

Mindfulness Exercises for Children

Build a Stress Ball



If you're feeling brave, and are prepared to clean up a mess, provide the children with balloons, flour, and funnels to build their own stress balls (you may want to double-layer the balloons). Some other filling options include rice, small beads, or the leftover dots from punched paper. Once the kids have built their own stress balls, try using them with *The Feeling Exercise*.

The Body Squeezing Exercise



Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and ask them to squeeze and relax each of the muscles in their body one-by-one. They should hold each squeeze for about five seconds. After releasing the squeeze, ask the kids to pay attention to how it feels when they relax. Children understand this exercise better if you help them visualize how they can squeeze a particular muscle using imagery, such as the following:

1. Curl your toes tight like you are picking up a pencil with your feet.
2. Tense your legs by pretending like you are standing on your tippy-toes, trying to look over a fence.
3. Suck in your stomach as if you are trying to slide through a narrow opening.
4. Make fists with your hands and pretend like you are trying to squeeze all of the juice out of an orange.
5. Pretend like a bug landed on your nose, and you're trying to get it off without using your hands. Try to scrunch your face and move your jaw to make it fly away!

The Five Senses Exercise



Take the children outside if the weather is nice, and have them lie silently in the grass. Begin to call out each of the five senses in turn (sight, smell, sound, taste, touch), and ask the children to notice everything they can with that particular sense, until you call out the next one. This exercise can also work well on walks, and in a number of other situations.

Mindfulness Exercises for Children

The Feeling Exercise



Collect a number of interesting objects such as feathers, putty, stones, or anything else that might be interesting to hold. Give each child an object, and ask them to spend a minute just noticing what it feels like in their hand. They can feel the texture, if their object is hard or soft, and the shape. Afterwards, ask the children to describe what they felt. With bigger groups, pair children off to take turns completing the exercise together.

The Seeing Game



Ask the children to spend one minute silently looking around the room. Their goal is to find things in the room that they've never noticed. Maybe there are some big things like a poster or a picture, or just little details like cracks in the ceiling or an interesting pattern on the door. After the minute is up ask the kids to share the most interesting new things they noticed.

Ocean Breathing



Have the children sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Ask everyone to slowly breathe in through their nose, and then out through their pursed lips (as if they are blowing through a straw). Point out that the slow and steady breathing sounds like ocean waves, gently crashing on shore. Let the children continue breathing and making the ocean sound for one to two minutes.

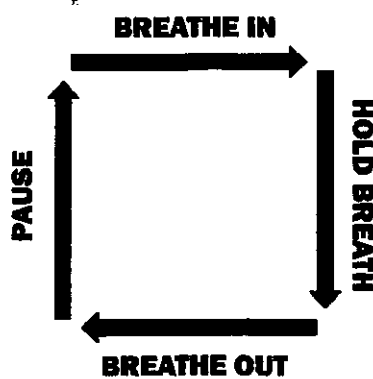
The Power of Listening



Ring a bell, a wind chime, or anything else that creates a long trailing sound. Ask each child to listen, and silently raise their hand when they can no longer hear the sound. After the ringing ends, ask the children to continue listening to any other sounds they can hear for the next minute. When the minute ends, go around the room asking everyone to tell you what sounds they heard.

Family Mindfulness Schedule

Square Breathing. Teach your child this breathing technique to help them be in the present moment at any time. Draw a square on paper, or in the air with your finger. Perform one step of the technique while drawing each line of the square. Time each step to last about four seconds.



Free Time

Mindfulness Box. With your child, decorate a box large enough to hold several small objects. Fill the box with interesting items found around your home and yard (e.g. feathers, rocks, flowers). Encourage your child to explore their surroundings with more than just sight. For example, notice the texture, weight, and smell of each item.

Keep adding to your mindfulness box, and review it from time to time for further practice. Try to notice something new about each of the objects inside.

Bedtime

Progressive Muscle Relaxation. This activity will help your child become aware of the sensations throughout their body, and it's a great way to begin relaxing the body for sleep. Read the following script slowly, allowing time for practice.

Close your eyes, and pretend that you're holding two juicy oranges—one in each hand. Start to squeeze the oranges by making fists. Squeeze hard to get all the juice out. Notice what your fists feel like when you squeeze hard. Now let go of the oranges, and let your hands rest. Notice how good it feels to relax your hands.

Next, pretend like you're sitting on the beach. Squeeze your toes as if you are trying to pick up sand between them. Hold onto the sand by squeezing *even tighter*. Now, let go of the sand, and relax your feet. Notice how your feet feel different when you let them rest.

Finally, pretend like a fly landed on your nose. You want to get it off, without touching it with your hands. Scrunch up your face, wiggle your nose, just go crazy! Keep moving your face so the bug will fly away. Now, stop, and let your whole face relax. Pay attention to how it feels.

Family Mindfulness Schedule

Mindfulness, simply put, is being focused on the present moment. This skill improves emotional awareness and reduces stress. A parent can help their child achieve mindfulness by modeling mindfulness themselves, or by teaching their child to focus on the present moment.

Below you will find mindfulness techniques you can practice with your child during a busy daily routine. Focus on doing one technique very well each day, rather than trying to do many.

Waking Up

Five Senses. With your child, take a few moments to explore the morning through your senses. Take turns naming things you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. Try to notice things you would normally tune out, like the distant buzz of a neighbor's lawnmower, or the softness of a pillow.

Body Scan. Starting with your toes and working your way up to the top of your head, notice the sensations in each part of your body. For example, notice the feeling of clothing resting on your legs, tension in your muscles, or cool air on your face.

Meals

Mindful Check-In. Start a conversation about the here-and-now by asking your child to share one thing they are feeling physically, one thing they are thinking about, and one thing they are feeling emotionally. If your child has difficulty putting their emotions into words, try giving them options to choose from.

Mindful Eating. Rather than rushing through a meal, eat slowly and mindfully. Notice how the food looks, and how it smells. What does it taste like? What does the food feel like on your tongue? Take turns sharing different things you notice about the food, no matter how minor the observations might seem.

Travel

I Spy. In this game, your child will "spy" a color they see and ask you to guess what the object is. Playing this game will allow your child to take in their surroundings and notice things they might otherwise miss.

The Alphabet Game. While driving, ask your child to look for words in their environment beginning with each letter of the alphabet, in order. For example, a billboard with the word "Advertise" would start the game.

School

Mindfulness Bracelet. With your child, spend an afternoon making bracelets that are fun, and comfortable to wear. Every time you notice the bracelet on your wrist, take a moment to note one thing you see, hear, smell, and feel. Practice at home to get your child in the habit of using this skill even when they are not with you.

Worry Coping Cards

Think About What Is

When you worry, you probably think of bad things that *could* happen. Instead, try thinking of what *actually* happens most of the time. For example, instead of thinking, "I'm worried I will miss my school bus", try thinking "I've never missed my bus before."

Listen to Music

Enjoying your favorite music can take your mind off what's worrying you. Focus your attention on the instruments, lyrics, and voices in the song.

Talk About It

Talking about your feelings is one of the most powerful ways to control them. Tell a trusted person, like a parent, friend, teacher, or counselor what you're worried about. Try using this sentence to get started:

"I feel worried when ____."

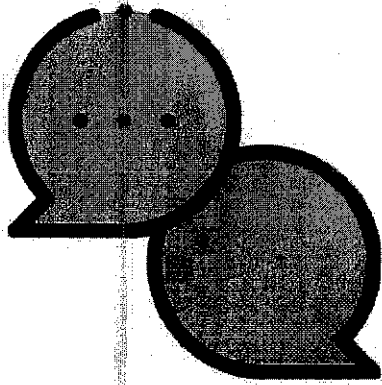
Get Moving

Get your energy out by being active. Play a sport, ride your bike, dance, swim, go for a walk, or run around until you're tired.

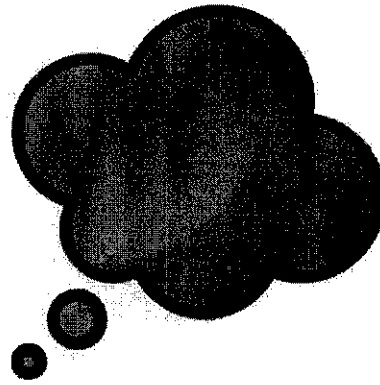
Practice a Hobby

Do any hobby that you think might distract you from your worry. Play an instrument, paint, practice a new skill, play a game, or do anything else that you enjoy.

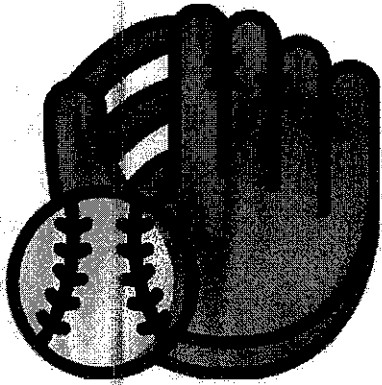
Worry Coping Cards



Talk About It



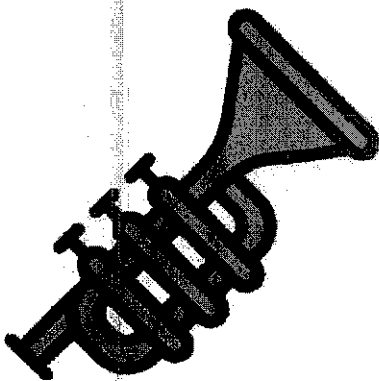
Think About What Is



Get Moving



Listen to Music



Practice a Hobby



Worry Coping Cards

Stop and Listen

Spend a few minutes just listening to the sounds around you. What sounds do you hear? Are they loud or soft? Pay special attention to interesting sounds you've never noticed before.

Take Deep Breaths

Breathe in slowly through your nose and hold the air in your lungs. When you are ready to release the air, put your lips together and pretend like you are blowing through a straw. Do this 20 times.

Favorite Place

Think of a place where you feel calm, comfortable, and happy. It may be a beach, a forest, your bedroom, or somewhere else. Imagine what this place looks and sounds like and imagine how good you feel when you're there.

Draw Your Worry

Draw a picture about your worry. Here are some ideas:

- What you look like when you're worried and when you're calm.
- What you can do to stop worrying.
- Something you are worrying about.

Journal

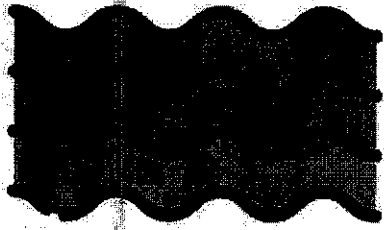
Write about your worries. Use these questions to get started:

- What are you worried about?
- What do you do when you're worried?
- What happened the last time you worried about something similar?

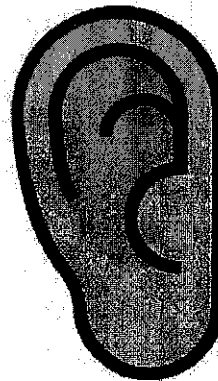
Write a Happy Ending

Usually when you worry, you imagine things ending badly. Try writing about your worry, but make the ending positive. Write about how you solve a problem, relax, start feeling better, or handle your worry.

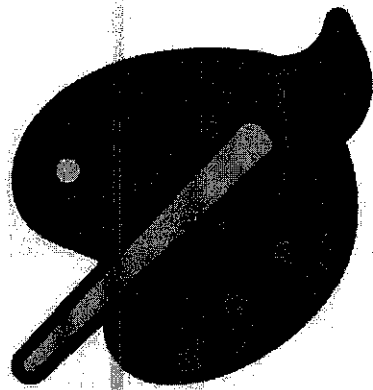
Worry Coping Cards



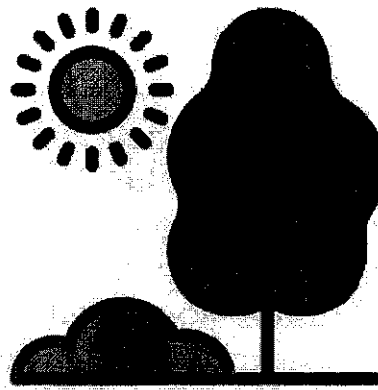
Take Deep Breaths



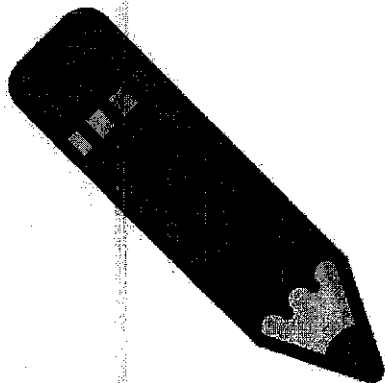
Stop and Listen



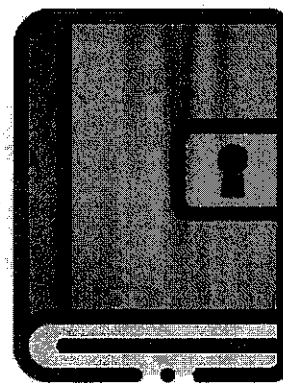
Draw Your Worry



Favorite Place



Write a Happy Ending



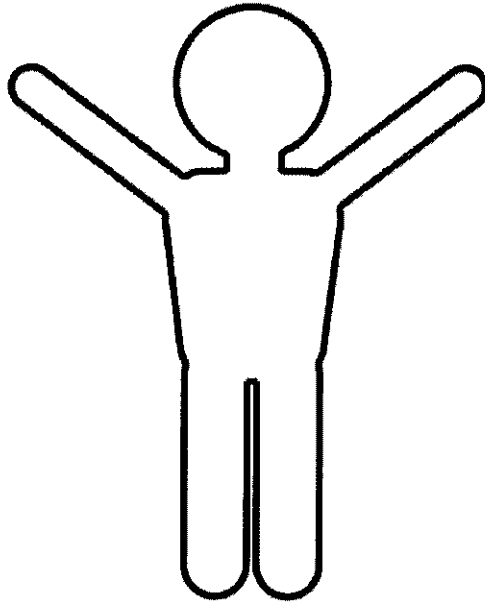
Journal

My Fears

What are some things
that make you feel
nervous or scared?

What do you think about when you are nervous or scared? _____

How does your body feel when you are nervous or scared? Color the areas
where you can sense these feelings.



What's something you can do to feel better next time you are afraid?
