



Yoga and Mindfulness for Mamas

What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.” - Jon Kabat-Zinn

The quote above is one of the most commonly cited definitions of mindfulness, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). Consider each part of this definition: paying attention – on purpose – in the present moment – non-judgmentally. This is something we could choose to do at any moment. In *Mindful Motherhood*, Cassandra Vieten writes, “Mindful awareness is something you are fully capable of because your own basic awareness meets each experience as it is, without evaluation or judgment, with a sense of openness, and is curious about what arises.” (p. 18)

The practice of mindful awareness is simply to spend more time being mindfully aware. As you practice, you will begin to approach your experiences with openness, curiosity, and compassion; rather than react based on your desire for situations to be other than what they are. Practicing mindful awareness on a regular basis in ordinary situations will strengthen your capacity to implement it when you need it most, as you face greater challenges.

It is important to understand that mindfulness can make your experiences feel unfamiliar. This can be disconcerting. As such, start with short periods of practice initially and grow your practice at a pace that feels comfortable to you.

Seeing your experiences with greater openness does not mean that you simply accept situations and become complacent. Mindfulness is not a method for suppressing or controlling thoughts or emotions. Being mindful means that you take the opportunity first to see what is before you without resistance. As you allow yourself to be open to your experiences and situation, you use this as a starting point for deciding if you need to make changes. In other words, you are not passive, but rather you take actions with greater awareness.



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How can we use Mindfulness in our lives as parents?

Mindfulness in parenting is about cultivating a way of being, rather than doing something in particular. You may practice being more present (less distracted) while spending time with your children, ensuring that you also remain grounded and aware of your own emotions. In other words, you do not deny yourself. A foundation to your practice of awareness is to tune into your body and the sensations you feel.

As you cultivate greater connection to yourself, you will have the capacity to feel more connected to your children and others. You do not create connection; you become aware of the connection that is already there. You may cultivate more opportunities for connection by creating space. As you find are you are better able to tolerate experiences, you will be able to provide a frame to support your children as they learn to manage their emotions.

As a mindful parent, you are not trying to become someone who you are not. You are learning to be with who you are. In other words, you are not a better or worse person for being mindful. You are simply practicing being more aware.