Mindfulness and meditation activities

**The following mindfulness and meditation activities can be used both with adolescents and adults as a tool to cope with and manage stress. The practice of mindfulness helps us to be aware of our thoughts, feelings, and sensations as they arise, and to notice what we are feeling and thinking, without judgment. Mindfulness can help us develop skills to help us calm down and release tension. Mindful moments can happen every day, at any time, and in any place.**

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

1. Find a comfortable position either lying down on your back or seated with your legs crossed, stretched out or in a different comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes if you would like to. If you choose to leave your eyes open, allow your gaze to soften and shift downward.
3. Rest both of your hands on your stomach, or one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest.
4. Slowly take a deep breath, paying attention to your hands moving up and down as your stomach rises and falls.
5. Slowly take five more deep breaths, again concentrating on your hands going up and down on top of your stomach.
6. If it is helpful, you can visualize breathing in one colour of smoke, and breathing out a different colour of smoke.
7. If a thought comes into your mind, acknowledge it, thank it for arriving, and let it pass as you bring your attention back to your hands moving up and down as you breathe.
8. Now, take three normal breaths.
9. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and notice any sensations and new feelings.

THOUGHTS ON A LEAF

1. Find a comfortable position either lying down on your back or seated with your legs crossed, stretched out or in a different comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes if you would like to. If you choose to leave your eyes open, allow your gaze to soften and shift downward.
3. Rest both of your hands on your stomach, or one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest.
4. Slowly take a deep breath, paying attention to your hands moving up and down as your stomach rises and falls.
5. Now begin to visualize yourself by a stream of water. Look around. What does it look like? Is it daytime or night ime? What is the weather like? What sounds do you hear? What things do you see? What way is the water in the stream flowing? Is it flowing fast or slowly?
6. Now imagine trees by the stream, with leaves that you can reach.
7. If a thought enters your mind, acknowledge it. Then, pick a leaf from the tree, place your thought on the leaf, and then place the leaf in the stream. Watch the leaf as it floats away on the stream and bring your attention back to your breath.
8. Every time a new thought enters your mind, acknowledge it, then let it go on a leaf down the stream and try to refocus your attention on your breathing.
9. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and acknowledge any sensations and new feelings you are experiencing.

HANDS ON BREATHING

1. Find a comfortable seated or standing position.
2. Start to focus your attention on your breathing, feeling your chest and stomach rise and fall with each breath in and out.
3. Take five normal breaths, focusing on each one.
4. Then reach one hand out in front of you.
5. Take the index finger of the opposite hand and being to trace the fingers of your outstretched hand; breathing in as you go up each finger and breathing out as you go down each finger.
6. Go all the way from one side of the hand to the other side of the hand, tracing each finger, then go back across the hand the opposite way.
7. When you have completed one hand, do the same with the other hand.
8. Repeat this for as long as needed, maintaining your sense of focus and awareness on your breath and sensations.

BODY SCAN MEDITATION

1. Find a comfortable position either lying down on your back with the palm of your hands facing upward and your feet slightly apart. This exercise can also be done sitting on a comfortable chair with feet resting on the floor.
2. Try to lie very still for the duration of the exercise, moving minimally if it becomes necessary to adjust your position.
3. Start to bring awareness to your breath, noticing the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out. Do not try to change the way you are breathing, just bring your awareness to how you are breathing naturally.
4. Start to bring your attention to how you are feeling. How do your clothes feel against your body? Are any of your limbs feeling particularly heavy or light? Note any parts of your body that are either feeling no sensation or are feeling a lot of sensation.
5. Now start to pay special attention to your feet and toes and the way that they feel. Are they heavy or light? Are they sensitive or not?
6. Start to bring this kind of attention to your other body parts, moving upward in sequence:

* Toes and feet
* Lower legs
* Knees
* Thighs
* Pelvic region
* Abdomen
* Lower back
* Chest
* Upper back
* Hands
* Arms
* Neck
* Face and head
* The top of the head

1. Once you have focused on all the different areas of the body and you feel ready, slowly open your eyes and acknowledge any sensations and new feelings you are experiencing.

WALKING MEDITATION

1. Find a quiet space that is 3 to 4 metres in length.
2. Begin to walk slowly starting at one end of the space and moving toward the other end.
3. Focus on the experience of walking, being aware of the sensations of standing upright and the subtle movements that keep your balance as you move. Focus on how your feet feel, how your toes feel, how your ankles feel. Think about how your knees feel and your hips feel. Think about how your upper body is moving or reacting in response to the movement of your lower body. Do your hands or arms sway back and forth to help you balance as you walk or do they stay still by your sides?
4. If it is helpful, you can also count your steps as you walk slowly to focus your mind.
5. Once you reach the other end of your space, slowly turn around and walk back towards the other end.
6. Repeat this for as long as needed, maintaining your sense of focus and awareness on your sensations.

MINDFUL SEEING

1. Find a space or window where you can see some kind of view or something you can focus on.
2. Look at everything there is to see. Avoid labelling or categorizing what you see. Instead of thinking “picture”, “bird”, or “sign”, try to notice the colours, patterns, and textures of things.
3. Pay attention to the movements of things, like leaves or grass in the wind, or people and children moving around your space. Notices different shapes in this small segment of the world you are in at that very moment.
4. Be aware, but not critical. Be observant, but do not fixate too long on one thing.
5. If you become distracted by other thoughts, that is ok. Acknowledge your thoughts and gently try to refocus your mind on what you can see and observe.
6. Continue this for as long as needed, maintaining your sense of focus and awareness on what you can see and observe around you.

MINDFUL LISTENING

1. Find a space where you can hear a few or many different sounds. This could be the act of opening a window or sitting outside of your house/shelter.
2. If you feel comfortable, close your eyes and listen to the sounds.
3. Try to differentiate one sound from another. Try to feel the vibrations of those sounds if possible. Avoid trying to guess what each sound it, but rather how they harmonize or clash with each other.
4. Be aware, but not critical. Be observant, but do not fixate on one sound for too long.
5. If you become distracted by other thoughts, that is ok. Acknowledge your thoughts and gently try to refocus your mind on what you can hear.
6. Continue this for as long as needed, maintaining your sense of focus and awareness on the sounds you can hear around you.

TICK TOCK

**This activity requires a facilitator or the ability to hear a rhythmic noise**

1. Ask the participants to get into a comfortable seated position; they can sit cross-legged, or with their legs folded in a different way or straight out in front of them, and their arms should be relaxed by their sides.
2. Explain that you want them to start focusing on their breathing; they can put their hands on their stomach and/or chest and begin to feel their bodies rise and fall with their breath.
3. Tell the participants that you are now going to start making a rhythmic sound and you want them to sway back and forth in time to the beat. You can either use the back of a mindfulness chime or anything available to make a rhythmic beat like a woodblock, a drum, the bottom of a bucke
4. Speed up and slow down the rhythm of the beat.
5. After a minute or two, stop (you can use the mindfulness chime or another sound to signal the end of the exercise).
6. Ask the group how they are feeling.

FIVE SENSES

1. Find a comfortable seated or standing position.
2. Begin to focus your mind on your breath.
3. Slowly start to look around and try to notice **five** things you do not normally notice visually, like a shadow or small crack.
4. Then bring your awareness to **four** things you are currently, physically feeling. This could be the texture of your clothing, a breeze against your skin, the smooth surface of the chair, or the resting of your hands in your lap.
5. Start to bring your awareness to **three** things you can hear. Take a moment to listen and note things you can hear in the background. This could be the chirp of a bird, people talking outside, or the faint sounds of traffic in the distance.
6. Now, notice **two** things you can smell that you normally filter out, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant. Take note of cooking smells, clothing smells, smells of people, etc.
7. Then notice **one** thing you can taste. Focus on one thing that you can taste right now, at this moment. You can take a sip of a drink, chew a piece of gum, eat something, etc. Notices the current taste in your mouth, or even open your mouth to search the air for a taste.
8. Conclude the exercise by taking one deep breath and being grateful for all of the feelings and sensations you are able to experience.

ZIP UP

**When you do this activity for the first time this may require a facilitator, but it can eventually be done by participants on their own**

1. Ask the participants to get into a comfortable standing position; their knees can be a little bent and relaxed, but they should be standing straight with their arms relaxed by their sides.
2. Explain that you want them to start focusing on their breathing. Ask them to take a few breaths in and out; they can put their hands on their stomach and/or chest and begin to feel their bodies rise and fall with their breath.
3. Tell the participants that now you would like them to envision that there is a zipper at their feet.
4. Tell everyone to bend down slowly and pretend to take the zipper between two fingers, then begin to slowly roll up bringing the zipper with you. As everyone rolls up towards standing, they should tighten their body where the zipper is, for example: zip up your feet, zip up to your knees, zip up to your stomach, zip up to your chest, then zip up to the top of your head.
5. When everyone is pretending to hold the zipper at the top of their head, instruct everyone to take a deep breath in, tighten everything up one last time, and then, in a rush, pull the zipper down quickly and blow out a big breath, releasing all the tension from your body; participants should now feel relaxed.
6. Ask the group how they are feeling. Repeat the exercise a few more times.

Source: Plan International Australia (2020). Parenting under Pressure.