



## **Mindfulness-Based Art Activities and Resources for Children and Parents**

*Doing mindfulness together with your child can reduce stress<sup>i</sup>, create stronger bonds in relationships<sup>ii</sup> and builds a stronger foundation upon which social skills are built.*

### **What is Mindfulness-Based Art Therapy (MBAT)?**

Mindfulness is a frame of mind, being keenly aware of the present and acknowledging and accepting our actions and thoughts with a non-judgmental attitude.<sup>iii</sup> Mindfulness-based art therapy blends meditation with artistic expression and pays close attention to the process of creating rather than the finished project.<sup>iv</sup>

### **What are the Benefits to doing MBAT?**

It can help children

- improve their abilities to pay attention and focus
- regulate emotions<sup>v</sup>, and improve decision making
- improve mood, self-confidence, and encourage positive thinking<sup>vi</sup>
- manage symptoms of anxiety, depression,<sup>vii</sup> and chronic pain<sup>viii</sup>
- explore creativity with courage<sup>ix</sup>

### **How do I get started?**

1. *Set the Stage and Breath:* MBAT can be practiced anywhere, anytime, and with few materials. Breathing calms the body.
2. *Get to know your children's triggers:* There are periods in the day that are better than others to do MBAT with your child.
3. *Be consistent with what you do:* have a predictable schedule of what you do with your child and in what order, creating safety in predictability.

## **What are some Mindfulness and MBAT activities I can do at home?**

Doing something quietly together can help build your mindfulness practice with your children.

### **1. Create a mindfulness-based art and play box**

Having a special set of tools and materials at your fingertips can make it easier to do MBAT when your child needs it the most. It does not have to be elaborate or expensive and most items can be found around the house, at the dollar store or a thrift store. Having a tool box such as this can help transition your child from co-regulation (with you), to self-regulation (on their own) as they grow more independent in their skills and confidence. Some ideas are:

- personalized encouraging letter from parent to child
- tactile objects such as a comfort toy/stuffed animal
- playdough or kinetic sand and plastic placemat
- pens, pencils, coloured markers and crayons and paper
- simple water colour palette and brushes
- access to music
- fidget toys (ones that you can pull and push, or click)
- simple sticks, dominos, beads, or beans that can be used to arrange in designs and patterns (mandalas, spelling out words)
- Breathing Buddy (create it together)
- Therapy Pillow (create it together)

### **2. Begin with a Breathing Meditation, Heart Meditation, or Body Scan Exercise**

These exercises calm both the body and the mind and brings awareness to the rest of the body. Read this in a calming voice, pausing occasionally. One deep breath from your inhale to your exhale should be about 6-7 seconds long.

#### Breathing Meditation: (to learn how to do 5 full breaths)

*Read aloud: We begin. Get into a comfortable position on a chair or the ground. Keep your eyes open and focus on a spot just in front of you or shut your eyes (without falling asleep!). Start by breathing in and out, noticing the rise and fall of your breath, your body (shoulders, stomach, nostrils). Notice your breath, is it slow or fast, are you feeling relaxed or tense? Notice the sensations all around you (smells, sounds, presence). Acknowledge them and continue to breath. Take deep breaths through your nose as slow and controlled as possible, and exhale through your mouth as slow and controlled as possible. Try to make this process of breathing in and out for a total of 7 seconds or more. If you feel light headed, breathing through your nose may help, and at any time, you can stop the exercise. If your mind wanders or is distracted, bring*

*your attention back to breathing, slowly tuning out all other distractions. Continue to breathe deeply and slowly and gently allow yourself take note of the things around you and pay attention to yourself and your surroundings with an increased awareness of: sounds, smells, body posture. Expand your awareness from the breath and the space around you, and gently open your eyes or refocus your gaze, and bringing the exercise to a close.*

### Art Activity: Breathing Buddies or Breathing Beads

Younger Kids: To help count 5 full breaths, try making a Breathing Buddies: Simply take one sock, stuff it with cotton fluff and tie off the end. Tie off 5 equal sections of the sock by twisting them with pipe cleaners or tie with yarn, and draw a face on one end with sharpie. Use in your lap during breathing meditation to count off 5 full breaths. Ask your child to observe how the Breathing Buddy moves up and down, to breath in good thoughts and breath out bad thoughts.

Older kids and parents: to help count your breaths, make breathing beads: take a piece of rope or ribbon and add 7 beads, tying off each end or tying it together to form a loop. Run your fingers through each bead as you count a full 7 seconds of each breath.

### Heart Meditation: (to learn how to focus on positive affirmations)

*Read aloud: We begin. Sitting comfortably, quietly take a few deep breaths. Place your hand on your heart and close your eyes. Take 5 deep breaths and focus on how your heart is feeling right now. Sad, happy, scared, silly? Now place your hand on your heart and think of your heart being filled with gratefulness (or something we are thankful for). Pause, and now, place your hand on your heart and think of it being filled with joy, then, love, empathy. Notice how your body feels. Notice how your heart now feels. Does it feel the same or different from when we started? As we repeat these positive phrases, you send both yourself and others messages of wellness and that can help how you interacted with others. Prepare to listen to your heart and be with it in the moment, and breathe as you finish.*

### Art Activity: Heart-shaped Playdough and Colouring

Younger kids: Make a heart out of playdough rolled and shaped like a heart. Shape and reshape the heart each time you change the “feeling.” Using repetitive words and tactile materials helps to isolate, and be more fully aware of the particular feeling.

Older Kids and Parents: After each repetitive feeling, choose a colour that best represents the feeling based on what comes to your mind. For example, yellow for joy, pink for compassion. Associating colours with feelings can show us the impact colour has on our mood and feelings.

### Body Scans (to learn to be aware of how our body is feeling)

Read aloud: *We begin. In this guided imagery, we sit in a comfortable position with eyes closed or fixed on a spot just in front of you. Take one deep breath, then two and three. We will focus our attention on each part of our bodies, starting at one end and ending at the other. Before we begin, sitting comfortably, check in with how your body is feeling; is it tense, relaxed, in pain, restless, heavy, light? Acknowledge its overall feeling and now begin to check in with different parts of our body. We start with our toes, wiggle them and scrunching them up and releasing them to a restful state. Then our feet, our legs, our knees, our hips, our tummies, our fingers, hands and arms, our shoulders, head, ears, nose and mouth, wiggle them and rest. Now, to finish, check in with your overall body again. How has it changed? More relaxed, more attuned to pain, soreness, or lightness of your body. Acknowledge its feeling and then move on to do 5 long breathes. In the last breath, focus on laying your whole body to rest.*

### Art Activity: (Outline of body for awareness and “emoji’s”)

All Ages: draw a small or life-sized outline of our body (with a partner), and choose a colour that matches different types of feelings. Begin by colouring all the areas of the body where you feel tense (angry-red, blue-tired, purple-pain). This helps us understand the connection between mind and body, and how our feeling and emotions affect different parts of our bodies. Doing this activity in a larger group also helps us to learn that everyone has feelings and but are felt in different parts of our bodies.

Alternatively, fill a page with circles and draw “emoji,” or images of faces that show a different expression. You will learn about how your child understands and interprets certain emotions through facial expressions.

### **3. Show and Touch (being mindful of details)**

Choose a single object. Place the object directly in front of you and close your eyes. After 4 full breaths, open your eyes and observe the object’s texture, size, shape, pattern, scale. Now, describe the object to your partner, taking turns. This is a simple way to teach the practice of isolating and highlighting their senses from one another. The brain is working to describe the object with accuracy rather than what the object is used for.

### **4. Exploring Multiple Art Mediums (experimentation)**

Set out a plain piece of paper next to 2 or 3 different types of art supplies (chalk pastels, pencils, and markers), start with a simple breathing meditation and rotate your use of each material every few minutes. Observe the shapes, colours, textures of each kind of medium and how you feel about using them. The main goal here is to allow for experimentation and focus on what each medium offers. Focusing on the medium rather than what you are drawing encourages a free flowing creative process.

### ***5. Explore tactile and Malleable Art Materials: (control and manipulation)***

Using only your hands, set out playdough, rice in a bowl, kinetic sand, or clay. Begin by observing it by sight, then smell, then touch. Close your eyes and feel how it expands and contracts in your hand. Shape it then pull it apart. Roll it and squish it. Draw in sand by filling a flat container with fine sand. Squish and squash any feelings of frustrations, have fun, and relax. The malleable nature of the materials allows for a sense of control, manipulation, and movement rather than what you are making.

### ***6. Experience Music: (how music affects feelings)***

Listen to a favourite type of music or artist. Sit in it for 1 minute, breathing full breaths. Take note on how the song make you feel (tense, energized relaxed, joyful, peaceful). While breathing, notice the rhythm of your breath and how it rises and falls with the music. Allow any memories that you get from listening to that particular music flow in and become aware of emotions they bring. Still sitting, refocus your attention to the musical notes and end the session.

Alternatively, use oil pastels, watercolours, or Chinese brush painting while listening to music. Move your hand with whatever the music leads you to do. Does the music lead you to paint using fluid motions, staccato or sharp pauses? Let the music guide your expression and just relax.

### ***7. Doodle Zentangles***

Going beyond adult colouring activities, try doodling your own Zentangles. With no artistic skills required, Zentangles allow us to mindfully create designs and patterns on small manageable paper tiles using only a thin-tipped black pen, to relax and rejuvenate our mind and body. Begin by marking your square with four dots in each corner, linking them together in a border with curved or straight lines. Draw freestyle lines, breaking up the space in sections. Add intricate designs and patterns, moving the tile around if you wish.

Zentangles quiet the mind, helping you stay in the present moment, increases concentration skills, promotes body awareness and improves hand-eye coordination. Focusing on doing a repetitive task provide a healthy distraction for those with chronic illnesses and mental health difficulties.

See [www.zentagle.com](http://www.zentagle.com) for more information online.

### ***8. Designing circular Mandalas***

Making mandalas, or circular designs can be used as a tool to relax both your body and mind. Create patterns emanating from a circle or singular point radiating outwards using rulers, circular stencil, stamps, paper and pens, or by using found objects, buttons,

beads, or beans. This art activity is portable, affordable, and can produce a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction and confidence.

### **9. Expressive Writing**

Writing things down at the beginning or the end of the day has its health benefits. The act of reflection as well as writing can relieve stress and provide a healthy way to express emotions. Start with simple journaling prompts to do with your child; as they progress, starting them off with their own journal or diary may help them process their thoughts in a tangible and creative way. Adding art within the pages or even scrapbooking ideas adds another level of fun. Here are some exercises to get you started:

#### *Flushing Frustrations*

Write or draw any of your anxieties or frustrations on a page, being as elaborate as you wish. Then take your page and tear it up into small pieces and flush it down the toilet. Plumbing concerns? Write your itemized list on a chalk board or white board, then wipe the slate clean. The act of expressing your cares, seeing them in front of you and washing them away can be very therapeutic!

#### *Motivational Messages*

Focus on a motivation message, quote, poem, or favorite passage. Learn it by heart, write it out, or draw out an image reflecting what it means to you. Write it on a sticky-note and post it everywhere: your fridge, car, bathroom mirror. Revisit your quote throughout the week, especially when you feel down. Incorporate it into an art piece by drawing, sketching and painting it!

#### *Question Blitz*

Using no longer than half a page try writing about:

- My favorite way to spend a rainy day is...
- My favorite piece of clothing is...
- 10 things that make me smile are....
- My favorite words are....
- If my body could talk, it would say...
- Using 10 words, describe yourself...

### **Mindfulness Web Resources**

1. Mindfulness for Mental Health:  
<http://youth.anxietybc.com/mindfulness-exercises>.
2. Guided Mindfulness Meditation Practices with Jon Kabat-Zin  
<http://www.mindfulnesscds.com>

3. Mindful: How to incorporate mindful practices at home and in the workplaces. Has guided meditations and articles from authors in the field.  
<http://www.mindful.org>
4. American Mindfulness Research Association: Gathers resources from a community of mindfulness practitioners and provides information on a range of mindfulness-based topics. <https://goamra.org>
5. Go Zen: Mindfulness for kids: <http://www.gozen.com>
6. MindUP: How to incorporate mindfulness into education curriculum. Lessons from the Inner Kids and Mindful Schools programs.  
<http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/>
7. Kids Books on Mindfulness:
  - a) Jenny Kellet. Mindfulness for Kids: Mindfulness Workbook for Children. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.
  - b) Eline Snel et al. Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and their Parents). Shambhala Publishing, 2013.
  - c) McLean, Kerry Lee. Moody Cow Meditates. Wisdom Publication, 2009.
  - d) Grossman, Laurie et al. Master of Mindfulness: How To Be Your Own Superhero in Times of Stress. Instant Help Publishing, 2016.

### Mindfulness Apps

1. *Headspace*: Meditation made simple - learn meditation practices in doable 10-minute chunks of time during your day. Info at [www.headspace.com](http://www.headspace.com) or your preferred app store.
2. *Mindfulness I and II*: The Mindfulness App can be used by everyone, both beginners and experienced practitioners of meditation and mindfulness. It is easy to use. You can choose between different types of guided meditations, or if you want to meditate in silence. You decide if you want a guided introduction, and for how long you want to sit. Info at [www.mindapps.se](http://www.mindapps.se) or your preferred app store.
3. *Mental Workout*: Learn mindfulness meditation from one of the world's leading experts, Stephan Bodian. The app contains inspirational talks, guided meditations, relaxation exercises, body scans, and an 8-week plan to start your mindfulness practice. Info at [www.mentalworkout.com](http://www.mentalworkout.com) or your preferred app store.
4. *Muse*: Designed to help you build your mindfulness practice, Muse: The Brain Sensing Headband combines mindfulness instruction with neurofeedback training to help you gain control of your brain and learn mindfulness and how to bring your brain to calm. Paired with their headband, Muse is a wonderful tool. Info at [www.choosemuse.com](http://www.choosemuse.com) or inquire with staff and Alongside You can arrange a demo or bring in a Muse headband for you to purchase.

### Works Cited:

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<sup>i</sup> Paul Grossman, et al. Mindfulness-based stress reduction and health benefits. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 57 (2004) 35–43

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<sup>ii</sup>Duncan, L.G., Coatsworth, J.D. & Greenberg, M.T. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* (2009) 12: 255.

<sup>iii</sup> Jon Kabat-Zinn. <http://www.mindfulnesscds.com>

<sup>iv</sup> Callahan, Margaret Jones. *Mindfulness Based Art: The Sparks Guide for Educators and Counselors*. Friesen Press. 2016.

<sup>v</sup> Greenberg, M. T. and Harris, A. R. *Nurturing Mindfulness in Children and Youth: Current State of Research*. *Child Development Perspectives*, Blackwell Publishing 2012. Vol 6: 161–166

<sup>vi vi</sup> McNiff, Shaun. Chapter 2: The Role of Witnessing and Immersion in the Moment of Arts Therapy Experience. P. 40. In *In Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies: Theory and Practice*. Laury Rappaport ed. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2014: 38-50.

<sup>vii vii</sup> Herring, Daniel. *Mindfulness-Based Expressive Therapy for People with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness*. P.171. In *In Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies: Theory and Practice*. Laury Rappaport ed. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2014: 168-179.

<sup>viii</sup> Kabat-Zinn, J., Lipworth, L. & Burney, R. J The clinical use of mindfulness meditation for the self-regulation of chronic pain. *Behave Med* (1985) 8: 163.

<sup>ix</sup> McNiff, Shaun. Chapter 2: The Role of Witnessing and Immersion in the Moment of Arts Therapy Experience. P. 40. In *In Mindfulness and the Arts Therapies: Theory and Practice*. Laury Rappaport ed. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 2014: 38-50.