



Overview

Join Matt and Zindzi in their 'mindfulness cubby' and go along with them for a mindful journey, as they learn about their senses, bodies, feelings, and brains, and what types of activities, play, and games may help with big emotions.

We see Zindi model how to ask for help and calm down when becoming frustrated.

There are many 'mindful' activities within this episode that can be used with children in all manner of settings and circumstances. Other play ideas and games to build mindfulness and emotional coping tools in children and families. Most of these can be done with things found lying around the home, so no need for expensive resources or 'expert' lessons.

Tip for Adults

Mindfulness for young children will look very different to mindfulness for teenagers and adults. This resource details a variety of different activities, as some will stick with certain ages and preferences, while others may not. Keep it short (at least to begin with – and build up over time if your child wants to), keep it sensory, keep it simple, and most of all – keep it fun!

Adult life can also be stressful, fast-paced, and full of big feelings, so doing as many of these mindfulness activities with a child as you can, will be a great way to build resilience for adults as well children. Once your child becomes familiar with some of these activities, ask them to lead them while you follow their instructions – this not only helps them to understand the concepts at a deeper level, but means you get a dose of mindfulness as well!

Mindfulness in '3D'

There are a number of useful mindfulness acronyms out there, but one phrase we developed if adults find themselves stuck with how to use mindfulness in everyday life or even want to create their own mindfulness activities is Mindfulness in 3D - where the 3 d's stand for; Decide, Describe, Delight/Don't Judge. Here's how it works:

Decide – decide if you would like to focus your attention or awareness on one particular sense or aspect (e.g., smell, breathing, or sounds) OR open your attention/noticing to whatever comes along (e.g., sounds, smells, textures as you go for a walk).

Describe – use vivid and sensory language to describe and 'narrate' your experience, ask your child to try and describe it themselves, talk about experiences in terms of your senses but also internal emotions, feelings, and memories.

Delight/Don't Judge – bring in wonder and awe to positive and new experiences, try to experience things as if for the first time (or as an alien or robot from another planet!). Suspend judgement as much as possible and focus in on the moment. This includes when we might be angry or upset, as these emotions have a purpose and are not automatically negative – be kind and allow yourself to experience all emotions – don't judge them or yourself/children for having them.



Mindful Breathing & Body Awareness

Breathing Ball

The 'breathing ball' Matt uses to help Zindzi calm her body and thoughts down in the episode can be found at many bargain shops or online. They are sometime referred to as 'hoberman spheres'. If you can't find one, ask your child to imagine they are holding one in their hands, and bring their hands out wide when they breath in, and contract the imaginary ball inwards as they breath out.

NB: The breathing speed should be at a fairly natural but slightly slower than normal speed. Too fast can miss the calming impact, too slow can also be somewhat discomfoting or tightening.

Make a 'Body-Brain' Remote

Explaining to children that their breathing is a bit like an 'air-conditioner' or 'remote' for their body/brain can be a useful metaphor. When on fast or hot – we might feel stressed or a bit agitated, when put on slow or cool – it can help calm us or slow things down. Over time, remember to use our breathing and as a tool to help control our body and brain, this can help children to cope with big feelings and emotions.

Using empty cardboard boxes and loose parts like bottle tops and craft supplies, get your child to make a 'remote control' for their body and brain. Practice using the remote to control body movements, actions, feelings, and breathing! Over time you could add different 'dials' and 'controls' to the remote e.g., speed dials, weather dials (stormy, raining, sunny), temperature dials, a 'pause' button. Buying a 'giant/big button remote' from a department store (often used by the aged or visually impaired) is another fun alternative to use in a similar way.

Every now and then, you or your child could pretend that the 'remote control' batteries are on low or need recharging, or press the 'super slow-motion' button, then together or taking turns, walk around the room as slow as you can, until the batteries are replaced or another button pressed.

NB: You can talk to children about how their brain has a similar 'remote control' or 'control panel/station' that over time they may learn to work and that sometimes different emotions, sometimes even more than one at a time, can be pushing some of the buttons on that 'control panel'.

Watching the animated movie, *Inside Out*, and/or reading the book version, can really help to demonstrate and model this concept for adults and children.

Belly Breathing 'Buddy'

Using a favourite soft toy (with a bit of weight is good), a plastic bath boat, or after making a large 'pet rock', place the preferred object on your child's tummy and try to get them to notice both visually and by touch, how the object moves up and down as they breath. You can suggest to your child that a nice calm and slow rate of breathing might even put the toy, pet rock, or people in the boat, to sleep! This activity can be down anytime, but can be great as part of bath-time fun or getting ready for bed.

Shutting your 'Robot-body' down

Another great activity for bath-time fun or getting ready for bed or a rest, is to get your child to pretend they are a robot, and using a remote control (NB: can use a craft-made remote or giant remote from the department store) start to pretend to "shut-down" your child-robot's body, beginning with their feet/legs, moving up the body, arms/hands, before getting to the face/brain. Ask the 'robot' if they can feel or notice any 'electricity' still in that body part after it has been shutdown. As your child gets better with this activity, you can get more specific and detailed with shutting down the robot-body parts (e.g., toes, fingers, noses, ears).

'Reset' Your Robot Body

A useful variation on the 'Robot Shutting Down' activity is to try and get you robot-child to tense and relax each body part as you control it with your remote. You can tell your child to pretend you are 'resetting' each robot-body, and to do that they need to make that body part very tight and tense/hard, and to then make it very floppy and soft/loose. Follow the same progression from bottom/feet to top/head, and with practice you can again get more specific/detailed with body parts.

Mindful Games & Play

At this age, most mindfulness should look or feel like a game or playing. By bringing even the briefest moment of attention, noticing, or awareness, to something we are doing or playing, suddenly helps to make it a more mindful moment and research suggests more enjoyable!

Remember not to forget the old classics, which often have forms across many cultures and backgrounds. There is probably a good reason why they stood the test of time and versions can be found across many countries.



For example; Eye-spy (or I-smell), Simon Says, Red Light-Green Light, What's The Time Mr Wolf, Rocks/Jacks/Knuckles, Duck-Duck-Goose, Mother May I, Do as I say-Not as I do, and the list goes on. Remember once children get good at these games, you can change the rules to do the opposite or add in an extra step or gesture (e.g., Green light suddenly means stop or add in a Purple Light to spin around, Do as Simon Says but not if they have their finger on their nose).

Mindful Matching Game

Get together 3-5 pairs of jars, small boxes, or containers, and fill these with matching materials that either makes sounds (e.g., money, buttons, sand/dirt) or smells (put holes in top to smell; e.g., rosemary, lemon rind, popcorn), and see if children can describe without labelling the sound or smell, and find their matching pair using their concentration skills (matching letters or colours on the bottom can help children know if they got a correct pair or not).

NB: To take to the next level, add more pairs of sounds/smells or introduce pairs of different 'weights' and see if children can match them (start with light, medium, heavy) or see if they can sequence 4-5 non-pair jars/containers from lightest to heaviest. A similar game can be made with matching textures or fabrics, or least rough to smoothest using a blindfold and sandpaper!

Guess the 'Mystery' Object

After getting hold of a large cardboard box (and cutting two holes for arms to go in) or a milkcrate with some fabric placed over the top, place a variety of 'mystery' objects from around the house, and the aim of this game is for your child to touch, explore, and describe (without trying to label the object just yet) before having a guess at what they think the object is. You could have a photo sheet or drawing of the various objects in the 'mystery' box to help younger children. Even if you can't find a box, simply get your child to place their hands behind their back and pop in a mystery object.

Crack the Spaceship Code (Back Drawing)

Another great bedtime activity, but fun at any time is a game of back (or palm) drawing. Taking turns, one person pretends their back is the alarm system for a spaceship. The other person either taps a certain number of dots (and with practice - later on can become shapes, letters, even a word) and the 'alarm system' needs to guess how many dots there were (can have a code made up of 3-4 numbers). If the person gets all the code correct, the spaceship gets to take off! A palm held behind one's back also works for this game.

Art and Craft Ideas

Art and craft activities like finger knitting, weaving, bracelet making, paper mache, drawing mazes or simple tessellation patterns using lids, shapes, or freehand (and then colouring in), can all be great mindful activities.

Creating symmetrical, linear, circular, triangular patterns with loose parts and objects can also be fun (e.g., leaves, rocks, bark, marbles, blocks, icy pole sticks).

Go outside (or set up a lovely fruit-bowl or whatever you can find in the fridge on a table/stool) and sit down to draw or sketch it. Together try to notice things about the set-up, things you might not normally notice or focus on. You could add to this drawing across the day or week – do you notice new things each time? You could also try a new drawing each time or day, do your different pictures change or notice different things each time?



Find or print out a photograph of your face, cut it in half vertically down the line, and stick onto a piece of paper. Try to notice and draw the other half of your face as best you can. Again, this can be added to over time as you notice new things.

Make a 'slow down' jar/'Mind jar'

Make your very own 'slow-down' jar that Zindzi uses to help calm and slow herself down in the mindful cubby. Using a recycled jar or glass water bottle (with any labels removed) arrange a variety of coloured glitter and some glitter glues. Going through various emotions, thoughts, and feelings (e.g., joy, anger, worried, excited) that your child can identify, get them to choose a glitter colour for it and put that in the jar.

Once you have done this for maybe 4-5 emotions/feelings/thoughts, fill the jar completely with water and screw the lid on tightly (some superglue or waterproofing tape around the lid can be useful at this stage).

You can then discuss with your child that sometimes our thoughts and feelings may start to rush around in our head, they can excited feelings, angry feelings, big feelings, but that if we watch them like in the jar (and maybe do some slow-down breathing), eventually they start to slow and eventually they settle down. The extra important thing to note, is that our feelings and thoughts can still be there, we are not trying to get rid of them or make them disappear, but watching them and knowing eventually they will slow/settle down can be helpful.

You can make a 'slow down' jar or 'mind jar' for everyone in your family. Some people also like to add a drop of food colouring. Pick a special place where your 'slow down' jar will live.

Make a 'rainstick'

Matt uses the calming sound of a rainstick when reading the book called *Colours of Australia* and you can make one too. Using a strong/rigid cardboard cylindrical tube (a cling or foil wrap tube will work if you can't find anything else) you and your child can spend some time decorating the outside.

Depending on what you have around the house, you can experiment with what materials may work and sound best in your rainstick. Examples include; small gumnuts, leaves, rice, dried beans, pipe cleaners, metal wire, cotton balls etc. Once you are happy with the sound and speed, using elastic bands or sticky tape, place a covering on both ends. Again, this can be soft (brown paper bag) or hard (cardboard) – whatever sounds best. The ends can also be decorated.

Once you have made your home-made 'rainstick', you can play a fun listening game where children need to raise their hand when they can no longer hear the sound of the stick (can also be played with a chime or long-sounding bell).

Mindful Movement, Music and Dance

Listening to different types and forms of music, can you draw on a piece of paper, what that music would "look like" if you could see it! Is it slow, wavy, sharp, red, green, does it have a shape, a way of moving across the page. You could also draw an outline of your body first or your brain/mind on the page, and draw how the music makes your body or mind feel – just like Matt and Zindzi did in this episode. NB: the soundtrack to the movie, *Fantasia*, is a great place to start for emotive music. Many versions of the songs may be found freely online.



You could also use the body outline to draw how certain emotions look and feel in your body – where do you feel anger, in your hands, your tummy, your face – is it red or green – is it messy or sharp, or radiating outwards. Across the week or day you can do this for many different emotions – happy, sad, scared/worried, disgust/"I don't like it" feeling.

Another fun game, is to dance to the music. What would this song and sounds "look like" if they were a dance or movement? Does it make your body want to move slowly or fast, is it calming or energizing, does it make you feel joy or maybe a bit scared?

Playing musical games like "Freeze" or musical chair/cushions are quite mindful and require noticing and concentration. You can also add specific postures or gestures/actions that children must do when they freeze or sit. This helps to add an extra layer of complexity or difficulty to keep it interesting for children once they get the hold of the basic rules.

Getting children to dance slow when you play drums or music fast, and dance fast when you play drums or slow music, is another fun activity. Switch between doing matching (slow-slow, fast-fast) or mis-matching (slow-fast, fast-slow) to keep children on their toes. Putting your hand on your head or nose may be a simple way to indicate a change in the rules!

Mindful Boardgames & Tabletop Games

Surprising, or perhaps not surprising, many tabletop and social games involve being mindful and paying special attention on purpose. Remember, you don't always have to play by the stick rules – and often starting with a more basic version and adding in more rules or aspects as your children get better with practice is a great way to progress.

For example, when playing Four in a Row, start with playing Three in a Row, or start with four in a row but only vertically and horizontal to begin with before adding in diagonals. Can you even move to Five in a Row? With Uno-style games, you could start by playing snap on the colour only, then the number only, then either the colour or number. If someone gets a matching pair, maybe they need to wiggle their nose, tap their head, and stick out their tongue – and if they forget a step, the other/next person gets the cards.

Possible games (NB: can even make your own versions):

- Four in a Row, Memory, Guess the Face games
- Stacking, Electric Buzzer, Fishing games
- Snap and Number-Shape-Colour-Pattern games
- Chinese Checkers, Sequencing pieces games
- Drawing Guessing games, What/Who Am I? games
- Code-breaker games
- Marble Run/Rube Goldberg-machine games
- I Spy/Spot it/Search-and-Find games (and books)
- Spot the Difference/Connect-the-dot books

Getting Outside (or Inside)

Mindful Walk or Sensory Countdown

Big Ted is able to help Joey get his bounce back and feel a little better himself when he notices some lovely smelling lavender and the tiny beautiful flowers it has. You can expand on this in what we call a mindful walk or sensory countdown.



Go for a walk outside and try to notice or find 5 different sounds, 4 matching colours, 3 different textures, 2 different smells, and if you really concentrate or are brave, 1 type of taste! You can also open up your awareness rather than focussing on one, and label different sounds, smells, textures, feelings, and even tastes, as they come into your field of awareness.

Mindful Outdoor Scavenger Hunts

Using colour swatches from the hardware store or some colour squares/fabric, you can go on an outdoor colour scavenger hunt. You could also add different sounds, sights, and textures to tick off on a bingo-style checklist. A shape scavenger hunt is another fun alternative.

NB: Remember, the above can be fairly easily adapted for inside. You can also keep a list of previous responses and see if you can come up with new answers each day.





Cooking

Cooking is a great way to build in, notice, and talk about senses (texture, smell, taste, sight, and even hearing) and feelings (interesting, strange, familiar, just like grandma's). Talk about the various senses as you put each ingredient in, and how these might change throughout the cooking process.

Baking a cake or something to eat for a neighbour or friend can be a great way to build in kindness to a mindful cooking activity. Making birdseed cakes or seed/flower bombs is another fun way to link in an act of kindness. Remember to ask your child and yourself, how does it feel in my body and brain when I give or do something nice for someone else?

Have a mindful 'tea tasting' with your child Using herbal teas (without caffeine) or even better-making your own with some mint, basil, or lemongrass, notice the ingredients before you add some warm water – what do they look like, smell, texture, even taste. Once you add the warm water, notice the warmth in the cup, what changes in smell are there, can you even taste it before it touches your lips, is there any steam or condensation forming? Taking a slow, thoughtful sip, what does it taste like, can you follow the sip as it travels from your mouth, down your throat, to your tummy, how does that feel?

Mindful Munching – 'Eat Like an Alien'

Using popcorn and a strawberry, ask your child to pretend they are an alien who has never seen this type of food before, because it does not grow on their planet. Get your child to explore it with their multiple senses (before they even start to eat it!). What does it look like? What does it feel like? What does it smell like? Does it make a sound if I gently squeeze it near my ear? Can I even taste it, just from the smell?

Then ask your child to start to eat it like they are on slow-motion. When they eat like this, how does this 'strange/mystery' food feel like, taste like, can they still smell it? After slow-motion eating for a moment, see if they can follow it as they slowly swallow it and it moves down their throat and into their stomach. Can they still taste or smell it? What did they think of this out-of-this world food? Have they ever eaten anything like that before, that slowly, that focussed. Likely not!

'Slow' Food & 'Paddock to Plate'

If you have time and patience making 'slow food' can be a great mindful activity. Making popcorn (NB: must involve a responsible adult) in a saucepan with a few tablespoons of oil is a great activity. Once you start to heat the oil, put 3-4 kernels in the oil, and then you must focus on listening carefully to hear when these finally pop – this will let you know the oil is at the right temperature. Put a quarter or half-a-cup of kernels in the pan and put on the lid (glass lids are great if possible). Then comes another focussed listening activity, you must carefully listen to hear when the kernels stop popping altogether, this way you know when to take the pan off the heat, so the popcorn doesn't burn. All through this process from kernel to popcorn, this allows you to talk about the different sounds, the smells, the visual changes, the different textures, and eventually the taste! You can even Eat (Your Popcorn) Like an Alien.

Making homemade butter from scratch in a jar or blender using heavy whipping cream can be a great 'slow food' addition to add to your popcorn. For popcorn or butter (or any favourite food), you can ask your child to draw or try to name all the stages and people involved in the process. If you do this on small separate pieces of paper, you can add more and more stages and people to this, as you think of them. See how many stages and people you can list/draw, from the farmer who plants the seed, to the various truckdrivers and transport stages, to the person who puts them on the shelf, to the person who eventually buys it and brings it home! We can even say a little or a big thanks to all those processes and people involved.

'Mindful' Movement Songs

I Can Run As Fast As You - Play School: Oomba Baroomba
This is a wonderful song for the children to compare body and feeling sensations between being very active/energetic with much more slower and calmer movement feelings.

The Tiger - Play School: Oomba Baroomba
This is a great slow mindful movement exercise which also builds some self-regulation as the children need to try and manage their impulses to "roar" loudly.

The Black Cat - Play School: Oomba Baroomba
This is another great slow mindful movement exercise. Get the children to really notice physical senses, touching the ground, and making very slow and purposeful movements.

A Sailor Went To Sea - Play School: 50 Best Songs
This song is a great song to promote movement-based self-regulation, memory/sequencing, and self-monitoring.

R-O-B-O-T - Play School: 50 Best Songs
This is a great song to sing before or after a robot relaxation or breathing activity, or a slow-motion walking exercise.

Mr Clicketty Cane/Wash Your Face With Orange Juice - Peter Combe: Spaghetti Bolognaise
This song is another great song to promote movement-based self-regulation, memory/sequencing, and self-monitoring. It begins with 1 step and builds to 6.

Take a Breath - Sesame Street: The Best of Elmo
This is a great song to introduce before or after a mindful breathing or relaxation activity.

Other ABC Kids Song Ideas:

Small Potatoes! – Feelings, Science, Art
Big Block Singsong – Waiting, Mad, Robot, Shapes



Mindful Book List

Family Movies, Storybooks or Audiobooks:

(Disney, Pixar)
Inside Out (emotions)
Wall-E (noticing/awareness)
Ratatouille (senses)

Emotions:

'The colour monster' by Anna Llenas
'In my heart' by Jo Witek & Christine Roussey
'Feelings' by Richard Jones & Libby Walden
'My many coloured days' by Dr. Seuss, Steve Johnson & Lou Fancher

Noticing & Awareness:

'The sloth who came to stay' by Margaret Wild & Vivienne To
'The listening walk' by Paul Showers & Alik
'The noisy paint box' by Barb Rosenstock & Mary GrandPre
'Planet Kindergarten' by Sue Ganz-Schmitt & Shane Prigmore

About Your Brain & Body:

'Your fantastic Elastic brain' by JoAnn Deak & Sarah Ackerley
'Hey warrior' by Karen Young
'This book is out of control' by Richard Byrne
'Power Down, Little Robot' by Anna Staniszewski & Tim Zeltner



Curiosity & Waiting:

- 'The Golden Egg Book' by Margaret Wise Brown & Leonard Weisgard
- 'Waiting is not easy!' by Mo Willems
- 'How did that get in my lunchbox' by Chris Butterworth & Lucia Gaggiotti
- 'Du Iz Tak?' by Carson Ellis

Other 'Mindful' ABC Kids Shows & Episodes

The Floogals – any episode! Maybe start with 'Popcorn' episode

Play School Art Time - Still Life, Portraits, Patterns, Shapes

Play School Story Time - The Sloth Who Came To Stay (Myf Warhurst), Where The Forest Meets The Sea (Julia Zemiro), Imagine – Pia Miranda

Play School Stop, Look, Listen series

Bluey - Hide and Seek, Rug Island, The Magic Xylophone

Grandpa Honeyant Storytime - Two Hearted Numbat, Caterpillar And Butterfly, You And Me – Our Place

ABC Kids Listen Podcasts - Soundwalks, Noisy by Nature, Story Salad

Play School Episode Theme notes - How Do You Feel Today, Five Senses, Helping Hands, Fun and Games, Let's Experiment, My Favourite Things

Sesame Street - Shape Hunt, Martian Mission, Simon Says

Other possible 'Mindful' ABC Kids shows to check out:

Curious George, Pablo, Pocoyo, Dot., Octonauts, Odd Squad, Wallykazam!, Arthur, Daniel Tiger's Neighbourhood

Growth Mindset:

- 'What do you do with a problem' by Kobi Yamada & Mae Besom
- 'Rosie Revere, Engineer' by Andrea Beaty & David Roberts
- 'The most magnificent thing' by Ashley Spires
- 'Beautiful Oops!' by Barney Saltzberg

Different/New Perspectives:

- 'Here we are, Notes for living on planet earth' by Oliver Jeffers
- 'They all saw a cat' by Brendan Wenzel
- 'Duck! Rabbit!' by Amy Krouse Rosenthal & Tom Lichtenheld
- 'The true story of the three little pigs' by Jon Scieszka & Lane Smith

Kindness & Gratitude:

- 'Those shoes' by Maribeth Boelts & Noah Jones
- 'The invisible boy' by Trudy Ludwig & Patrice Barton
- 'Ordinary Mary's Extraordinary Deed' by Emily Pearson & Fumi Kosaka
- 'The thankful book' by Todd Parr

Connection to country/Indigenous Knowledges:

- 'You and Me Murrawee' by Kerri Hashmi & Felicity Marshall
- 'Two hearted numbat' by Ambelin Kwaymullina & Ezekiel Kwaymullina
- 'Where the forest meets the sea' by Jeannie Baker
- 'You are stardust' by Elin Kelsey & Soyeon Kim

Play School

Notes for Educators and Families Series 349 Special: Mindfully Me



Additional Mindfulness resources for Adults, Families, & Educators

The Play School 'Mindfully Me' episode! Remember, you can find it on ABC iView website or the ABC Kids App for tablets and iPads.

Queensland Brain Institute (QBI) - The BRAIN Activity Booklet for kids
<https://qbi.uq.edu.au/brain-activity-booklet>

ABC Catalyst - The Science of Meditation
<https://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/meditation/11016548>

ABC Catalyst - The Mindfulness Experiment
<https://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/the-mindfulness-experiment/11017418>

Zero To Three – Mindfulness For Parents
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2268-mindfulness-for-parents>

Zero To Three – Mindfulness For Early Childhood Professionals
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2269-mindfulness-for-early-childhood-professionals>

Getting Started With Mindfulness: A Toolkit For Early Childhood Organisations (Zero To Three)
<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/2896-getting-started-with-mindfulness-a-toolkit-for-early-childhood-organizations>

MindUp, Pre-K to Grade 2 Curriculum, Scholastic
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/mindup/>

MindUp For Families – Support Pack
www.mindup.org.uk/families/

Becoming A Stop, Breathe & Think Classroom, Elementary School Edition
https://www.stopbreathethink.com/wp-content/uploads/SBT_Elementary-Intro-Packet.pdf

App & Web-based Mindfulness examples:
Stop, Breathe, Think (SBT) Kids (App & Website)
<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/kids/>

SBT For Educators (includes classroom resources)
<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/educators/>

Mind Yeti (Now Free on YouTube, Vimeo, Spotify, iTunes)
<https://www.mindyeti.com/v2/s/pricing>

Insight Timer, Meditation for Kids (App & Website)
<https://insighttimer.com/meditation-topics/children>

Credits

A/Series Producer
Bryson Hall

Executive Producer
Jan Stradling

Notes for Educators and Families
Dr Ben Deery (The University of Melbourne)