



A Model for Mindful Parenting

For many of us, the term ‘mindful parenting’ is somewhat obscure. What exactly is mindful parenting, and what does it mean?

A simplified definition is that mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience, moment by moment.

A team of US researchers set out to introduce a model of ‘mindful parenting’ as a framework whereby parents intentionally bring moment-to-moment awareness to the parent-child relationship. This is done by developing qualities of listening, emotional awareness, self-regulation, compassion and non-judgmental acceptance to parenting interactions. The aim of the research was to integrate mindfulness-based intervention

techniques and mindful parenting into well-established, evidence-based family prevention programs.

KEY FINDINGS

- The cultivation of mindfulness is thought to provide an antidote to states of being unaware, for example not noticing or not paying attention to thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It is also thought to provide an antidote to avoiding the experience of what is happening in the present moment.
- The model of mindful parenting suggests that the quality of parent-child relationships will be improved by promoting parents’ ability to bring a present-moment awareness to their parenting.
- Parents who adopt mindfulness for their parenting and regularly engage in mindful parenting practices will undergo a fundamental shift in their ability and willingness to truly be present with the constantly growing and changing nature of their child.

- Mindful parenting may enhance parents' abilities to successfully navigate their children's cognitive, and behavioural changes during adolescence, as well as adapt to their own developmental changes.
- Mindful parenting may also promote parenting practices such as teaching children how to label, express, and talk about their feelings, which can promote a child's own self-regulation abilities.
- Mindful parenting does not imply that the impulse to display emotions such as anger or hostility is not felt. Rather, it involves pausing before reacting in order to exercise greater self-regulation and choice in the selection of parenting practices.

THINGS YOU CAN DO

- ✓ **Make time to listen.** Kids tend to talk when they're ready, not when it suits us, so make the most of those precious conversations.
- ✓ **Notice tone, facial expressions and body language.** Hearing the content of a conversation is often not enough. If we watch for tone, expressions and body language, we can more successfully detect our child's needs or intended meaning.
- ✓ **Resist the temptation to say 'I told you so'.** Allow kids to make mistakes and suffer consequences, recognising that mistakes are all a healthy part of life.
- ✓ **Provide clear standards and expectations for behaviour.** Ensure these are appropriate to both culture and the child's developmental level.
- ✓ **Practise identifying emotions.** If we are able to identify both our own and our child's emotions, we can make conscious choices about how to respond, rather than reacting automatically, based on perceptions or beliefs.
- ✓ **Avoid self-blame.** When parenting goals are not achieved, a mindful approach may lead to greater acceptance of our efforts rather than a focus on specific outcomes of parenting.

- ✓ **Pause before reacting.** Give yourself the chance to exercise greater self-regulation and an opportunity to choose which strategy you're going to employ.
- ✓ **Show compassion.** When we do, our kids feel a greater sense of positive affection and support.

Source: Duncan, et al., *A Model of Mindful Parenting: Implications for Parent-Child Relationships and Prevention Research.* *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev* (2009) 12:255-270.



TAKEAWAY

FROM PROFESSOR MICHAEL BERNARD
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In our relationship with our child, mindful parenting requires us to listen with our full attention; be non-judgmental in our acceptance of our self and our child; cultivate an emotional awareness; and show self-regulation and compassion. When we practise mindful parenting, we increase our capacity for parenting calmly, with greater consistency, in a warm and nurturing way.