



# Mindfulness and Social and Emotional Learning for Parents and Caregivers

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Welcome to the world of mindfulness! We are excited that you have joined us to learn ways to support your own well-being and that of your child. Simple exercises will help you feel more at peace and will enable you and your child to manage the stress of daily life. Following is information about what mindfulness is and how to practice it with your child.

*Mindfulness strengthens our ability to remain calm, respond thoughtfully, and have greater compassion for ourselves and others.*

**WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?** Mindfulness is the practice of noticing what we are feeling, thinking, sensing, and doing in the present moment.

**HOW IS MINDFULNESS PRACTICED?** Simple mindfulness practices use an anchor—such as the breath, a bodily sensation, or a feeling—to focus attention. The goal is to focus attention on the anchor and notice when attention drifts. When attention does drift, return your attention to the anchor. Deep breathing is one mindfulness activity that can be practiced to experience an immediate sense of peace and calm.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?** Mindfulness helps us to be our best.

- When you and your child pause and do mindfulness activities together, you both slow your heart rates, which lowers blood pressure and gives a sense of peace and calm.
- Deep breathing and focusing support brain functioning and sharpen the ability to concentrate so that you and your child can relate well and learn together.
- Practicing deep breathing several times per day helps to develop the positive brain habit of pausing and responding with compassion rather than reacting with judgment and anxiousness.
- Pausing and responding with compassion helps to intentionally choose helpful words and actions.

*Without mindfulness, we tend to be impulsive and reactive, which causes stress and anxiousness that impacts everyone around us.*

**HOW DOES MINDFULNESS SUPPORT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?** Mindfulness concentrates primarily on breathing deeply and focusing attention on the present moment, fostering emotional calm and mental clarity. Social and emotional learning (SEL) develops skills and concepts that promote five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Together, these two approaches deepen the ability to understand and manage inner life skills while engaging in relationships and activities in the outer world.





# Tips for Doing Lions Quest Mindfulness Exercises with Young Children

At this stage of life, young children are going through one of the most rapid periods of growth and development, physically, intellectually, socially, and emotionally. They want to explore what’s going on inside of them and how they feel. Language skills are increasing as they learn to express their feelings verbally. Therefore, the focus of mindfulness exercises at this age is on the development of deep breathing as well as focusing attention on, expressing, and managing feelings.

*Mindfulness exercises may be beneficial to practice as a family as well as one-on-one with your child.*

Following are simple tips for engaging your child with mindfulness exercises:

**TRY OUT THE EXERCISES FOR YOURSELF.** It’s always best to do the exercises yourself before sharing them with your child so that you are comfortable and familiar with them. You may find that by participating with your child, you are becoming a more patient and responsive parent. Notice how your calm behavior supports the social, emotional, and academic learning needs of your child. Mindfulness is for adults, too!

**INTRODUCE MINDFULNESS AS A FUN ACTIVITY.** Young children are usually eager to try something new. Tell your child that you are going to do something fun together that will help you both feel more peaceful and ready for a good day. After experiencing a mindfulness exercise, your child will likely look forward to more because the exercises are enjoyable and make them feel safe and calm.

**PARTICIPATE WITH YOUR CHILD.** Let your child know that you will be participating in these exercises with them. Children are much more likely to do these exercises if you share in the experience.

**FIND A QUIET AND COMFORTABLE SPACE.** Find a place with enough space and no distractions. A quiet space is ideal, as it supports turning the attention inside. Some people like to dim the lights. Turn off all media unless you choose to play soft instrumental music in the background.

**BEGIN WITH A MINDFUL POSTURE.** Get into a mindful posture, which is generally a comfortable seated position, either in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. Sit up straight with hands on the thighs. Let your child choose whether to close the eyes or gaze softly toward the floor. You and your child may choose to do an occasional exercise lying down or standing to mix it up.

**CREATE A DAILY HABIT.** Young children love routine. Doing a simple mindfulness exercise at the same time every day helps to create a powerful daily habit. Consider doing mindfulness exercises after breakfast or before bed.





## Introduction to Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing is the foundation of mindfulness practices. This brief exercise will acquaint you and your child with this simple practice that you will be using with each mindfulness exercise going forward.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's do something fun together that will help us feel really peaceful and ready to have a good day. Will you do this with me?*

*Let's start out by getting quiet and comfortable. The first thing we will do is keep our bodies as still as possible. Let's try it. (pause)*

*Now let's get comfortable by wiggling a little bit and getting the kinks out. (pause)*

*Now sit up straight as if a string is pulling your head up to the sky. (pause)*

*Place your hands on your thighs, palms down. (pause)*

*Gaze softly toward the floor. Notice what it feels like to sit quietly for a moment and just breathe. (pause)*

*Now place your hands on your belly and notice what is happening. (pause)*

*Your belly is rising when you breathe in and falling when you breathe out. Isn't that amazing? This is happening all day long, and we don't even think about it! Let's try a few more of these belly breaths. Notice your belly rising and falling under your hands. (pause)*

*Now imagine that your belly is a balloon. When you take your next breath, notice that your belly is getting bigger like a balloon as you fill it up with air and smaller as you let the air out. Can you be like a balloon a few more times? Fill your balloon belly again and feel the belly rise under your hands, perhaps just a little bit more each time. Then feel the belly go all the way down as you let out the air. (pause)*

*Let's do this a few more times and see what starts to happen in your body. (pause)*

*How do you feel when you do this? (pause)*

*You can notice your balloon belly any time you place your hands on your belly and notice them going up and down with each breath. Cool, huh? I'm feeling safe and peaceful right now and I hope you are too. (pause)*

*Thanks for doing this with me.*

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did it feel like to sit quietly at first? What did it feel like to fill up your belly like a balloon when you breathed in and let it go when you breathed out?
- So What?** What happened inside your body as you kept doing this?
- Now What?** Would you like to do this again?



# I Can Keep Calm

Young children experience stress just like adults do. Stress management begins when children are able to identify their feelings of confusion, fear, anger and frustration. Providing positive ways to constructively express and control impulses helps children build relationships and manage their behavior.

*Everyone experiences a range of different emotions throughout the day.*

Here are some positive ways they can deal with those emotions:

1. Stay calm, take a deep breath
2. Explain what you are feeling
3. Tell what you need

## Building Your Child’s Social and Emotional Competence

Self-management is a social and emotional learning competency that helps children effectively regulate their emotions, control impulses, manage stress, and set and achieve goals. These activities help children build emotional awareness, reflection, and calming skills.

**Act It Out!**

Invite your child to create pantomime motions to accompany each of the three steps for dealing with their feelings to help them remember what to do when they find themselves in upsetting situations. For example, put a hand up in a stop position for stay calm, cross arms for explain what you feel, and touching the mouth for tell what you need.

**Think about It!**

Have your child think back to a situation when they felt different emotions. Invite them to analyze the situation and name the emotions they felt. Have them discuss ways they could have used the three strategies in that situation.

Many children are experiencing feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear due to the onset of COVID-19. They need a chance to share their thoughts and feelings and ask questions. Make sure you are accurately informed and ready to educate your child knowing the information is evolving all the time. Get information from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>



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## Mindful Self-Awareness Exercise: Identifying Feelings

One of the most important skills for mental health and well-being is being able to identify what you feel and how feelings are expressed in the body. This exercise will help you and your child explore what you are feeling at any moment and how that feeling shows up through facial expressions and body postures.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's take a few minutes together to get peaceful inside and then we will look at something called feelings. Do you know what I mean by feelings? (pause)*

*Feelings are things like happy, sad, mad, scared, and lots more. Do you know how we show our feelings? (pause)*

*We show them in our face and body. In a couple of minutes, we will have some fun together and use our faces and bodies to show some feelings we have every day.*

*First, let's get comfortable. Sit with your back as straight as you can. Place your hands on your legs. You can close your eyes if you like or gaze softly toward the floor. Take a really big, slow, quiet breath and hold it for a couple of seconds. Let's see if we can do this very quietly. (pause)*

*Now, let out your breath in the same way, slowly and quietly. (pause)*

*Begin to breathe even more deeply, bringing the air all the way into your belly when you inhale through your nose and releasing the air all the way out of your mouth when you exhale, like a big balloon. Let's do this three more times. (pause)*

*How does this feel? (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*Continue to breathe slowly and deeply. I am going to call out a feeling word, one at a time. When you hear the feeling word, show me that feeling with your face and body without talking. For example, if I say happy, show me with your face and body what that might look like right now. (pause)*

*Notice where you feel it in your body as you make the expression. (pause)*

Slowly choose several feeling words from the following list and pause after each one to give your child time to make the expression: mad, sad, happy, angry, fearful, glad, cheerful, ready, eager, anxious, excited, nervous, peaceful. Allow your child time to respond with facial expressions. You may want to make expressions, too.

*Take two deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth to finish the activity. Slowly, if your eyes are closed, open them.*

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice as you took your deep breaths today?
- So What?** What is helpful about knowing how you show your feelings in your face and body?
- Now What?** How can you use what we did today to understand the feelings of others?



# Mindful Self-Management Exercise: Impulse Control

This exercise helps with controlling our impulses when faced with strong feelings by identifying feelings that come from challenging thoughts, inserting a pause, and reframing those thoughts to take positive action.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

## Breath Awareness

*Let's take a few minutes together to get peaceful inside. Then we will look at how we can help ourselves feel better and act in more positive ways when we have difficult feelings, as we all do. We will do this together. First, let's get comfortable. Sit with your back as straight as you can. Place your hands on your legs. You can close your eyes if you like or gaze softly toward the floor. Breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth. Let's do this three times together—in and out (pause), in and out (pause), in and out. (pause)*

*As you breathe in, notice your belly filling up like a balloon. As you breathe out, notice your belly relaxing as the air goes out of your body. (pause)*

## Mindfulness Activity

*Continue to breathe slowly and deeply. We all know that some thoughts and feelings feel really good and some are not so helpful. Think about a time when something happened that caused you to have a strong feeling. (pause)*

*Maybe someone is saying or doing something that is making you very upset and you can see your feelings getting stronger and your body is getting tighter. (pause)*

*For example, maybe someone took something away from you that you wanted. You are just about to say or do something that could be a big problem, like yelling, having a tantrum, or saying something that is not nice. (pause)*

*Then you realize that you have the power to pause the scene, count to five, and choose a positive thing to do! Now imagine you are holding a remote control like the one for our TV. Press the **PAUSE** button. Everything on the screen is frozen! (pause)*



Now take five deep breaths in and out. For each breath, say to yourself: "I'll take a deep breath, and count to five, until I feel all calm inside." (pause)

Now you are ready to think about a positive thing that you can say or do. (pause)

Press **PLAY** on your remote control and watch yourself using helpful words or actions to solve the problem. (pause)

Notice how others around you feel and respond to your good choices. (pause)

Notice how your positive choice feels in your body now. (pause)

Pressing the **PAUSE** button lets you choose the best way to respond. (pause)

Take two deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth to finish the activity. Slowly, if your eyes are closed, open them.

If you are able to, share the **TV Remote Control** handout with your child.

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice and how did you feel when you pressed the PAUSE button?
- So What?** Why do you think it might be helpful to press a PAUSE button when strong feelings come up?
- Now What?** What are some situations that come up in a day when it might be helpful to use your imaginary PAUSE button?



## TV Remote Control

I'll take a deep breath.  
I'll count to five,  
Until I feel all calm inside.





## Mindful Self-Awareness Exercise: Building Self-Confidence

This exercise will help you and your child experience the power of saying positive statements to build self-confidence.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's begin our time together today by becoming peaceful and quiet inside as we find out what it is like to say positive things about ourselves. Saying positive things about ourselves can make us feel our best every day.*

*Let's get into a comfortable position, so feel free to wiggle a little to make that happen. Sit up straight as if a string is pulling your head upward. Place your hands on your thighs. Gaze softly ahead. Take a slow deep breath in as I count to five. One, two, three, four, five. (pause)*

*Slowly let your breath out as I count to five again. One, two, three, four, five. (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*Continue breathing slowly. Let's notice our surroundings in silence. What are your eyes seeing? (pause)*

*Now listen carefully. What are your ears hearing right now? (pause)*

*Now feel your legs. (pause) Feel your hands. (pause)*

*Now take a deep breath and think of all the things you have learned to do with your eyes, ears, legs, and hands, like drawing, singing, riding a bike, playing a game, or making something. (pause)*

*Think about what nice things you said to yourself to learn these new things. We might think of these positive statements as word hugs—little compliments we say to ourselves to boost our self-confidence. Self-confidence is the sense that we are important and capable. For example, if you are trying to be more helpful at home, you might say, "I see what people need and help them." If you wanted to get better at drawing, you might say, "I will keep using my crayons and then I'll get better at drawing." (pause)*

*At school you might say, "If I do my assignment, I will learn \_\_\_\_." If you want to get better at a sport, you could think, "If I keep practicing the moves, I'll play well." (pause)*



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*Inside your head, take a moment and think of a positive statement or word hug you could give yourself right now about something you are trying to learn to do better. (pause)*

*Here is mine. Share a positive statement.*

*Whatever is happening, you can give yourself word hugs and they will make you feel stronger and more self-confident. Take two more deep breaths to finish the activity. Slowly, if your eyes are closed, open them.*

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What was it like to notice your senses, such as seeing, hearing, and feeling your legs and hands?
- So What?** What are some word hugs that you will give yourself, such as “I am smart” or “I am kind”?
- Now What?** What do you think will happen if you give yourself word hugs daily?



## Mindful Self-Management Exercise: Managing Stress

This exercise will help you and your child learn how to manage stress by being with your thoughts and feelings without reacting or getting upset by them.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's start our time together by getting peaceful and quiet so we can learn about ways to manage stressful and difficult feelings. Find a comfortable position, sit up straight, and place your hands on your thighs. Close your eyes, if that feels comfortable, or gaze softly downward. Breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth. Let's do this three times together—in and out (pause), in and out (pause), in and out. (pause)*

*Now continue breathing slowly on your own. As you breathe in, notice your belly filling up like a balloon. As you breathe out, notice your belly relaxing as the air leaves your body. (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*While you are breathing slowly, you may notice some thoughts coming into your mind. (pause)*

*Some thoughts bring up strong feelings. Think about a time that you felt a strong feeling, such as feeling angry, sad, worried, scared or something else. (pause)*

*Notice where you are feeling this feeling in your body. It could be in your chest, your belly, your arms and legs, or somewhere else. (pause)*

*Now imagine you are holding onto the string of a balloon that is floating over your head. Make a fist and hold the string tightly. (pause)*

*Take a deep breath in and blow your strong feeling out of your body and onto the balloon. (pause)*

*Picture a face on the balloon that shows your strong feeling. (pause)*

*Notice this feeling and be with it for a little while. (pause)*





*When we have a strong feeling, we can notice it. We can be with the strong feeling for a little while and then we can let it go. (pause)*

*Notice again the strong feeling that you sent out of you and up to the balloon. (pause)*

*The feeling is no longer in you, but you are still holding on to it. Take one more breath in and as you breathe out, open your fist and let go of the string. (pause)*

*Watch the balloon and your strong feeling floating away from you. (pause)*

*Notice how your body is feeling now, as your strong feeling is moving away. (pause)*

*Whenever you are having a strong feeling, you can say this poem: Take it easy. Take it slow. Breathe in the air. Then let it go! (pause)*

*Slowly, if your eyes are closed, open them.*

If you are able to, share the **Let It Go!** handout with your child.

### Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

#### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice as you recalled a strong feeling today?
- So What?** Why do you think it might be helpful to imagine putting strong feelings onto a balloon?
- Now What?** When might you use an imaginary balloon to help you with a strong feeling?





# Let It Go!

Take it easy.  
Take it slow.  
Breathe in the air.  
Then let it go!



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