



Mindfulness and Mindful Parenting for Parent Educators

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION FACT SHEET • FS107E

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is an emerging concept currently drawing considerable attention in social and health science fields. Perhaps the best known definition of mindfulness was coined by Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1994:

Paying attention in a particular way;

On Purpose,

In the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.

Although researchers and practitioners are yet to arrive at one universal, empirically tested, operational definition, most definitions include the concepts of “receptivity” and “full engagement with the present moment” (Black 2011).

Why be mindful?

Mindfulness is recognized across many disciplines as a useful means for improving a person’s quality of life by reducing stress and by increasing positive emotions. Substantial evidence shows that practicing mindfulness can increase happiness, reduce anxiety and depression (Hofmann et al. 2010), improve immune system functioning, and change brain function (Placone 2011), as well as create more satisfying family relationships (Kabat-Zinn et al. 1992; MacDonald and Hastings 2010; Duncan et al. 2009). Practicing mindfulness increases an individual’s awareness of how thoughts lead to automatic reactions, and this awareness can help an individual regain control over which reactions he or she chooses. Scott Rogers (2009), founder of the website MindfulParent.org, states that:

When we are mindful, we see what is before us.

When we are not mindful, we see what is in our mind.

Scott Rogers

What is mindful parenting?

Mindful parenting is when parents and caregivers cultivate an awareness of themselves and their children in the present at different levels (physical, emotional, and mental) to create desirable changes that are in line with their parenting goals. Larisa Duncan presents five dimensions of mindful parenting that can help parents and caregivers respond skillfully to their children, that is, with more awareness and less reactivity (Duncan et al. 2009). These five dimensions and their beneficial outcomes are outlined in the following chart:

<u>Parenting Dimensions</u>	<u>Outcomes for Parents/ Caregivers</u>
The five dimensions of mindful parenting.	General: Reduced stress; improved communication
1. Listening with full attention	Specific: Better ability to:
2. Nonjudgmental acceptance of self and child	1. Discern child’s behavioral and verbal cues
3. Emotional awareness	2. Balance child-oriented, parent-oriented, and family-oriented goals
4. Self-regulation in the parenting relationship	3. Respond appropriately to child’s needs and emotions
5. Compassion for self and for child	4. Respond in line with parental values
	5. Display positive affect in parent-child relationship, and be more forgiving to self
	(modified from Duncan et al. 2009).

Why practice mindful parenting?

In addition to the outcomes in the five dimensions of mindful parenting, Placone and Singh found that those kids whose parents practiced mindful parenting showed healthier self-esteem, better school performance, more positive relationships, and greater flexibility and adaptability (Placone 2011; Singh et al. 2007). Parents and caregivers who become aware, attentive, intentional, self-regulated, and content are more likely to be effective when applying appropriate parenting strategies.

For most people, cultivating mindfulness requires practice. To learn how to practice mindfulness, see the *WSU Extension Publication FS108E: Mindful Parenting for Parents and Caregivers*, or check out the additional resources listed below.

Further Readings

Kabat-Zinn, J., and M. Kabat-Zinn. 1997. *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*. New York: Hyperion.

Placone, P. 2011. *Mindful Parent Happy Child: A Guide to Raising Joyful and Resilient Children*. Palo Alto: Alaya Press.

Rogers, S. 2005. *Mindful Parenting: Meditations, Verses, and Visualizations for a More Joyful Life*. Miami Beach: Mindful Living Press.

WSU Extension Publication FS108E: Mindful Parenting for Parents and Caregivers.

Additional Resources

Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network. <http://www.cyfernet.org/>.

Parenting Further. <http://www.parentfurther.com/why/9-parenting-strategies>.

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FS107E