



Yoga and Mindfulness for Mamas

Why are relationships important in parenting?

- When you ask adults, whose parents were unhappily married to describe their childhood memories, chances are you will hear tales of sadness, confusion, false hope and bitterness.
- Gottman and colleagues did a study looking at what happens after a couple has their first baby. In a study of 130 couples over 12 years, 2/3 had a big drop in relationship happiness and increase in hostility (fighting). Their parenting of their baby was compromised. This led Gottman to state, "The real cradle where the baby is nursed in - is the emotional climate between parents."

How does the relationship of the parents affect the children?

- How parents get along makes a big difference to how they relate to their children. Parents who are emotionally stable can be more emotionally available to their children
- Parents who are sensitive and in tune with their children, have children who are more confident and securely attached.
- The roadmap for being a good parent is the same as the road map for improving marriage. The same interpersonal style parents practice with their children – including being emotionally aware, empathetic, and open to joint problem solving, is a good style for marriage.

How does parental conflict affect children?

- Parental conflict affects children's ability to emotionally regulate themselves, they have more difficulty focusing their attention and soothing themselves when they become upset.
- Parental conflict affects children's attitude and achievements
- Parental conflict affects children's ability to get along with others. When parents express contempt, criticism, and defensiveness, their children may show antisocial behavior and aggression towards their peers.
- Research has shown that when there is parental conflict, children have more health problems such as coughs and colds.
- Marital problems where parents withdraw can lead to children internalize problems, becoming depressed, anxious and withdrawn.
- Hostility and contempt between parents is linked to kids becoming aggressive with their peers.



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How can mindfulness help you in your relationship with your partner?

Research has shown that children are the happiest and most successful when they are listened to, understood, and taken seriously by their parents. But what effects do such habits have on the parents themselves and their marriage? These are a few strategies to help with dealing with emotions in your relationship

1. **Awareness:** Simply being aware of your own thoughts, feelings, and body sensations – what you are seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, and what your internal gut feeling or intuition is, will help you relate better with others. Rather than getting caught up in only one or two sources of information – like only your thoughts that are telling you a story about the person you are with, comparing, categorizing, etc. – or only your feelings – noticing all of your responses to another person will help you function better in relationships.
2. **Acceptance/Non-Judgment:** Remember that acceptance or non-judgment does not mean that you approve of someone's behavior. You accept that the other person IS the way they ARE. That is just how they are. You can think all day about how they should not be that way, or you wish they weren't that way, but they ARE who they ARE. Stop fighting it. They cannot be any different from exactly who they are.
3. **Allowing/Letting Be/Non-Striving:** Now that you've recognized who the person is, allow them to be that way. Allow them to be who they are. This does not mean you have to stay in the same room or in a relationship with them, or that you don't set boundaries. It means that you allow them to be who they are, and then YOU make decisions about how to behave based on YOUR values and goals – in other words – who YOU want to be. You are basing your actions and responses on who YOU are rather than on who THEY are.
4. **Present-Moment Focus:** Whether you are with your baby, your partner, or your mother-in-law, keep your attention on the present moment interaction with them – not the past, or the future. What is happening right now is the ONLY thing you can do anything about. Pay attention to this moment.
5. **Beginners Mind/Curiosity:** In your relationships with others, it can be really helpful to not categorize everything they do into what you already think or believe about them, and be curious! Even when the person is doing something you don't like, see if you can ask questions. Try investigating how they are thinking and feeling. Really try to be interested in what is going on for them.



6. **Compassion:** As much as you can, even in distressing moments, see if you can intentionally direct compassion toward the other person, and yourself, in the situation. Imagine that they (and you) are doing their best... even if it doesn't seem like it. It is difficult to open your heart when you are in conflict with another person, and again, this does not mean that you become a doormat or don't strongly set your boundaries. It means that you also can find a place in your heart where you understand the unmet need or fear/anxiety/insecurity that lies underneath what they are doing. Strangely, while you might think this makes you weaker, this allows you to be stronger in setting boundaries and communicating what you want.

Bringing mindful awareness to the awe, wonder, joy, gratitude, amusement and countless other enjoyable times between you and members of your family is just as important as bringing mindful awareness to the difficult moments.