

Easy Mindfulness Exercises for Kids with ADHD



From the ADHD Experts at

ADDITUDE

Strategies and Support for ADHD & LD

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A trusted source of advice and information for families touched by attention-deficit disorder—
and a voice of inspiration to help people with ADHD find success at home, at school, and on the job.

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Easy Mindfulness Exercises for Kids with ADHD

10 exercises parents can use to encourage mindful meditation, self-reflection, and improved focus in children with ADHD.

By Kathryn Debros, Christopher Willard, Psy.D., and Elliott Buck, M.Ed.

You've heard that mindful meditation can help increase focus, calm a buzzing brain, or reduce symptoms of hyperactivity or impulsivity. And, like many parents, you'd like to incorporate this free, non-medical therapy into your child's ADHD treatment plan.

The problem, of course, is that many kids — especially those with ADHD — don't jump at the chance to meditate. Many are also not adequately aware of their feelings, bodily sensations, and breathing to apply meditation techniques properly. And parents (who seldom practice mindfulness themselves) don't always know where to start, what exercises are appropriate, or how to help their kids push past obstacles.

But mindfulness is possible — and effective — at any age. The key is to tailor activities to your child's maturity and interest level — and not to expect meditation to be a cure-all for your child's ADHD. Instead, keep an open mind and encourage your child to use mindfulness in the way that works best for her — ideally developing her self-awareness, building critical skills, and finding her calmest, happiest self along the way.

CULTIVATE CALM

Learn how your child's brain changes with mindful meditation at <http://additu.de/calm-brain>

What Are the Benefits of Mindfulness for Children?

Recent research has repeatedly shown that a daily dose of mindfulness improves attention, boosts self-esteem, and helps kids better monitor their emotions.

“Research indicates that brain training involving mindfulness practices can strengthen areas of the brain responsible for attention, emotional control, and problem solving,” say psychologists Kirk Strosahl and Patricia Robinson, authors of *In This Moment*. “There is emerging evidence that mindfulness-based brain training produces permanent structural changes in the brain.”

Some studies have also found that children who regularly practice mindfulness were more empathetic than their peers. In one small study, preschoolers were given stickers and told to distribute them to whomever they chose. Before learning mindfulness, the children mostly gave the stickers to friends; afterward, they happily gave the stickers to kids they didn’t know or didn’t like.

How Can We Get Started?

The best (and easiest) way to start a mindfulness practice is to encourage your child to focus on her breathing. Here are two easy, kid-friendly techniques to help get you started:

- **Hot Chocolate Breath:** This technique starts with your child holding up her hands as if she were holding a mug of hot chocolate right under her face. Prompt some basic visualization, and ask her to imagine first smelling the hot chocolate — inhaling deeply through her nose — and then blowing it to cool it down, exhaling smoothly across the surface out her mouth. Have her repeat this breathing pattern and visualization — in through her nose smelling, and back out through her mouth, cooling off — for a minute or two. Encourage her to let her breath find its own rhythm: not too fast, and not too slow.

Using imagery like this — connecting the exercise to the pleasant sensation of drinking hot chocolate — provides kids with a positive association and helps them make sense of their breathing patterns. Slow, deliberate breathing is what calms down the body and the brain; the visualization jumpstarts the prefrontal cortex and helps children with ADHD focus their wandering attention.

- **7/11 Breath:** This technique is popular with athletes, police officers, and teachers who are regularly placed in high-pressure, high-perfor-

MINDFULNESS AT SCHOOL

Find 10 exercises for stronger school focus at <http://additu.de/10-school>

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mance situations. The technique is as straightforward as it sounds — simply have your child breathe in for 7 seconds, and out for 11. After a few repetitions, he should notice that his brain chatter has quieted considerably, and he may even feel less physically antsy. If he maintains the 7/11 breath for 12-15 repetitions, he should settle into 4 to 6 breaths per minute, a range that's **scientifically proven** to optimize long-term focus.

8 More Easy Mindfulness Activities for Kids

Breathing exercises are simple, portable, and versatile. But not all children take to them right away. If breathing in and out isn't your child's thing — or if she's interested in exploring other ways to be mindful — have her try one of the following:

- 1. Mindful coloring.** Have your child choose her favorite tool (crayons? pencils? gel pens?) and encourage her to notice how it feels as it moves on the paper. If she'd like to go beyond the lines, try doodling or Zentangling, drawing soothing, repeatable shapes to create stunning artwork. Drawing can be done sitting, standing, or upside-down.
- 2. Walk a maze.** Go outside with a stick of chalk and draw curvy snaking lines, a spider web, or just a big swirl and challenge your child to walk it, tightrope-style. For a rainy-day activity, use masking tape on the carpet for the same purpose. It has to be a slow, focused, controlled, heel-to-toe, end-to-end challenge. You'd hate for him to fall into the imaginary lava, after all.
- 3. The Breath Button.** One of the mainstays of mindfulness is learning to take big, satisfying breaths and recognizing how good it feels to let them go. This can be done sitting still, or you can designate a Breath Button. You and your child pick an object anywhere in the house — a doorknob, a special toy, a piece of paper on the wall that says "breath button" — and make a rule that whenever your child touches that object, she'll take a big, mindful breath.

For example, every time you leave the house, have your child touch the doorknob and take a breath to settle her brain. This encourages her to stop and think, embedding calm and focus into her daily routine. As a bonus, you can teach an anxious child to seek out and use the Breath Button as a tool to self-calm.

ACTIVITIES AND TOOLS

Get the ultimate list of mindfulness exercises and resources at <http://additu.de/resources>

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- 4. Play “I Notice...”** This is basically “I Spy,” but with a range of answers, which teaches your child to develop awareness. Chances are, once they look, they’ll find things you never noticed before either. Try to find an object in each color of the rainbow, notice different textures (soft, hard, prickly, squishy), or shapes (square, circle, triangle).
- 5. Try yoga.** Balance poses, like Tree, encourage focus and control. Upside-down poses, like legs raised against the wall or a shoulder stand, encourage calm. There are a million resources available for it; try [Cosmic Kids Yoga](#) on YouTube for inspiration.
- 6. Knitting.** Knitting teaches concentration, control, coordination, and a little math, too. As an added bonus, it involves sensory input and fine motor development. If regular knitting is too complicated, try crocheting or even finger knitting. The repetitive motion is calming, the feel of the yarn is soothing, and kids feel proud of themselves for making something.
- 7. Digging in the garden.** Gardening is a bit like knitting — repetitive, sensory, with an exciting end result — but is better suited to kids who need a lot of gross motor movement. As it turns out, kids who aren’t good at sitting tend to be awesome at digging. Have them dig to pull up weeds, plant a butterfly or bee garden, or find a local community garden that needs help.
- 8. Pause app.** There’s an app for everything, right? In a world flooded with technology, there’s an app for slowing down, too. [Pause](#) turns breathing and moving slowly into a fun, blobby game. Have your child use it for a minute or two at a time to focus, calm down — and maybe even get better at that sitting still thing.

CALMING APPS

Find 3 online tools for overstimulated kids at <http://additu.de/calming>

ADDitude eBooks
Available Now
additudemag.com/shop

Mindfulness and Other Natural Treatments

The best non-medical treatments for ADHD, including exercise, green time, and mindful meditation.

Learn how mindfulness works on ADHD brains, and how to begin practicing it today. Plus, research the benefits of other alternative treatments like yoga and deep breathing exercises — including some designed especially for kids — as well as the science behind each natural therapy.

>> Learn more about this eBook: <http://additu.de/mindful>

A Parent's Guide to ADHD, Diet, and Nutrition

The foods, vitamins, minerals, supplements, and herbs that can help your child manage symptoms.

What is a good ADHD diet? Is sugar the enemy? What about gluten? Dairy? In this comprehensive special report, we detail the connection between the food your child eats and the severity of his hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity, covering topics from artificial dyes and flavors to the right amount of protein.

>> Learn more about this eBook: <http://additu.de/nutrition>

ADHD Medication and Treatment

The latest information on managing medication, starting therapy, evaluating alternative treatments, and more.

You're relieved to know, finally, that your lifelong symptoms are due to ADHD. But now, you have questions — on everything from which medications are available to how to tell if they're working properly. In this comprehensive special report, you'll learn how to seek an accurate diagnosis and map out a treatment plan that's right for you.

>> Learn more about this eBook: <http://additu.de/treatment>

FREE ADDitude Downloads

Music for Healthy ADHD Brains

8 of the best songs to help you or your child focus.

ADHD Vitamins and Supplements

Find out which herbs, vitamins, and nutritional supplements may help control some symptoms of ADHD.

9 Foods to Eat (And Avoid) for Improved ADHD Symptoms

Your guide to a high-protein, low-sugar, no-additive diet.

Your Free Guide to Flavorful Fish Oil

Kid-tested, ADHD-approved omega-3 supplements.

Mobile Apps for Better Sleep

Easy-to-use resources to overcome common ADHD sleep challenges.

11 ADHD Coping Mechanisms

Learn why we think, act, and feel the way we do.

Secrets of the ADHD Brain

Learn why we think, act, and feel the way we do.

Find these and many more free ADHD resources online at:

<http://additu.de/freedownloads>

Expert Webinar Replays:

Sound Medicine for Your Child's ADHD Brain

>> <http://additu.de/sound>

Music can be a powerful catalyst for learning in children with ADHD or LD — but most parents aren't sure how to harness it. In this expert webinar, with Sharlene Habermeyer, M.A., learn how music develops three key areas of the brain, how music can improve your child's reading and math skills, and which songs work best.

Neurofeedback and Cognitive Training for Kids

>> <http://additu.de/neuro>

Is brain training — including neurofeedback and cognitive training (CT) — really all it's cracked up to be? Is it safe for kids? Is it worth the money? Naomi Steiner, M.D., shares the research behind some computer-based alternative therapies so you can make an informed decision before treating your child.

How Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Unlocks Productivity

>> <http://additu.de/cbt>

CBT is not a magic pill to cure ADHD symptoms. But more and more adults today are using it, and with good reason: research confirms the benefits of CBT as an effective and life-changing therapy for people with attention and executive-function deficits. Learn how faulty thinking sabotages ADHD coping mechanisms, and what adults can do to change course.

How Diet, Sleep, and Exercise Reduce ADHD Symptoms

>> <http://additu.de/natural>

Medications are an important part of the treatment toolkit for many with ADHD. But they don't work for everyone, and don't always control every symptom — which means that kids with ADHD need a holistic treatment plan that incorporates diet, sleep, and regular exercise in order to get the best results. In this expert webinar, learn how to set up the most effective plan for your child's needs.

Best Strategies for Stressed-Out Moms Raising Kids with ADHD

>> <http://additu.de/stressed-out>

Feel like you're approaching burnout? You're not alone. Mental and physical exhaustion are common in parents of special-needs children. Kirk Martin, founder of CelebrateCalm, shares helpful tips to relieve the stress and make parenthood a little easier and more manageable.

FREE ADHD Newsletters from ADDitude

Sign up to receive critical news and information about ADHD diagnosis and treatment, success at school, adult ADHD, and parenting strategies:
<http://additu.de/newsletter>

Adult ADHD and LD

Expert advice on managing your household, time, money, career, and relationships

Parenting Children with ADHD and LD

Strategies and support for parents on behavior and discipline, time management, disorganization, and making friends.

ADHD and LD at School

How to get classroom accommodations, finish homework, work with teachers, find the right schools, and much more.

Treating ADHD

Treatment options for attention deficit including medications, food, supplements, brain training, mindfulness and other alternative therapies.

For Women with ADHD

Managing ADHD on the job, running a household, dealing with challenging emotions, and much more.