

Mindful Living: Your EAP Guide to Wellness

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ISSUE 3

This edition of the Lighthouse EAP newsletter focuses on **Mindfulness**.

Mindfulness is awareness of one's own thoughts, feelings, and senses in the present moment. There are two main components of mindfulness: awareness and acceptance. Awareness helps us notice any thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as they happen. The goal of awareness is not to stop thinking or to clear the mind, but to just notice your thoughts and feelings, rather than allowing them to consume you.

Acceptance is observing those same thoughts, feelings, and sensations in an open, nonjudgmental, and compassionate way. Practice is key in establishing mindfulness as a part of a routine. We have included ways for you to get started on your mindfulness journey.



Getting Started at Home

Consider practicing mindfulness for a few minutes each day. If you are in need of a more structured routine, try practicing mindfulness when you first wake up, while eating or doing the dishes, on break while at school or at work, and/or just before bed. Remember that mindfulness is not just for adults, but for children and young adults too! Mindfulness can be practiced individually or collectively with family members or friends. Below are a few mindfulness exercises for both children and adults to try.

MINDFULNESS JOURNALING:

When experiencing overwhelming feelings of stress, anxiety, and/or depression, journaling can be a helpful and accessible way to relieve emotions. Journaling can be described as a process of self-reflection that includes putting thoughts, feelings, and insights onto paper. Numerous studies have shown the benefits of journaling on mental



health including reduction of symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The benefits of journaling are not just limited to mental health, it can also provide benefits to physical health. Researchers out of New Zealand found the following impact of journaling, "76% of adults who spent 20 minutes writing about their thoughts and feelings for three consecutive days two weeks before a medically necessary biopsy were fully healed 11 days later. Meanwhile, 58% of the control group had not recovered." (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/>)

While addressing emotions can be difficult, repressed or avoided emotions have been found to activate the nervous system, causing our bodies to go into fight or flight. In order to keep your nervous system regulated make time on a regular basis to acknowledge and feel your emotions, whether it be through journaling or another healing outlet. Writing down your thoughts can also help reduce rumination of distressing thoughts.

Tips for beginning to journal:

- There is no right or wrong way to journal. It does not have to be a certain length, look aesthetic, or even be in full sentences. If you'd prefer, try journaling through drawing or coloring.
- You can keep the journal private for yourself or share with others, whether online or in person.
- Set aside time to journal. Like any habit, starting can be the hardest part. By scheduling time for journaling in your calendar, it can be easier to make that commitment to yourself.
- If starting feels like a big commitment or overwhelming, start small! Give yourself the goal to journal for three minutes at a time and allow yourself to work up to longer time spans.
- Journal daily or whenever works best for you. For some, daily journaling may be a helpful release but for others it may be more helpful to engage in journaling when you notice an emotional build up.
- Some may like to keep their thoughts in a specified notebook, for others it may be more beneficial to use scraps of paper or your notes app in your phone. If you dislike writing things down, you could try recording yourself talking.
- If you are struggling to connect with your emotions while journaling try bilateral journaling. Bilateral stimulation is the process of crossing the body in a rhythmic pattern and can allow easier access to the emotional side of the brain. You can practice this by asking yourself a question and writing it down with your dominant hand, then respond to the question using your non-dominant hand. By not being able to quickly write down your thoughts and utilize muscle memory you may be able to better process your emotions.
- If you don't know what you want to write about try using prompts; you could look up different journal prompts online or buy a journal that already has prompts in it.

FIVE SENSES GROUNDING ACTIVITY:

A grounding activity such as this one can be helpful when your mind starts to ruminate and your thoughts and/or feelings seem overwhelming. Begin by closing your eyes and taking 1-3 deep breaths. After breathing deeply, open your eyes and ask yourself the following questions:

What are 5 things I can see?

What are 4 things I can feel?

What are 3 things I can hear?

What are 2 things I can smell?

What is 1 thing I can taste?

5 SENSES



End the activity by closing your eyes and taking 1-3 more deep breaths. This can be a quick way to re-focus and re-engage with the present moment.

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION:

(Adapted from *Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script*, therapistaid.com)

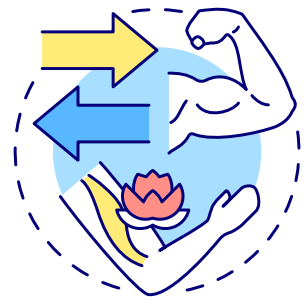
This activity reduces stress and tension by having you slowly tense and relax each muscle. For best results, practice frequently and in doing so, you will become more aware of when you are experiencing tension and how to help yourself relax.

To begin, sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take 1-3 deep breaths. Begin tensing your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold the tension for 5 seconds. Then, release. Next, tense the muscles in your calves and hold for 5 seconds, then release. Follow this same pattern by tensing the muscles in your upper legs and pelvis, each time holding 5 seconds before releasing. Move onto other muscles including your chest, stomach, muscles in your back, and your shoulders. Now tense your entire arms, making a fist and squeezing, feeling the tension all the way up your arms. Tense your face and neck by distorting the muscles around your eyes and mouth, hold for 5 seconds, and release. Lastly, tense all of the body parts mentioned above at the same time for a final 5 seconds before one big release. Allow your body to go limp. Take a moment to stretch and open your eyes, if you closed them, when you are finished.

You can also find many guided relaxation videos on line that can walk you through this process.

An example is *Letting Go Of Stress* by Emmett Miller, M.D.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Xq70vHly2I>



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

LETTING GO BREATHING EXERCISE:



Deep Breathing

Slowly take a long breath and fill your lungs with air. Hold your breath until it starts to become a little uncomfortable. Notice the sensations growing stronger and more unpleasant as your body naturally wants to exhale. When you are ready, slowly and gently release your breath. Notice the sensations of "letting go." You might imagine yourself letting go of something broad like stress or something specific such as disagreement or annoyance. You might want to repeat this exercise 3 times, while noticing your shoulders drop and your body relax with each release. You could also adapt this exercise for children, and have them imagine that they are blowing out a certain number of birthday candles on a cake, while they exhale.

Benefits of Mindfulness for Kids

(<https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids/>)

Studies show that the benefits of mindfulness for kids may include:

- 1. Increased focus**, attention, self-control, classroom participation, compassion.
- 2. Improved academic performance**, ability to resolve conflict, overall well-being.
- 3. Decreased levels of stress**, depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior.

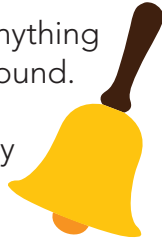


MINDFULNESS EXERCISES FOR CHILDREN:

1. Have you or your child(ren) gather a few interesting objects (feathers, rocks, slime/molding clay) or anything else that might be interesting to hold. Give each child an object and ask them to take approximately one minute to notice what it feels like in their hand. They can pay attention to the texture, shape, weight, etc. After the minute has passed, ask the child to describe what they felt. (*Mindfulness Exercises for Children, therapistaid.com*)



2. Ring a bell, a wind chime, or anything else that creates a long trailing sound. Ask your child to listen, and then silently raise their hand when they can no longer hear the sound. After the ringing stops, ask them to continue listening for any other sounds they can hear for the next minute.



When the minute ends, discuss with your child what sounds they heard. (*Mindfulness Exercises for Children, therapistaid.com*)

3. Even reading is an excellent form of mindfulness. Talk to your child(ren) about something that interests them and then take them to the library to pick out a book related to this topic. Spend 20 minutes a day reading the book. This process lends itself to present focus, awareness, and engagement.



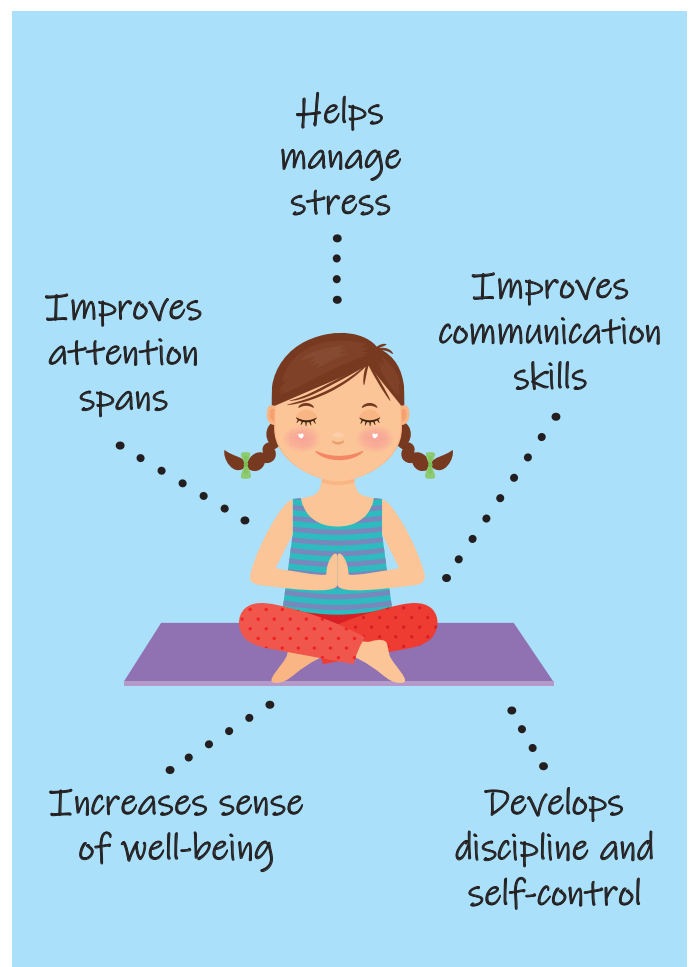
For other mindfulness tips and activities for children visit:

<https://www.mindful.org/mindfulness-for-kids/>
<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-for-children-kids-activities/#tips-teaching-mindfulness>

CALM DOWN YOGA FOR KIDS

	I am strong.	
	Use your strength to catch tricky waves.	
	I am kind.	
	Stretch high and spread kindness all around.	
	I am brave.	
	Be brave and fearless as you fly down the ski run.	
	I am friendly.	
	Stretch like a dog wagging its tail.	
	I am wise.	
	Be a wise owl perched on a tree branch.	

Childhood 101 & Kids Yoga Stories
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Helps manage stress

Improves attention spans

Improves communication skills

Increases sense of well-being

Develops discipline and self-control

7 Tips for Mindful Eating

Controlling how you eat can be as important to your health as what you eat. Here are seven tips for eating mindfully, which has been shown to cause weight loss, reduce binge eating and improve a general sense of well-being.

1 Prepare to eat:
Emotions are tied to eating, so try to recognize them and how they affect your food choices.

2 Breathe and relax:
Sit comfortably, take a few deep breaths and take a moment to be thankful for the food you're about to eat. This prepares the body for the rest-and-digest phase.

3 Notice what is on your plate:
Not being aware of what you eat can lead to overeating and weight gain. Notice the colors, textures and amount of food on your plate. Pay attention to the food's smell, taste and feel as you eat.

4 Chew thoroughly:
Chew slowly, chewing each bite of food approximately 20 times. Enjoy the bursts of flavor in your mouth. Think about how the food makes you feel.

5 Eat slowly:
Enjoy what you eat and improve digestion by not rushing through your meal. Digestion begins with chewing, and chewing and swallowing are the only parts of the digestion process you can control.

6 Stop when you are full:
It takes the brain about 20 minutes to recognize that you've had enough—another good reason to not rush through your meal.

7 Make eating a separate activity:
Eating while working, reading or watching TV can cause you to overeat and make poor food choices. Treat eating as a part of your day when you can nourish not just your body but your mind and spirit. Consider it another form of meditation.

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Learn more at johnshopkinnsolutions.com/balance



988

**SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE**

There is hope

Talk with us. If you or someone you know needs support now, call or text **988** or chat **988lifeline.org**

PEP22-08-03-004

People experiencing a mental health crisis have a new way to reach out for help in the U.S., by calling or texting the numbers 9-8-8. The new three-digit number is designed to be easily memorable and a quick way to connect people who are suicidal or in any other mental health crisis to a trained mental health professional.

Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact **419-475-5338 to schedule an appointment.**

Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.

