



# Mindful Parenting – key point summary & discussion

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**Mindfulness** is the capacity to be fully present with our actual, moment-to-moment experiences, with compassionate attention and without trying to change anything. **Mindful Parenting**, a fundamental parenting skill, is responsive parenting, instead of reactive, parenting: moment-to-moment, open-hearted, non-judgmental attention so we can see our children as they are, not as we want them to be. An investment in long-term relationship with your children.

## FIVE PRINCIPLES OF MINDFUL PARENTING

1. **Listening with full attention**
2. **Non-judgmental acceptance of self & child**
3. **Emotional awareness of self & child**
4. **Self-regulation in the parenting relationship**
5. **Compassion for self & child**

### 1. Listening with Full Attention:

Listen with focused attention. Find connect time daily where your child has your complete physical and mental attention. Can be formal or spontaneous. Increasingly important to follow non-verbal cues as children approach adolescence.

*Explore your habits: when do you not listen with full attention? What changes can you make? For each child?*

### 2. Non-judgmental acceptance of self & child.

This requires genuine, often uncomfortable enquiry, into your deepest recesses of shame, ambition and fear:

- *What traits, qualities, etc., do you not accept about yourself, your child? Are these realistic, appropriate? For example, perfectionism: into which corners has it crept? Explore!*
- *Which fears, goals and experiences of success and failure are you projecting on to your child? We are all doing it: explore it.*
- *Where do you communicate, unknowingly, that you and your child are NOT whole, NOT worthy of unconditional love?*
- *Challenges and mistakes are healthy, normal, unavoidable, and navigable. Where are you intolerant, to yourself and your child?*

### 3. Emotional awareness of self & child

Pay attention to your feelings and your child's feelings and mind the gap so that you're not reacting automatically. Strong emotions trigger automatic behaviors and undermine our best-practice parenting strategies; this is human. A commitment to mindful parenting gives us some breathing room to make the best choices. This gives you greater willingness and ability to endure strong emotions through decentering – noting that feelings are just feelings—then you are MORE fully present not consumed by your feelings.

- *What are your parenting triggers? What makes you snap? How are your buttons pushed?*
- *Why do you have this button: what do you fear? How can you defuse that fear?*
- *What effect do your buttons have on your child?*

### 4. Self-regulation in the parenting relationship –

Responsive instead of reactive parenting enables us to walk our talk: actions match values & goals, teaches our children to do the same & improves their relationship with us as they get mature (the true end goals!)

- *What can you do differently starting right now, tomorrow?*
- *Review some of your parenting triggers from #3 above; make a plan for responsive parenting for each one.*
- *Recall a parenting situation that you could have handled more mindfully; envision a new response.*

### 5. Compassion for self & child:

We are our own worst critics. Accept your efforts and the process rather than focusing on a specific outcome to each situation.

- *Review examples of when you beat yourself up for not meeting a parenting goal.*

- How do you feel when judged negatively by others for your child's behavior in public.
- Review where your child feels it is not safe to make mistakes around you and try again. How can you bring mindful parenting to bear on their unique needs for support and affection?

**We can only give our children what we are willing to give ourselves...the greatest gift we can give them is our full presence.**

## **FIVE STRATEGIES FOR CULTIVATING YOUR MINDFUL PARENTING SKILLS**

- 1. Develop your own mindfulness practice**
- 2. Manage your stress: use the S.T.O.P. system**
- 3. Acknowledge and accept imperfection**
- 4. Honour your child's sovereignty**
- 5. Cultivate self-kindness & self-compassion**

- 1. Develop your own mindfulness practice:** Sit in silence for 5-30 minutes a day, at the same time, in the same place, and pay attention to your breath. When your mind wanders, which it of course will—gently bring your awareness back to your breath. Why? This trains us to maintain our mind/ body connection. When we're caught up in past & future, our health and well-being suffer. Our modeling this capacity for our children speaks louder than words and actions.
- 2. Mindfully manage your stress:** modern life keeps us in a constant state of low-grade stress, with the flight-fight response triggered. We don't notice it. But when we strengthen our mind-body connection with mindfulness practice, we can track and notice stress or imbalance in the body and mind, all day long. This is shifting from *mindlessly stressed* to *mindfully responsive*.

### **STOP**

**S – STOP:** when you notice stress or imbalance, pause in your awareness.

**T: take a breath:** think about the breath you are taking. A deep breath metabolizes stress hormones, releases happy hormones, and signals your body to relax.

**O: Observe:** observe how shifting your attention away from your stressors and into the breath makes you feel.

**P: Proceed:** Congratulate yourself for stepping out of reactivity and into responsiveness. Now you are empowered to take a skillful action that aligns with your goals.

- 3. Acknowledge and accept imperfection –** Mindful parenting acknowledges that regardless of our best intentions, less than optimal moments are an unavoidable reality. How we navigate these moments is key. When our children see us navigate mistakes, they get authentic model of what it means to be human. Choose to see these moments as opportunities for compassion, learning, humor, kindness, forgiveness, honesty, and repair.
- 4. Honour your children's sovereignty:** Kids need to be seen and known as they really are, separate from their parents. This isn't about giving them unbridled freedom or too many choices, but about bringing more awareness to our own unmet needs, agendas, issues, unfinished business and thwarted dreams. Take responsibility for what is unfinished in us rather than burdening our children: this is setting appropriate boundaries and emotional separation. What our children need is often different from what we need. We must practice bringing these needs to light, addressing and understanding them with more skill and grace in gentle awareness.
- 5. Cultivate Kindness and Compassion:** Parenting is humbling, challenging, thrilling, heartbreaking. No quitting, no hiding, no finish line. Self-compassion is truly an act of self-preservation. Sometimes our kids get the best of us, and we feel there's nothing left for us. We look outside of ourselves for love, approval and care. Self-compassion is the understanding these are cultivated by accepting ourselves as we are. Mindfulness practice is self-parenting: giving ourselves space to be in the present moment. Only in genuinely offering these to ourselves can we give to anyone.