

Talking About Mental Health March 2021

This month with the Umbrella Project, we are focusing on mindfulness. So, what is it? Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening in the moment. It is about noticing our own thoughts, feelings, sensations and the environment around us. Too often this information is missed as we rush through our days. When we can find the time, even a few minutes, to practice mindfulness we are able to tune into the present instead of looking back in the past or trying to imagine the future.

When we become more aware of our thoughts and feelings we are much better able to manage them. We have to know they are there to bring our focus to them! Also, practicing mindfulness can boost attention and concentration. Some studies have even shown that starting a mindfulness practice can increase brain activity in the area associated with positive emotions.

Mindfulness can be practiced by children, youth, young adults and adults. There are many different ways that you can bring some mindfulness into your everyday practice with your family.

Mindful Listening: Go into your backyard, onto your balcony or porch or go for a short outdoor walk. Focus on sounds. Listen to the everything you hear. If you notice your thoughts wandering, simply bring your mind back to the task of listening. You will be amazed at how many sounds are there that you would otherwise not have noticed! When you

Mindful Eating: Have family members take their first bites of food and really concentrate on the taste, textures, temperature and feeling of the food in your mouth. If your mind wanders, bring yourself back. Then share around the table what you each noticed. This can be playful and funny too! And always remember to be grateful for your ability to even have food as there are many families who do not always have easy access to foods.

Mindful Body Scan: Get comfortable and close your eyes. Notice your body. What do you feel? Travel from toes to tip of your head. Notice how your body feels on the surface it is on. Try to just notice without judgement or explanation. Gently bring yourself back to the scan if you wander. If possible, share what you discovered. Did anything surprise you?

Mindful Silence: This can be really fun but, surprisingly, not always that easy to accomplish! Try and get the whole family to agree to 1, 2, 3, 5 minutes (whatever works for you! Make it realistic). During that time no one is to speak, communicate, sing or make sounds. Simply go about your day to day without speaking. This can be very powerful and interesting. When you are finished your assigned time, share back what it was like.

Mindful Focus: Ring a bell or use an online sound for a bell, close your eyes and listen only to the sound. Focus on the sound until it is completely gone. You will be surprised how long it can last if we really focus our attention onto it!

Last thoughts:

Sitting in front of screens is the opposite for mindfulness in most cases, but sometimes the right app or use of technology can enhance and support our mindfulness activities.

You can try:

- Listening to calming music and noticing your body
- Anxiety Canada website has great activities and resources
- Stop, Think and Breathe app is a mindfulness app specifically to support kids
- GoZen on YouTube has some fun, free videos
- Headspace.com
- <https://www.connectedbreath.co> (.co not .com)



Thanks to Edge Mutual for sponsoring the Umbrella Project at UGDSB!

Jenny Marino

Mental Health Lead for Upper Grand District School Board