A Basic Mindfulness & Meditation Handbook

Urban Mindfulness in Brick City & Beyond

Newark Center for Meditative Culture
Our intent in writing this handbook was to benefit individuals and families new to the practice of meditation and mindfulness. It will introduce you to the basic concepts, practices, tools, and tips to gently guide you as you explore, experiment and evaluate the role of meditation in your life.

Take your time. Try out the various meditative and mindfulness forms and techniques. See what works for you — what fits your situation (time, location, access, etc.)

Don’t expect to become a master in one week. Everyday’s practice will not necessarily be the same. Some days you may find that you are able to maintain focus throughout the meditation effortlessly.

On other days you might barely keep your thoughts, feelings and sensory perceptions from pulling at your attention. This is the path. Keep practicing. Practice makes perfect practice! Let “perfect practice” (consistent, self-compassionate, expectationless) be the goal.

Finding a guided meditation group near you can also help. Establishing a new practice is often easier when done in a social setting!

— May the focus be with you
If you are new to the practice of mindfulness and meditation, urban mindfulness can be a challenge. We are constantly tested by bombardments to our senses.

With our minds often distracted, frustrated, ticked off, in fight-or-flight mode, or simply stressed out and weary — it might seem impossible to meditate.

It’s not!

There’s also the illusion (and excuse) that we are too busy.

We’re not!

You might not feel like you can find the perfect spot to meditate.

You can!

“Remember that you are surrounded by perfect places to meditate. Some might seem better than others at first glance, but you can always find a good spot to sit in silence. ... ... I’ve heard of people finding all sorts of inventive places to meditate. One solution I’ve heard people come up with is meditating in a stairwell.”

— Russell Simmons

No matter whether you are spiritual, religious, or secular in your lifestyle, no matter what forms of meditations and contemplations you might practice — it all comes down to trying to be mindful and aware while:

• sitting

• walking

• lying down

• or any other posture, be it momentary or stationary, that you use during the day.

And, trying to be mindful and aware in various activities you might embark on during the day:

• waking up

• working

• playing

• eating

• going to sleep.
FAQs: Mindfulness & Meditation

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the cultivation of sustained awareness by paying attention purposely in the present moment and without judgement.

With consistency, motivation, and gentleness it can be a powerful and healing discipline. However, the seriousness of cultivating mindfulness is also play!

Playfulness and lightness of being are important elements of well-being. So if you think this is for you — get experimenting with this love affair of simply being in the present moment!

What is meditation?

Since ancient times every form of religion or spiritual practice has forms of meditation or contemplation. Meditation can use silence, sound, stillness, or motion. Meditation is essentially training our attention so that we can be more aware, more present in the here and now, both of our inner workings and what's happening around us.

What isn't meditation?

• It’s not a religion but it can enhance your own faith or be practiced in an entirely secular way.
• It doesn’t require having a certain personality type or background.
• It doesn’t require a huge amount of time every day.
• It doesn’t eliminate negative emotions and rough times from your life.
• It’s not meant to stop you from thinking or to only have positive thoughts.
• It doesn’t mean you have to withdraw from the “real” world or not have opinions, passions, or fun.
• It’s not indulgent, or self-centered.

Two Modes of Mindfulness Practice: Formal and Informal

FORMAL means engaging in making some time every day or most days to practice — using guided meditations and joining a sitting group for support. INFORMAL means letting the practice spill over naturally and gently into your daily life — at home, work, and play. A formal morning and evening meditation can bookend your informal mindfulness to reinforce this embodied practice. Ultimately, they can become a seamless whole.

Resource on mindfulness: Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life; Copyright ©2012, 2016 Jon Kabat-Zinn.
What are some types of meditation?

Mindfulness Meditation is currently very popular, especially as it pertains to stress reduction in the form of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training.

Tranquility Meditation quiets the mind and makes it more focused. The most popular type is meditation on the breath but there are many forms of tranquility or concentration meditation.

Insight Meditation is an investigative meditation that requires clear awareness of what is happening as it happens.

Kindness Meditation softens the mind, making it more gentle and wieldy, as well as protecting it.

Why meditate?

- Develop a calmer, less distracted mind
- Spot assumptions
- Stop limiting yourself
- Reprioritize what’s important
- Become a friend to yourself in any situation
- Become more tolerant and kinder to others
- Creates a portable safety resource
- Less wasting time controlling the uncontrollable
- Access hidden qualities and integrity
- Access more energy
- Develop a happy mind.

FAQs:

Mindfulness & Meditation

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What’s the right attitude?

1. Don’t expect anything
2. Don’t strain
3. Don’t rush
4. Let go
5. Accept things as they arise
6. Be gentle with yourself
7. Investigate yourself
8. View all problems as challenges
9. Don’t ponder
10. Don’t dwell upon contrasts.

Practice can lead to:

STRESS REDUCTION
- MORE PEACE OF MIND!
Step 1: Creating a Sacred Space

Making Good Meditation Associations: Creating a Space and Habits Conducive to Meditation Practice

First Association
START WITH A SEAT

Choose a comfortable but firm cushion or chair.

Develop Consistency
USE BASIC TRIGGERS

Use the same space or room each day. Find a comfortable posture that suits you. Face the same direction each day. If you can, adjust the temperature to be not too hot or cold or prepare your clothing to be proper. Adjust your lighting to be not too bright and not in your face.

Set a Tone
ADD UNIQUE TRIGGERS

If you like scents, use an oil or incense, the same scent each day. Try infusing the room with a colored light, the same color each day. Open and close your session with a timer chime or bell, the same sound each day.

Set Intentions
PLAN YOUR SESSION

Determine the length you want your session to be. Decide what style of meditation you will use.

Follow-up & Reflect
TRY A MEDITATION JOURNAL

Find a fresh notebook to jot down reoccurring thoughts, emotions, feelings, what’s happening in your life. You can both write and sketch.

Edited from Making Good Meditation Associations by Kazi of OurShamanSong.com.

Step 2: A Comfortable Sitting Position

As we know, nothing is permanent, so you may need to adjust your sitting style from time to time.

Lotus This is the most stable but most difficult position, most can’t do it. Each foot is placed up on the opposite thigh. This is symmetrical and very solid, but unless it’s easy for you, one can easily injure their knees trying to force it.

Half Lotus The left foot is placed up onto the right thigh and the right leg is tucked under. This position is slightly asymmetrical so upper body may need to compensate to keep itself straight.

Burmese-style The legs are crossed and the tops/sides of both feet rest on the floor. The knees should ideally also rest on the floor.

Kneeling You can use a meditation bench, which keeps the weight off your feet and helps keep your spine straight. You can kneel using a pillow between your legs. If using a meditation cushion, it is often placed “on edge.” Or you can kneel without any pillow or bench, sitting on your heels.

Chair Sit closer to the front edge to hold your own spine up and stay alert instead of resting against the chair back. The hips should be slightly higher than the knees to keep you from slouching. Keep your feet flat on the floor. If helpful, you can use a cushion behind you to help keep your back straight. You can compensate for your height by using a cushion under the feet or under the buttocks.
Step 3: Preflight Your Posture

The aim is to allow for optimal performance and to balance being firm and alert, but relaxed.

**Position** Choose a position that is relatively easy without much struggle, not necessarily the position that you would prefer. Try not to slouch.

**Knees** should ideally rest on floor in cross-legged positions or prop them with cushions/towels so as not to strain them.

**Back** Imagine the top of your head being pulled upward, which straightens your spine. Then just let the muscles go soft and relax. There should be a slight curve in the lower back that helps hold the body upright effortlessly.

**Head** should feel like it’s balanced effortlessly atop your spine.

**Chin** is slightly tucked in and back of neck relaxed.

**Mouth** is kept closed and breath through your nose. Tongue can be pressed lightly against upper palate helping to reduce the need to swallow.

**Eyes** can be closed or you can keep them open with eyelids lowered and gaze resting on the ground about 2-3 feet in front of you.

**Breath** should flow naturally in and out, letting the belly and spine move gently with the breathing. Take a few deep breaths into the upper chest to allow your chest to open before you meditate. Relax on the out-breath, keeping a sense of space across the front of the chest.

**Hands** should be supported slightly so there’s no strain in your shoulders or upper back. Below are a few main hand positions to choose from. Use what is comfortable to you.

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Step 4: 5 Minute Breath Meditation

This classic meditation practice is designed to help us gain tranquility by teaching us to focus on the in and out breath.

Find a relaxed, comfortable position seated on a chair or on the floor on a cushion. Keep your back upright, but not too tight, hands resting wherever they’re comfortable. Tongue on the roof of your mouth or wherever it’s comfortable.

And you can notice your body from the inside. Noticing the shape of your body, the weight, the touch.

And let yourself relax and become curious about your body seated here — the sensations of your body, the touch, the connection with the floor, the chair. Relax any areas of tightness or tension. Just breathe, soften.

And now begin to tune into your breath in your body. Feeling the natural flow of breath. Don’t need to do anything to your breath. Not long, not short, just natural.

And notice where you feel your breath in your body. It might be in your abdomen. It may be in your chest or throat or in your nostrils.

See if you can feel the sensations of breath — one breath at a time. When one breath ends, the next breath begins.

Now as you do this you might notice that your mind might start to wander. You might start thinking about other things. If this happens this is not a problem. It’s very natural. Just notice that your mind has wandered. You can say “thinking” or “wandering” in your head softly. And then gently redirect your attention right back to the breathing.

So we’ll stay with this for some time in silence — just a short time noticing our breath. From time to time getting lost in thought and returning to our breath.

See if you can be really kind to yourself in the process. And once again you can notice your body, your whole body seated here, let yourself relax even more deeply.

And then offer yourself some appreciation for doing this practice today — whatever that means to you.

Finding a sense of ease and wellbeing for yourself and this day.

[bell rings]

After you are comfortable with a 5 minute session, you might try making them a little longer.

English and multi-language audio guided meditations available at: http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations
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Yoga, taichi, qigong, dance, walking, and plain old exercise done mindfully helps reverse the prevalence of disuse atrophy from our culture’s quite sedentary lifestyle, especially for those with pain and chronic illnesses. Doing a mindful movement practice just before you sit down for meditation can also help to settle your mind if you are not quite ready to sit. It is great to integrate some form of movement meditation along with sitting meditation.

Legs Falling Asleep
Don’t worry — adjust your position slightly, then massage them before getting up.

Urges to Move
Try not to give in, but if so, just adjust your position slowly and mindfully.

Wanting to Give Up
Draw from your inner courage and faith! Sometimes it’s just the showing up for your meditation session that counts!

But, keep in mind the below...

Common Issues
You’re not alone!

Meditation is not for everyone
Meditation and mindfulness practices generally have beneficial effects on most. But occasionally some may experience discomfiting effects (rapid heartbeat, disturbing images, anxiety, etc.) which may cause them alarm.

If this occurs we recommend that you cease your practice for the day. With open eyes take a few deep breaths, followed by splashing water on your face and allow yourself to return to a relaxed state. Return to your practice on another day.

If the experience returns with continued practice, we suggest you discontinue and seek advice of your physician or therapist before returning to your practice.

Movement Meditation

Not quite ready for sitting meditation? ...then move!

Yoga, taichi, qigong, dance, walking, and plain old exercise done mindfully helps reverse the prevalence of disuse atrophy from our culture’s quite sedentary lifestyle, especially for those with pain and chronic illnesses. Doing a mindful movement practice just before you sit down for meditation can also help to settle your mind if you are not quite ready to sit.
You would be surprised — sometimes the angriest people end up being the most loving. We all have potential to uncover this beautiful aspect of ourselves. Metta meditation is a way to first give kindness to yourself and then to expand to others.

This aspirational meditation covers just about all we might need for our basic happiness. Pictured is one version. You can choose to use all the phrases, just a few, or create your own that resonates with you. It’s best to stick with that choice for at least a few weeks of consistent practice.

The Basic Practice
Sit comfortably. Silently in your mind, say each word, each phrase, slowly, and with conviction. Pause between each phrase to give yourself a moment to experience the feeling within your body without the words. Repeat these phrases three times in your mind.

We use these words to build up muscle memory in our heart/mind. In time, you will be able to drop the words and simply radiate wordless kindness or love. The practice above is just the preliminary step to developing metta.

Target Practice
You will go from the easiest target of friendliness to the most difficult. Though giving kindness to ourselves is sometimes the most difficult target, only once you’ve learned love to yourself meditatively, should you then move on to others.

Advanced Practice
We often use a few minutes of metta practice either at the beginning or ending of a meditation session. But, loving-kindness is a serious meditation practice on its own and it can be developed with the help of a teacher.

May I be safe
May I be healthy
May I be happy
May I be at ease
May I be filled with kindness
May I be peaceful
1. **Follow 3 breaths**
   If you start to feel overwhelmed, take a quick, centering moment — as short as following three breaths — to connect with a deeper sense of yourself.

2. **Acknowledgments**
   Mentally acknowledge those who have helped you learn the skills you have, who have taught you to be better at your job. We are all part of the big picture.

3. **Relaxed Holding**
   Notice how you are holding something in your hand—a steering wheel or a cup, for instance. What is the quality of your grip? Sometimes we exert so much force holding things, it exacerbates tension without our realizing it.

4. **Nourish yourself**
   Eat your lunch or snack, or drink your tea mindfully, noticing the colors, flavors, and the texture of what you are eating or drinking.

5. **Investigate yourself**
   Take a few minutes to investigate how you would like to be perceived at the conclusion of a meeting, an email, and a call. Would you like to come across as fearsome, gentle, resolute, inclusive, open-minded, unwavering? How do you feel when you perceive others that way?

6. **Receive, Review, Reflect, Respond**
   Read an entire email twice before composing a response. Imagine yourself being the recipient of your words. Before sending an important email, send it to yourself first. When you open it as the recipient, you’ll take in the tone, implications, and omissions that you might otherwise miss.

7. **Compassion in Conflict**
   In a situation of potential conflict, let compassion guide you. What would you want someone to say to you if they were upset with you? What would you want to hear if you knew there were two legitimate sides of the story?

8. **The art of listening**
   For an upcoming one-on-one conversation, resolve to listen more and speak less.

9. **The art of loving-kindness**
   At the beginning of a meeting, silently offer the phrases of kindness to either yourself to calm down or to all at the meeting.

10. **Make caring connections**
    As you begin or continue your mindfulness practice, use your new sensitivity to make better connections with colleagues, neighbors, and friends who share your values and challenges.

11. **Helping happiness**
    If you are feeling down or discouraged, consider helping someone. Science has identified a happiness-helping feedback loop. The more you help, the happier you can be.

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Excerpted and edited from the book *Real Happiness at Work: Meditations for Accomplishment, Achievement, and Peace*; Copyright ©2013 by Sharon Salzberg.
Why a turtle mandala?

Turtles are said to be easygoing, patient, and wise creatures. The turtle spirit animal is an important figure to many people and cultures around the world. The turtle energy is said to be divine and pure and might help with keeping focused.

You can imagine yourself as a wise and patient person while coloring this mandala!
What is a mandala?

The literal meaning of the word mandala is circle. This ancient Eastern art is an extremely popular expression and coloring them can help people regain focus, confidence, and concentration and help reduce anxiety. Mandalas have become a popular symbol of meditation — aiding in appreciating the beauty of nature and forming a greater connection with yourself!
Eating mindfully is a practice that supports ourselves, our families, our society, and the planet, and it is something everyone of any age can do. Leaders of organizations and communities can model responsible and compassionate eating. We can support the people who govern to engage in mindful consumption so that we can reduce the violence and suffering in our community.

Mindful eating and conscientious consumption is an ancient practice with profound applications in our current food-abundant yet food-desert environment. There’s no need to worry if your mind wanders off while doing these exercises, but as soon as you realize it has, just bring your attention back to the breath.

**Shopping**

Bring your mindfulness of eating to every food purchase that you make. Accept that you can’t always buy the best quality, but be skillful and smart in your purchases. • Be aware of the environmental impact on products you buy in plastic and paper. • Use reusable bags. • Feel gratitude at all that it took to get the food to the store for you — from farm, to processing, to shipping, to stocking — and whomever worked to help you purchase the groceries.

**Prep to Plate**

First, try to stay in the kitchen through prep to plate — not running off to do other things in the meantime. • Cooking provides a wonderful opportunity to be present, mindful and aware, as opposed to being distracted, stressed, or overwhelmed. It’s an opportunity to train the mind, to understand what it means to be present, appreciative, and patient. You will get back in touch with the food that you eat and mind-body connections. • Recognize the different smells, fragrances, flavors, and foods — first raw and then as they cook — and note the changes and nuances. • Set each plate-setting with kindness.

Pages 12 and 13 adapted from Thich Nhat Hanh teachings.
Gratitude

Many of us have abandoned prayer or meal contemplations that were common as we grew up. A moment of gratitude — simple appreciation — before and/or after each meal can make a big difference to our mind and body.

Eating

Practice not taking another bite before you have swallowed what is in your mouth — a tough practice, but try it! • Chew, chew, chew until the morsel almost vanishes before you swallow. • Observe how the food with liquid and heat in your mouth turns to liquid. • Be aware of nuance of flavors on the tongue — sweet, sour, salty, bitter, umami (savory) and the textures of the food.

Mindful Dinner Table Conversation

• Present Moment Awareness: Speak about things that nourish your awareness of the food and your being together, cultivating happiness. Thinking about something other than the food and the act of eating means not being in the present moment. • Silence: We can’t always eat in silence, but be comfortable in silence. Practice a meal by yourself, eating mindfully only aware of the food, without reading or listening to anything but your mouth chewing! • Smiling: Sitting at the table and eating with other people is a chance to offer an authentic smile. When family or community members sit together and cannot smile at each other, the situation is an unstable one.

Enjoy Washing Dishes

Try washing every bowl, every dish as if you are bathing a baby — breathing in, feeling joy — breathing out, smiling. But perhaps you are tired or lazy! You see a big pile of dishes and you don’t want to wash them. But as soon as you roll up your sleeves in front of them, it is not difficult any more.

Waste Not, Want Not

• Take only what you need on your plate and go for a second helping so that you aren’t discarding food from your plate. • Be skillful in using leftovers or freeze them immediately for later use.
Mindful Effort

Journaling Affirmations
You can use these prompts for personal journaling, discussion with family, or with young people in your life. Remember there are no right or wrong responses.

**Permission**

Today I give myself permission to feel my _______.

I will not allow anyone to tell me my feelings or experiences of _______ are not real.

I give myself permission to grieve by _______.

I give myself permission to protest, resist, and fight back by _______.

I give myself permission to not engage with _______.

I give myself permission to honor my body, spirit and its needs by _______.

**Fearless**

I am positively fearless about _______.

Today I feel _______.

I need to be more gentle with myself when _______.

I can nourish myself by _______.

I am proud of myself for _______.

Today I will not let fear _______.

I feel most in my power when _______.

I feel most fearless when _______.

**Compassion**

I pledge to be more compassionate with _______.

My body is trying to tell me _______.

I need to take responsibility for _______.

I commit to being more gentle with _______.

I am working not to project my _______.

I am proud of myself for _______.

My body affirms me every day by _______.

I am _______.

**Gratitude**

Today it made me smile when _______.

My friends today helped me _______.

I am grateful I could call _______ today to talk about _______.

Today my body felt _______.

I am proud of myself for _______.

I am grateful for _______.

I had fun today when _______.

Source for this spread: BEAM Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective https://wwwbeamcommunity/
Coping with Loss and Grief
You can use Worden’s 4 Tasks of Mourning as a non-linear process to healing in a way that works for you.

Keep in mind that:
• They are tasks people generally move through in different ways.
• Community care and cultural, spiritual rituals are powerful tools to help ourselves process grief.
• These tasks cannot be forced. You cannot force someone through grief or the mourning process.
• There is no ‘right way’ to mourn. Grief is the feeling, mourning is the process of expressing and navigating grief.

1 Accept the reality of the loss.
Acceptance can be a long process. We may go through waves of acceptance and then shift back into denial. This is okay. Be patient with yourself and know there is no timeline. Seek support from community.

2 Process the pain of the grief.
Everyone processes pain and grief differently. Some folks may talk to a therapist, who is trained to help people heal on their journey. Some folks may create art, look to their faith, music, or write to help themselves process. Find ways that work for you.

3 Adjust to a world without those who have passed.
Living without our loved ones can be incredibly difficult. It may take months or years before we learn how to be in the world without those who have passed on. Once again, there is no ‘right’ timeline. Everyone will adjust differently.

4 Find an enduring connection with those you’ve lost.
Find ways to honor the things you cherished about loved ones. They may not be with you physically, but the lessons, memories, and connections you made with them can still be part of your life. You can use photos, art, or altars to honor their memory. They will always be a part of your life story.

Engaging in Your Community
Serving our specific neighborhood and general community, mindfully and with compassion is an integral part of our mental well-being. You feel good, they feel good, and it betters society — all the way around.
Mindfulness, simply put, is being focused on the present moment. This skill improves emotional awareness and reduces stress. A parent can help their child achieve mindfulness by modeling mindfulness themselves, or by teaching their child to focus on the present moment.

Below you will find mindfulness techniques you can practice with your child during a busy daily routine. Focus on doing one technique very well each day, rather than trying to do many.

### Waking Up

#### Five Senses
With your child, take a few moments to explore the morning through your senses. Take turns naming things you see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. Try to notice things you would normally tune out, like the distant buzz of a neighbor’s lawnmower, or the softness of a pillow.

#### Body Scan
Starting with your toes and working your way up to the top of your head, notice the sensations in each part of your body. For example, notice the feeling of clothing resting on your legs, tension in your muscles, or cool air on your face.

### Meals

#### Mindful Check-In
Start a conversation about the here-and-now by asking your child to share one thing they are feeling physically, one thing they are thinking about, and one thing they are feeling emotionally. If your child has difficulty putting their emotions into words, try giving them options to choose from.

#### Mindful Eating
Rather than rushing through a meal, eat slowly and mindfully. Notice how the food looks, and how it smells. What does it taste like? What does the food feel like on your tongue? Take turns sharing different things you notice about the food, no matter how minor the observations might seem.

### Travel

#### I Spy
In this game, your child will “spy” a color they see and ask you to guess what the object is. Playing this game will allow your child to take in their surroundings and notice things they might otherwise miss.

#### The Alphabet Game
While driving or riding, ask your child to look for words in their environment beginning with each letter of the alphabet, in order. For example, a billboard with the word “Advertise” would start the game.
School

Mindfulness Bracelet
With your child, spend an afternoon making bracelets that are fun, and comfortable to wear. Every time you notice the bracelet on your wrist, take a moment to note one thing you see, hear, smell, and feel. Practice at home to get your child in the habit of using this skill even when they are not with you.

Square Breathing
Teach your child this breathing technique to help them be in the present moment at any time. Draw a square on paper, or in the air with your finger. Perform one step of the technique while drawing each line of the square. Time each step to last about four seconds.

Free Time

Mindfulness Box
With your child, decorate a box large enough to hold several small objects. Fill the box with interesting items found in your home and yard, such as feathers, rocks, flowers, etc. Encourage your child to explore their surroundings with more than just sight — also noticing the texture, weight, and smell of each item. Keep adding to your box, and review it from time to time for further practice. Try to notice something new about each of the objects inside.

Bed Time

Progressive Muscle Relaxation.
This activity will help your child become aware of the sensations throughout their body, and it’s a great way to begin relaxing the body for sleep. Read the following script slowly, allowing time for practice:

“Close your eyes, and pretend that you’re holding two juicy oranges—one in each hand. Start to squeeze the oranges by making fists. Squeeze hard to get all the juice out. Notice what your fists feel like when you squeeze hard. Now let go of the oranges, and let your hands rest. Notice how good it feels to relax your hands.

Next, pretend you’re sitting on the beach. Squeeze your toes as if you are trying to pick up sand between them. Hold onto the sand by squeezing even tighter. Now, let go of the sand, and relax your feet. Notice how your feet feel different when you let them rest.

Finally, pretend like a fly landed on your nose. You want to get it off, without touching it with your hands. Scrunch up your face, wiggle your nose, just go crazy! Keep moving your face so the bug will fly away.

Now, stop, and let your whole face relax. Pay attention to how it feels.”

Use what works!
1. **Establish your own mindfulness practice.**
   Come up with five minutes a day to practice mindfulness. It could be a seated meditation first thing in the morning, before bedtime, or even while taking a shower. Practice it every day. The key is to focus on all your senses while observing your breath; accept your thoughts and let them go without judgment. Think of this as a daily workout for your mind, so you are prepared to face the world without being overwhelmed.

2. **Practice “special playtime” with your child.**
   Carve out five minutes a day, at least five days a week, to play mindfully with each child in your family. During this time, take their lead! Use targeted praise for every little thing they do and refrain from using commands. While kids know how to be mindful, this experience encourages them to keep at it while teaching us how to accept them for who they are.

3. **Practice self-love.**
   Take every opportunity to have time to yourself. Prioritize it — even when your plate is full. Learning to know and love ourselves allows us in turn to be less judgmental to our life situations.

4. **Use empathy when others aren't at their best.**
   Everyone has bad days—our partners, kids, and us included. When things heat up, put yourself in your family members’ shoes and accept the difficulties of that moment. Detect stress in your body before it triggers mental stress. Model the behavior that you expect from others when you’re having a rough time.

5. **Use calm-down time.**
   Techniques like deep breathing and creating personal space are good ways to get discomfort out of our systems. If you are outdoors or in public when your child has a tantrum, prioritize safety and then find a safe spot to help the child practice calming down. Remember, it is not to be used as a punishment but to teach the child self-regulation. These same solutions can be applied to adults!

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**Use what works!**

Author: Ayman Mukerji Househam  Source: October 2016 [http://rubinmuseum.org/blog/tips-for-creating-a-more-mindful-family-practice](http://rubinmuseum.org/blog/tips-for-creating-a-more-mindful-family-practice)
The Mindful Family

Meaningful & Mindful Meal Tips

1. **Shutdown all gadgets.**
   Before cooking and eating the meal make sure all distractions are turned off (smartphones, televisions, stereos, etc.). Instead, use the time to connect and talk to one another.

2. **Take turns making dinner.**
   Assign the responsibility to a family member each day of the week. Pre-plan meals by going grocery shopping for ingredients during weekends. Think about preparing meals using recipes passed down from generation to generation.

3. **Experiment.**
   Family meals are a great opportunity to try new meals. Consider using a fruit, vegetable, or meat ingredient that you have never used before. If it is an international dish or ingredient, consider teaching your children about the country and history of the particular item.

4. **Set the table and wash dishes as a family.**
   Responsibility should be shared amongst all family members. The person cooking should receive help from beginning to end of the meal — from set up to clean up. Make this a ritual for your family.

5. **Encourage each child to talk about their day, dreams, and fears.**
   Hold the judgment and listen. Provide each child the space to speak candidly and openly.

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**haiku homebodies**

Some mindful family fun making non-rhyming poems together.

A haiku (pronounced hi-koo) is a 17-syllable poem made up of three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables, but you can be imaginative and break the rules such as 3,6,3 or 6,9,6 syllable patterns. Get to it!

**SAMPLES:**

*An old pond*

*A frog jumps in*

*the sound of water*

*I don't do dishes*

*My room is a garbage dump*

*Mom is not happy*

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Source: Mindful Living Network, April 2018 https://www.mindfullivingnetwork.com/
On Getting Outdoors

Taking Breaks in Nature

Hey you! Yes, YOU! Have you gone outside today? Not to get from one place to another, but to actually, and intentionally, take some time out to bask in nature’s glory? If not, here’s 5 reasons why you should:

1 **Boost Your Mood:** Whenever you’re having “one of those days,” step outside for a moment to look up at the sky or watch swaying tree branches. Being in nature increases pleasant feelings and makes you feel better emotionally. Nature deprivation — a lack of time in the natural world — has been associated with depression.

2 **Improve Your General Health:** Sunlight and oxygen are nature’s medicine. Those who get outside on a regular basis have been shown to have stronger immune systems than those who stay indoors. If you want to keep yourself well, make it a point to get outside and breathe fresh air.

3 **Relieve Stress:** These days our brains are on overload! With the majority of our time spent staring at screens, it’s so easy to become overwhelmed from day-to-day. Research reveals that environments can either increase or reduce our stress, impacting our bodies. Fortunately, levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, are lowered after time spent outside.

4 **Reset Your Brain:** Along with stress comes a lack of focus. Studies have found that nature replenishes cognitive resources, restoring our ability to concentrate and pay attention. On average, people who accessed greener areas experienced an immediate improvement in mental health and less mental distress.

5 **Self-Care 101:** Self-care encourages you to maintain a healthy relationship with yourself. When you pay adequate attention to your well-being, you’re reinvigorated to accomplish your goals. With all the benefits that spending time in nature provides, you’re loving and caring for yourself in a simple, but major way when you venture outside.

So the next time you’re feeling sad, overwhelmed, or sluggish, look no further than the great outdoors. It’s easy, inexpensive, and yields many benefits. Trade online for outside — go for a bike ride, a walk in the park, try gardening, or simply grab some like-minded friends for a hike. Your body and mind will thank you for it.

Article by Keyana Jones, Hikeolution.com.
**On Joy**

Have yourself a heapin’ serving. 
Have seconds. Or thirds. 
‘Cause 
joy is the justice, 
we must give ourselves.  

— J. Drew Lanham

**On Giving**

You might not be ready for kindness meditation. But you can do a little “as if” you like. Perhaps you’ve got too much anger in you for even that. Then try starting slowly through small acts of giving:

- Give a little gift to yourself or someone else. Gifts don’t have to cost anything. You can give a small treat to yourself on a hard day. Or, open a door for someone — little acts of kindness add up to big-heartedness.

- Give the gift of a smile to a stranger. Even tougher, give a little smile to someone you can’t stand. :-) It may be fake but it might change something for the better.

- Give the gift of an “inner smile” to someone, even yourself. A smile from your heart doesn’t need to appear on your face, but a slight uplift of the corners of your mouth can help!

**On Walking**

These Green Jewels within the city are great environments for practicing mindfulness. It is easy to turn a stroll through the park into a mindfulness practice. Find a path to walk in the park. Stay to either edge of the path so that bikers, joggers, and so on are not obstructed and may pass you easily. Before you begin walking, say to yourself that you will stay in touch with your senses and bodily reactions as you walk. Begin walking at a slower than normal pace.

As you walk you want to keep your attention on what you are “noticing.” When your feet touch and lift off the ground, what do you feel? Is there an aroma in the air? What are the different sounds you are hearing? Fix your gaze on objects far in the distance and hold that gaze for a few minutes. Then fix your gaze 6 feet in front of you on the ground and hold that for a while. Don’t always walk the same path if you can help it. One day, week, month walk on the grass, another on concrete or dirt.

You can touch, smell, taste natural objects that catch your attention. Pine cones, flowers, leaves, soil. Whatever captures your interest. Approach your walk like a small child that is discovering the world anew. Don’t assume that you “already know.” Allow yourself to “discover” something new. At the end of your walk ask yourself, “What did I notice today?”

— Ib’nallah S. Kazi

Excerpt from the poem *Joy is the Justice We Give Ourselves*; Copyright ©2021 by J. Drew Lanham.
“The mind can go in a thousand directions, but on this beautiful path...with each step, a flower blooms.”

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