness is about being fully engaged and awake in each moment of life. It is ultimately about becoming more aware of your experiences - whether this be thought processes, tension in the body or emotions. When we are in touch with this awareness, we are able to allow whatever is experienced just to happen, without needing to control it and without becoming overwhelmed by it. This is the source of true resilience. Also, as we learn to listen more deeply to ourselves a few things start to happen. We start truly hearing others, which naturally deepens our empathy and compassion. And we also get in touch with our intuition. There is not much research on this last point yet, but I suspect there will be in the near future."

What other mindfulness resources can you recommend to health and community professionals working with children?

"Other than Smiling Mind, for younger kids there are a number of awesome books such as Mindful Monkey, Happy Panda. For older kids Janet Eddy-Leal's Meditation Capsules is really useful. But my main recommendation would be for them to go and learn mindfulness themselves in a structured program and develop a daily personal practice. There is absolutely no substitute for a personal meditation practice when using mindfulness with others."

For more information, go to the [Smiling Mind website](#)

Get the [Smiling Mind app on iTunes](#)

