

How Parents Can Practice Mindfulness (Even With Our Kids Around)



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This post is part of [Stress-Less Parenting Club's new workshop](#). Our leader [Carla Naumburg](#) is showing us how we can make our family life calmer and happier through mindful parenting.

So far in this workshop, we've talked about what mindful parenting is — the ability to tune in to what is actually going on with you and your kids so you can respond thoughtfully, rather than reacting impulsively — and some of the myths about mindful parenting.

Now we're going to dive into how to actually be more present and connected in our daily lives. The trick to mindfulness is to practice it when it's easy so that we can actually use those skills to calm down and find our grounding when things get really chaotic. We'll talk more about meditation, yoga, and other *formal mindfulness practices* next week, but for now we're going to focus on *informal mindfulness practices*.

I'm talking about brief periods of time each day when we can focus on our breathing, the smell of our coffee, or the sound of the phone ringing. As we start to develop the habit of paying attention even when we are bored (sitting in traffic) or annoyed (another phone call from that person we've been avoiding), it will become easier to stay grounded and focused when our kids are whining or nagging.

The power of mindfulness exists in that moment — when we can respond to what is

actually happening, as opposed to reacting to whatever is going on in our regretful, anxious, frustrated, over-active brains.

Here are some tips for incorporating mindfulness in your everyday life:

In the morning: Pick one aspect of your morning routine, and try to pay complete attention to it. Don't do anything else. When you're drinking your coffee, notice the feeling of the mug in your hand, the rising steam, and how good it tastes. If you are tempted to check your phone or make a to-do list, notice those thoughts for what they are — just thoughts — and then go back to your coffee. (You can also do this in the shower or while brushing your teeth.)

While you exercise: Instead of zoning out to a podcast or TV show, ditch your headphones for a few minutes. You can choose to pay attention to your breathing, the sensations on your body, or the feeling of your foot hitting the ground. When your mind wanders, as it will, bring it back. Yes, I know, it's boring. That's the point — learning to stay present even when it's mind-numbing.

In communication: Before you starting writing that email or pick up the phone, take a few deep breaths. That will give you enough time and mental space to decide if and how you want to respond to whomever at that particular moment. I often realize that I am too tired or grumpy to have a civil interaction, and it's better for everyone if I get back to them later.

Sitting in traffic: The next time you find your hands tightening or your voice rising while you're sitting in traffic, focus on your breath instead of tensing up. Notice the feeling of air moving in and out of your nostrils, or the rising and falling of your belly. It might not get you moving any faster, but it will make the trip a lot less frustrating.

Anytime you need to: When things get hectic, try to **STOP** and/or **STAY**. Both of these activities are about reminding yourself to pause and breathe before you act. Pick one that speaks to you and that you are more likely to remember in a hectic moment.

- **STOP: Stop, Take a Breath, Observe, and Proceed**

This one is pretty straightforward. When life gets *crazy*, *stop* for a minute to *breathe* and *observe* what is happening with you and your kids. When you've had a chance to calm down, then you can *proceed* in a more thoughtful way.