

MINDFUL MAGIC

Creating mindful learning environments in
early childhood settings.



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What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the practice of living in, experiencing and being aware of the present. In particular, the practice of mindfulness enables us to maintain focus on our moment-by-moment thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and environment. For most people, entering this state of mindfulness is something that requires intention and practice. However, from time to time, we may all 'slip' into states of mindfulness unintentionally. This may be when participating in exercise, when you 'lose' yourself in a song, or even when you experience a state of 'flow' when fully immersed in your favourite hobby.

When intentionally practicing mindfulness, a large component of the practice is acceptance. This means accepting the thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations and environment for what they are. Mindfulness also means we must accept that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to become aware of and accept our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations or environment -these things just 'are'.

While the practice of mindfulness has its origins in the mediation of numerous Eastern religions, over the last 50 years the practice of mindfulness has become popular in the West. This was largely thanks to the work of Jon Kabat-Zin in the 1970s, and his introduction of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction. Since then, a magnitude of research has been conducted on the topic, with mindfulness becoming a widely used and adapted tool across multiple fields.



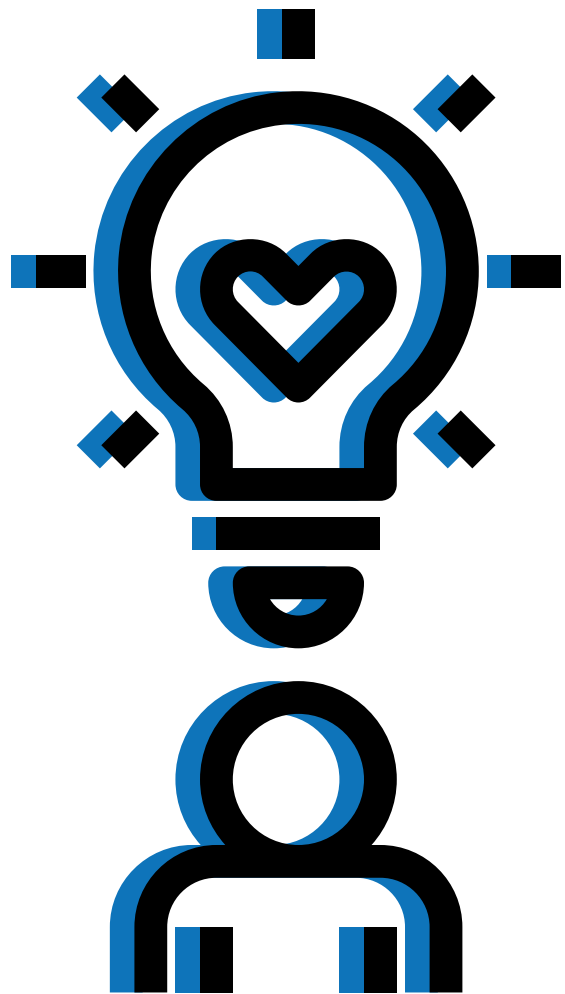
Why should we practice the skill of Mindfulness?

When we are not deliberately paying attention, our brains tend to operate on autopilot. While this is not always a bad thing, there are numerous times in our life where this can become a problem. Operating on autopilot can bring with it thoughts of dwelling on the past, worrying about the future, mind wandering, judgment and criticism. When taken to extreme lengths, this form of experiencing the world through our thoughts, rather than our senses can lead to reduced cognitive functioning.

So, why should we practice mindfulness?

Like all skills, mindfulness takes practice. But, just like other skills, the more you practice the better you get.

Practicing mindfulness creates ways in which we can combat negative thoughts, reduce our stress and better understand and accept our emotions. The benefits of practicing mindfulness are significant, with research indicating that mindfulness helps to promote resilience, reduce stress, improve memory and attention, enhance relationships, combat bias, and even help with weight loss.



Why should children practice the skill of Mindfulness?

As mentioned earlier, mindfulness is a skill that must be practiced. With nearly any skill, the more you practice the better you become, and therefore there is no one better primed to learn and develop this skill than children.

When we give children the strategies and tools to practice mindfulness, we are giving them the ability to cope with stress, relate to and accept uncomfortable feelings and sensations, and better position themselves to overcome challenges.

By setting up children with a base to build their resilience and foster the development of their emotional regulation, there are numerous benefits. Research suggests that positive outcomes of practicing mindfulness include:

- Increased focus, attention and self-control.
- Enhanced Self regulation and executive functioning processes when introduced in early childhood.
- Improved academic performance, conflict resolution and wellbeing.
- Decreased levels of stress, anxious thoughts and disruptive behaviour.

An understanding of mindfulness in our formative years sows the seeds of kindness, tolerance and peace as we grow in our fast paced world. Mindfulness techniques have also been proven as calming in times of trauma.



Mindfulness in Early Childhood settings - How can I be a Mindful Educator?

Creating a mindful learning environment in early childhood settings is beyond evaluating just the physical space and relies immensely on the practices, interactions and attachments from the educators within that environment. Early childhood is a time for children to play, learn, explore, experiment and discover. In Early Childhood settings and as educators we create space for this and for children to be, belong and become in alignment with the core values of the EYLF.

The ability to just 'be' itself is a state of mindfulness and its no surprise that the industrys governing framework recognises this. By holding this space we support children in feeling safe and supported in our learning environments and secure in their attachments to their educators.

Embedding mindfulness at the core of our intentional teaching is an excellent starting point for creating a mindful learning environment. Integrating mindfulness within our interactions with children promotes emotional awareness and supports the development of self regulation skills. The mindful educator role models self regulation which then helps them provide the supportive and nurturing Co- Regulation that children need to a develop a strong foundation of social and emotional skills.

It is suggested that before we as educators can offer mindfulness to children we must first experience and develop this for ourselves.

As an educator, adopting a present, responsive and aware approach to the way we engage and interact with children fosters mindfulness. This might look like:

- Observing children's response and reactions to certain situations and responding to their cues. Listen to children actively and validate their feelings and responses to these situations .
 - Taking things slowly, being present in the current moment (not worrying about what's coming next) providing appropriate transition periods and de-escalating the sometimes inevitable chaos that can be present in early childhood learning environments.
 - Practicing mindfulness yourself both inside and outside of your professional life to enable you to approach situations and interactions with children mindfully and become a positive role model to the children in your care.
 - Understand your triggers to control how you react in different situations.
- Triggers can often result in reactive responses.



Creating mindful learning environments in Early Childhood settings.

A mindful learning environment supports positive social and emotional developmental outcomes for children. An environment which supports this also promotes increased competencies in:

- self awareness
- self regulation
- social awareness
- relationship skills
- responsible decision making
- executive functioning

Mindfulness in early childhood settings can be practiced informally, it does not need to be set practices of breath work, meditation or intentional movement such as yoga. Whilst these practices are effective they are not essential.

You can embed mindful practices within your everyday routine by using the senses to anchor attention. This can be achieved through walking, listening to music and eating. By drawing attention and focus to the present in a way that is open, non reactive and non judgemental we as educators foster a child's ability to focus on their thoughts, feelings and perceptions that arise in the moment.

Within our curriculum planning incorporate mindful principles such as awareness, observation, non reactivity, and non judgement within routines, transitions, environment set ups and planned experiences.



Want to find out more about Mindfulness?



Get in contact to find out more!



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