

Haringey Educational Psychology Service

Tips for calming anxiety using mindfulness

With schools closed and many parents working from home it can feel like a never-ending spiral. Responsibilities seem endless, situations seem dire and time for yourself can seem a distant memory.



Stop. Take a slow deep breath.

These are trying times for all of us but incorporating mindfulness practices into your daily routine can help calm anxiety and build healthy coping strategies.

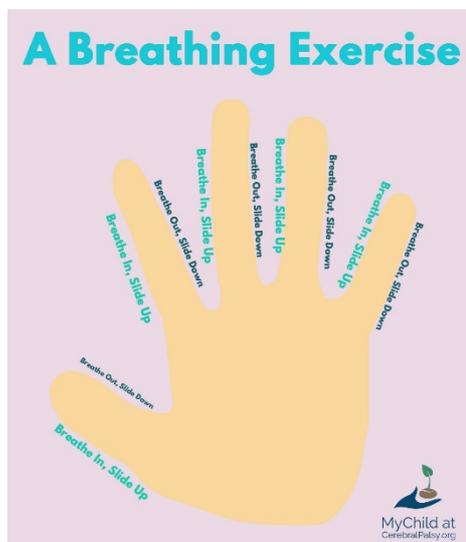
Being mindful is about taking time to focus on the present, being intentional and thoughtful about where you are and how you are feeling. It does not have to be complicated. Meditation is just one part of mindfulness.

Here are some tips from clinicians on making meditation work for you and your family:

- Meditation is simply about practising noticing our body sensations and/or thoughts and then bringing our mind back to our breath or whatever we have chosen to focus on. This takes time and practise (daily) as our thoughts can be a bit like a puppy (constantly wondering off and need to be gently pulled back!) If doing with your child, remind them that paying attention can be really hard.
- When thoughts or bodily sensations occur, rather than pushing them away, greet them every time and let them drift off. If practising with your child, help them to understand what happens if you try to push thoughts away (100 more come back) – ask them to NOT think about an elephant for 30 seconds. What happens? You can't stop thinking about one!
- Start with a 1-5 minute meditation daily and try and incorporate this into a routine
- Close your eyes and ask yourself (or your child) how do I feel, how does my body feel? (Label it simply to yourself)
- Focus on your breathing and observe thoughts when they come (and let them drift off, like balloons or buses or clouds) – be curious, it's about NOTICING, not about getting it right or wrong or trying to change thoughts in any way
- Every time you get a thought, gently bring your mind back to your breath, don't criticise yourself if this is hard, just notice how your mind is e.g. very busy
- Finish by getting a whole sense of things around you, you can try 'what can I hear, feel and smell'

Here are some other things to try

- **Squeeze Muscles:** Starting at your toes, pick one muscle and squeeze it tight. Count to five. Release, and notice how your body changes. Repeat exercise moving up your body.
- **Belly Breathing:** Put one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Slowly breathe in from your stomach (expand like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (deflate).
- **Mindful Meal:** Pay attention to the smell, taste and look of your food. No multitasking.



- **Finger breathing** (see picture) starting from the thumb – make sure you follow at the pace of your breathing
- **Blowing Bubbles:** Notice their shapes, textures and colours.
- **Colouring:** Colour something. Focus on the colours, shape and designs.
- **Listening to Music:** Focus on the whole song or listen specifically to the voice or an instrument within the music.

(adapted from the Child Mind Institute)