

Mindfulness in the Classroom



Primary Schools



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

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“ Everything from break and lunch
is put to one side and it helps you
focus on the lesson more. ”

-Pupil

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Introduction to Mindfulness

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is influenced by Eastern Religious and Spiritual Philosophies, such as Buddhism, and has been adapted for use in the West. This process was largely led by Kabat-Zin who has focussed on the psychological impact of mindfulness.

Kabat-Zinn (the founder of mindfulness-based stress reduction programmes (MBSR)) defined mindfulness as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally".

Mindfulness helps us to notice and experience what is happening rather than resisting, avoiding or telling ourselves stories about what is happening. There have been many studies, which have shown that mindfulness helps to reduce levels of stress, increase self-awareness and concentration and helps individuals to feel that life is more manageable.

Mindfulness encourages self-awareness of body sensations, emotions and thoughts (also known as the triangle of awareness). Curiosity and having a non-judgemental attitude are also seen to be helpful. Mindfulness isn't about getting the mind to stop thinking, but rather it is about noticing the mind's tendency to experience thoughts and patterns.

Mindfulness Based Interventions in Schools – Some Evidence so far

Schools can be an appropriate place to offer mindfulness as children are accessible and interventions can be offered to groups of children as part of a preventative approach.

The initial evidence around the positive impact of Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBI) in schools is increasing. In young people (e.g. Mendelson et al., 2010; Zoogman, Goldberg, Hoyt & Miller, 2015; Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010), MBIS have been shown to significantly increase positive affect, optimism, attention and social-emotional competence while decreasing dysfunctional behaviour and emotion dysregulation. Leuven (2013), found that secondary school pupils who followed an in-class mindfulness programme reported reduced indications of depression, anxiety and stress, even up to six months after the intervention had ended.

Recent meta analyses studies (Zenner et al, 2014) looked at the effectiveness of different MBIs in 1348 students. This

research has shown that MBIs can have enhanced effectiveness on emotion processes. Mindfulness may, therefore, support children in their education as they may be able to

“ Usually after lunch we've got a lot of like problems to deal with and when we do mindfulness we all calm down. ”

- Pupil

keep their mind more focussed, to regulate their emotions, to develop feelings of empathy and compassion and to deal with feelings of frustration (Mind and Life Education Research Network (MLERN), 2012).

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Mind and Life Education Research Network (MLERN): <https://www.mindandlife.org>

However, further evidence is needed to evaluate this type of intervention. Maynard et al. (2017) completed a meta-analysis of MBI at schools and found that although the evidence suggests that MBI can have a positive effect on socioemotional and cognitive outcomes for children, it is unclear whether it has a positive impact on academic and behavioural outcomes and, therefore, more rigorous evaluation is needed.

“It was very helpful that this was a manual that I can literally sit down with for five minutes before the children come in or even while they're doing the register. I can flick through it, pick an activity and just read what's there. That's been really helpful.”

- Teacher

How to use this manual

In this programme, we are asking you to deliver a mindfulness exercise to your class everyday for 5 minutes (ideally the same time each day), with the same group of pupils. The activities in this manual are divided into 4 parts; mindful breathing, the body, the mind and the world. When introducing this programme to your pupils, the first week should focus on mindful breathing and the daily activities outlined within this section of the manual should be followed. After the first week, any activities can be chosen from either the body, the mind or the world sections, but please only utilise the activities outlined in this manual.

In addition, you may wish to consider the following:

- Mental health can be an emotive subject which can stir up strong feelings for pupils.
- At the start of the activities, communicate to your class any available people in your school that they can speak to and remind them of the support options available.
- We strongly recommend that you establish ground rules around respectful listening and confidentiality with the class, prior to delivering the sessions. You may wish to create a poster so that the children can be reminded of these.
- Should any concerns arise during the activity about a pupil's safety or wellbeing, please ensure that you follow your school's safeguarding policy and procedures

5 Minute Mindful Breathing Exercises

Mindful Breathing

Day 1 - Basic Mindful Breathing Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position, keeping your back straight so that it is not touching the back of your chair. It may be helpful to move to the front of your seat so that you can feel your sitting bones.

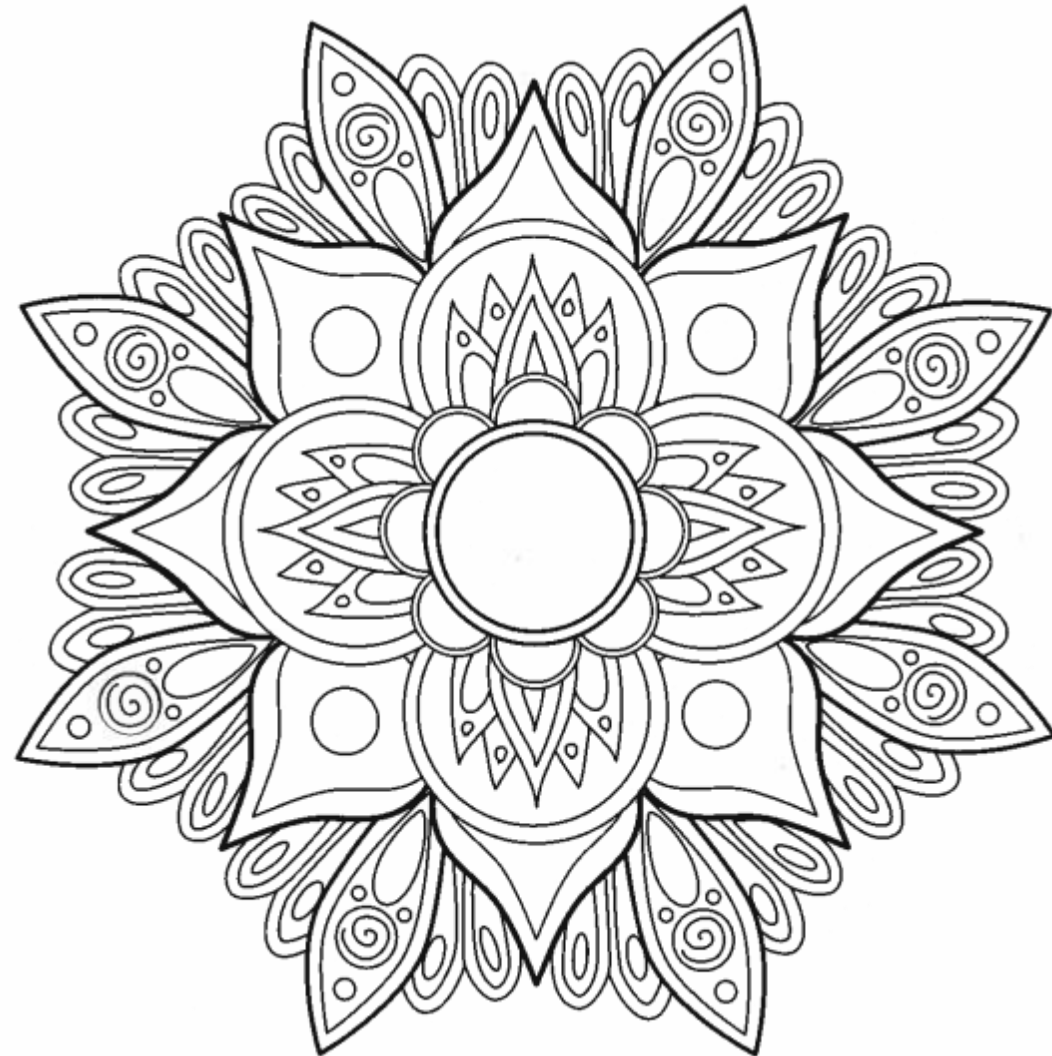


1. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable or soften your gaze and look at the floor.

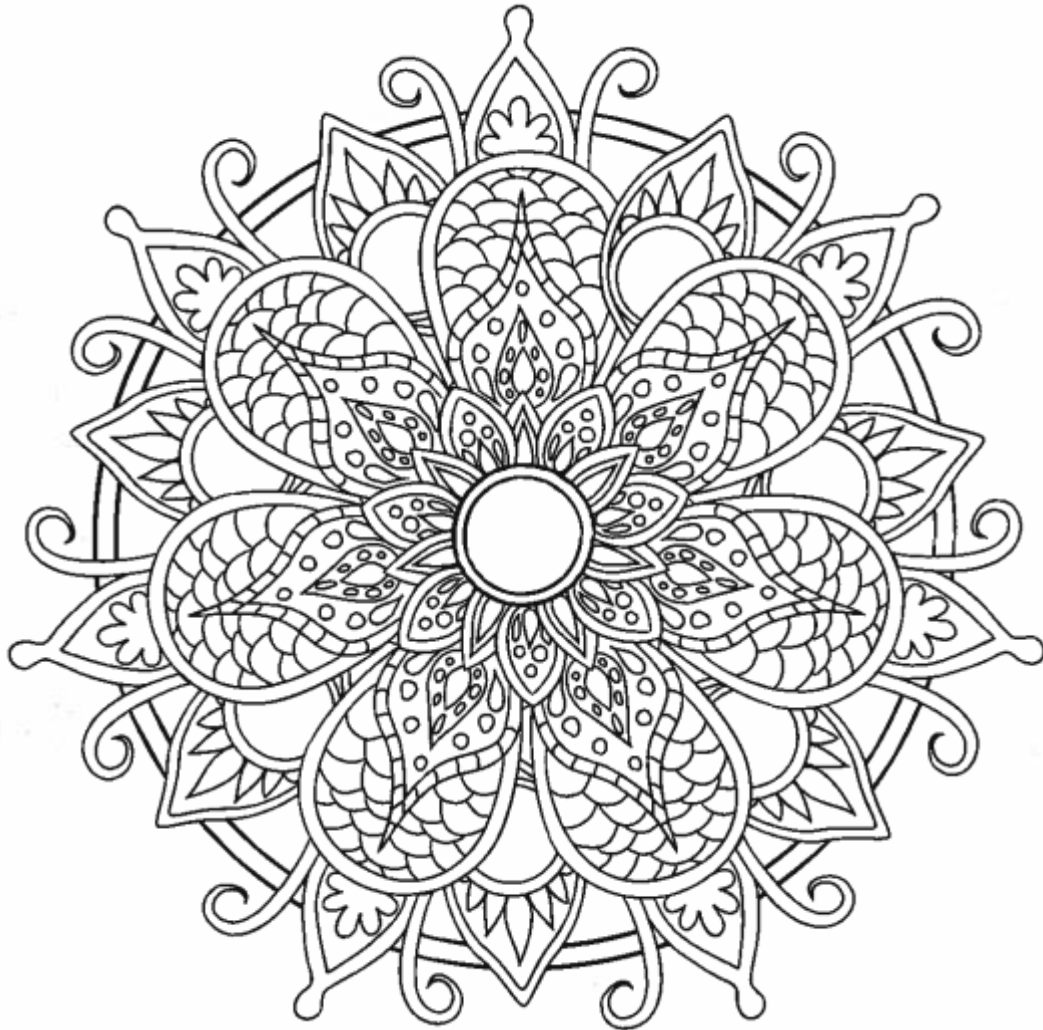


2. Scan your body and notice how you feel.

Mindful Colouring



Mindful Colouring



3. Notice the sensations of each breath as it happens – don't try and control the breath, just notice it.

- Focus on the breath going into your nostrils and out through your mouth.
- Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest.
- Notice the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe.
- Continue this for a few minutes.



4. If your mind wanders away from the breath notice this distraction and then gently bring your attention back to the feeling of the breath going in and out and your counting. Do not judge yourself, as the mind wandering is very natural.

5. After five minutes, take one more breath and feel your feet firmly on the ground. Notice the noises around you and come back to the here and now. When you're ready, gently open your eyes.



Day 2 - Understanding and Working with Thoughts

You could frame this activity by outlining thoughts. Mindfulness can help us to become more aware of our thoughts without judging them – they are what they are! We all have thoughts in our head all of the time but we don't always notice them. It's like music, which is on loop in the background when we are busy with other things. When we are still and focus on what's happening in the moment we can become more aware of our thoughts – it's like pressing the pause button! When we are more aware of our thoughts we become more in control of them.

Then move into the breathing exercise. Remind the pupils not to judge their thoughts but to just notice them and let them be.

Five Minute Mindful Breathing Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position, keeping your back straight so that it is not touching the back of your chair. It may be helpful to move to the front of your seat so that you can feel your sitting bones.

1. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable or soften your gaze and look at the floor.
2. Scan your body and notice how you feel.
3. Notice the sensations of each breath as it happens – don't try and control the breath, just notice it.
 - Focus on the breath going into your nostrils and out through your mouth.
 - Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest.
 - Notice the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe.
4. Notice any thoughts flowing through your mind.
5. After five minutes, take one more breath and feel your feet firmly on the ground. Notice the noises around you and come back to the here and now. When you're ready, gently open your eyes.

Additional Information and Resources

Exercises available via proprietary software

We have provided a manual with recommended activities for you to try. You do not need to have access to any additional technology in order to take part in the trial. However, if required and you have a licence or are already using any of the following, below are the activities which are approved for this trial:

- Headspace app.
- Mindful Gnats app.

GoNoodle videos:

- From mindless to mindful
- Let it go
- Forgive others
- On and off
- Find peace
- Find joy

7. Colour spotting

- Pick a colour/ask a pupil to pick a colour.
- For the next few minutes, ask the pupils to look around the classroom and just pay attention to anything that is that colour or has that colour in it.
- The aim is for the pupil to simply notice this.



Day 3 - Understanding and Working with Feelings

You could frame this activity by saying that when we are still there may be feelings that we begin to notice. Mindfulness isn't about stopping or controlling feelings. We are encouraged to be curious about our feelings and try and accept them as being real for us in that moment rather than judge them or ourselves for having them. It's like being an internal detective trying to piece together what's happening for us inside our mind and our bodies.

Then move into the breathing exercise.

Five Minute Mindful Breathing Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position, keeping your back straight but your body relaxed.

1. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable or soften your gaze and look at the floor.
2. Scan your body and notice how it feels.
3. Notice the sensations of each breath as it happens – don't try and control the breath, just notice it.
 - Focus on the breath going into your nostrils and out through your mouth.
 - Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest.
 - Notice the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe.
4. You may become more aware of your feelings and where they may be stored in your body. Just notice them and remain curious like a detective with a magnifying glass.
5. After five minutes, take one more breath and feel your feet firmly on the ground. Notice the noises and around you and come back to the here and now. When you're ready, gently open your eyes.

Day 4 - Negative Judgment and Acceptance

This activity can be framed in the following way. You can explain to the class that in today's activity, the aim is to remain curious and open about the thoughts and feelings that they may be experiencing in the moment. Rather than trying to change them, acknowledge them and accept them for what they are in the moment. They are neither "good" nor "bad". They are just there. It's almost like you the children are observers of their bodies and minds, on the outside looking in. This can help them to see things for what they are – a thought or an emotion and they can be changed.

Then move into the breathing exercise.

Five Minute Mindful Breathing Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position, keeping your back straight but your body relaxed.

1. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable or soften your gaze and look at the floor.
2. Scan your body and notice how it feels.
3. Notice the sensations of each breath as it happens – don't try and control the breath, just notice it.
 - Focus on the breath going into your nostrils and out through your mouth.
 - Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest.
 - Notice the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe.
4. Remain curious and open about your thoughts and feelings. There is no such thing as good or bad feelings. Pretend that you are an observer of your body and mind, on the outside looking in.
5. After five minutes take one more breath and feel your feet firmly on the ground. Notice the noises around you and come back to the here and now. When you're ready, gently open your eyes.

6. New view

- Ask the children to pick up an object that they use everyday (e.g. pen, pencil, book, etc).
- For the next two minutes they are going to focus on this object and give it their full attention. What do they notice about this object?
- Have they noticed something new about this object today?



5. Mindfulness bell

- You will need a bell or a triangle for this activity.
- Ask the children to sit comfortably and to close their eyes.
- Ring the bell and ask the children to listen to the beginning, middle and end of the bell until they can no longer hear it. Repeat this a few times.
- Ask the children to notice any sensations, thoughts or feelings.



Day 5 - Mindfulness in Daily Life

You may wish to explain that mindfulness is a practice that can also take place outside of the sessions in the classroom and there are ways to bring mindfulness into our everyday lives to be more present in the moment.

Some examples could include: being more mindful of the moment that we are in and bringing our mindful attention to everyday activities e.g. brushing our teeth, travelling to school, shopping, eating.

Here are some ways that you might practice mindfulness in daily life:

- Having a more curious attitude to life.
- Being more non-judgemental about our thoughts and feelings.
- Becoming more aware of our bodily sensations in the moment (i.e. quick body scan) – "checking in" with what's going on for us.
- Using the breathing techniques if you are feeling stressed, e.g. before a test.
- Being more aware of any negative thinking.

Then move into the breathing exercise.

Five Minute Mindful Breathing Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position, keeping your back straight but your body relaxed.

1. Close your eyes if you feel comfortable or soften your gaze and look at the floor.
2. Notice the sensations of each breath as it happens – don't try and control the breath, just notice it.
 - Focus on the breath going into your nostrils and out through your mouth.
 - Pay attention to the rise and fall of your chest.
 - Notice the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe.
3. Notice your body and be aware of how different parts of your body feel.
4. After five minutes, take one more breath and feel your feet firmly on the ground. Notice the noises around you and come back to the here and now. When you're ready, gently open your eyes.

Mindfulness Based Activities

The Body

1. The heartbeat exercise

- Ask the children to jump up and down on the spot for one minute.
- Then ask them to sit back down and place their hands on their hearts.
- Tell them to close their eyes and feel their heartbeats, their breath, and see what else they notice about their bodies.



4. Colours of the rainbow

- The aim of this activity is to encourage the children to notice what's in their surroundings and be in this current moment for a few minutes.
- Ask them to sit comfortably and to look around the room.
- In their mind's eye they are going to notice all of the things (big and small) that they can see. Are they able to find an object from every colour of the rainbow?



3. Notice that sound

- Ask the children to sit comfortably, they can close their eyes if they wish.
- Ask them to be silent and to notice at least five sounds around them whilst they continue to breathe in and out.
- This is not a competition, but just a fun way to see what they can notice. The aim is for the children to relax and notice the sounds.
- After a few minutes, ask the children to come back into this moment.



2. Balancing

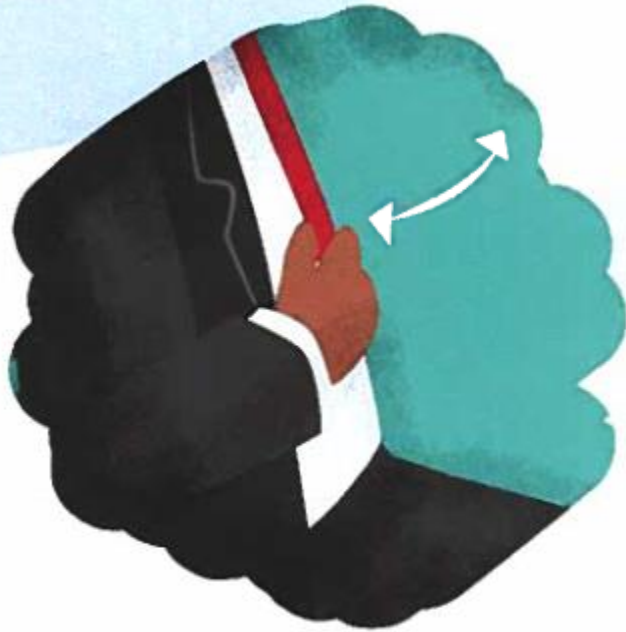
Balancing can be a fun way to investigate mindfulness of the body. You can start by introducing mindfulness as being present with our experience.

- Ask the children to balance on one foot.
- Ask them to pay attention to the muscles working to keep them balanced, the way it feels to tip to one side, and the natural reaction to put the other foot down when they feel like they may fall.
- You can also ask them to do different things, such as raising a hand, switching legs, or taking a deep breath and noticing how they feel. They will need to pay attention so as not to fall.
- Continue this for a few minutes before bringing the activity to a close.



3. Belly breathing

- Ask the children to put their hands on their bellies and see whether it is moving.
- Can they feel their bellies breathing?
- Encourage them to pay attention to these feelings and experiences.
- Continue this for a few minutes before asking the children to bring their awareness back to the room.



2. Mindful eating

You could do this exercise with a raisin or another dried fruit or a piece of chocolate. Explain that the exercise is to help focus on the experience of eating the raisin. You can model the process first if you think that this would be helpful.

- To begin, ensure that the children are sitting comfortably then start the process.
- Ask the children to pick up the raisin and look at it. Then ask them to silently think about the following: What can they see? How big is the raisin? What does it look like?
- Then move on to asking the children to put the raisin between their fingers and notice how it feels in their hand.
- Ask the children to bring the raisin to their nose – what does it smell like?
- Next the focus is on how the raisin sounds – ask the children to bring the raisin close to their ears and squish it gently. Can they hear any sounds coming from the raisin?
- Now the children can put the raisin on their tongues, but not swallow or take a bite! Just notice what the raisin feels like on their tongue for a moment.
- The children can now bite into their raisin - ask them to notice what the raisin tastes like. Is there more than one flavour?
- It is now ok for the children to swallow the raisin – is there any taste left in their mouth?
- Now ask the children to bring their awareness back to the room and feel their feet on the ground.
- Ask them to take one deep breath in and out.

Mindfulness Based Activities

The World

1. Five senses exercise

Read the following script to the children:

- Notice something you are experiencing with each of the five senses.
- Sit comfortably in your chair, in the basic position and take a breath in and out.
- Look around you and notice one thing that you can see.
- Now bring your awareness to something that you can feel e.g. the air on your skin, the surface your hands are resting on.
- Next, take a moment to listen and notice something that you can hear in the background.
- Now bring your awareness to anything that you can smell.
- Lastly, focus on one thing that you can taste right now in this moment. You can notice the current taste in your mouth or open your mouth to search the air for a taste.
- Now take a deep breath in and out and feel your feet firmly on the ground.



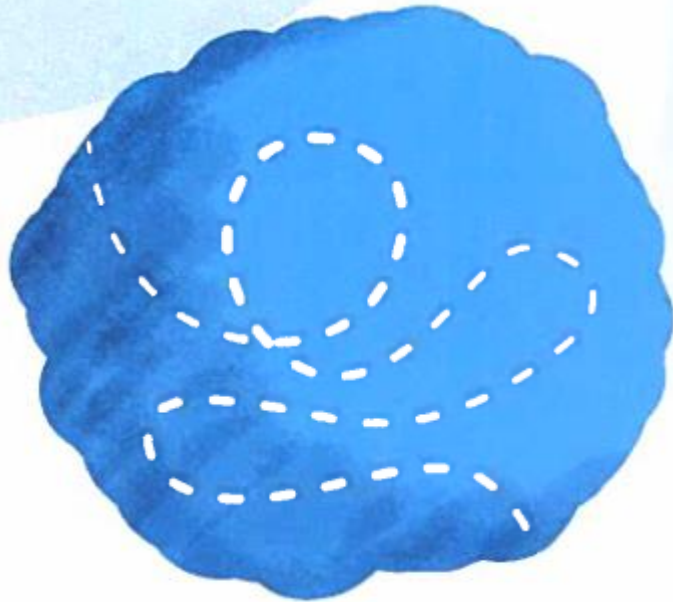
4. Body scan

- Ask the children to pay attention to each part of their bodies, starting from the top of their heads and going all the way down to the tip of their toes.
- You can ask questions to help them focus on different parts of their bodies – e.g. "can you feel your feet on the ground?" and "can you feel your legs touching the chair?"
- Continue this for a few minutes before asking the children to bring their awareness back to the room.



5. Go on a journey with your breath

- Encourage the children to start breathing slowly and deeply, and then ask them to pay attention to where they can feel their breath the most.
- Can they feel it in their nostrils, their chests, their bellies?
- Continue this for a few minutes before asking the children to bring their awareness back to the room.



7. The volcano

- Ask the children to sit comfortably with their back straight, they can close their eyes if they wish.
- Encourage them to imagine that they are a big and powerful volcano and ask them to feel their feet on the ground.
- Ask them to imagine what it would feel like to be that volcano.
- Encourage them to repeat this for a few minutes before bringing their awareness back to the room.



6. Sitting still

- Ask the children to sit comfortably and sit as still as they can for a full minute. You may wish to use a sound or bell to mark the beginning and the end of the minute.
- The aim is to encourage them to pay attention to what may be happening in their minds or bodies.
- Reassure your class that it's okay if they don't quite get the hang of it – the whole point of mindfulness is not to focus on succeeding but to pay attention to the experience.



6. Body contact

- Encourage the children to start breathing slowly and deeply.
- Ask them to pay attention to their bodies. They are going to notice four points where their body makes contact with itself or the world around them.
- Continue this for a few minutes before asking the children to bring their awareness back to the room.



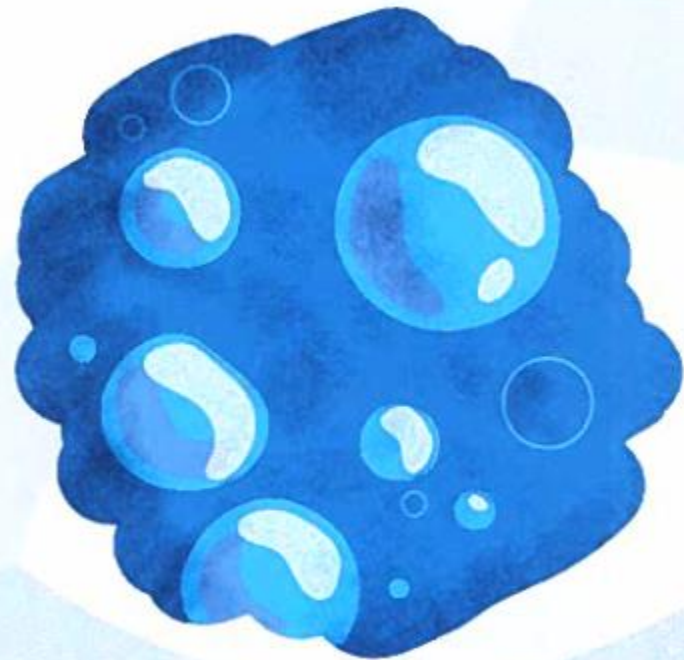
7. Tall like a tree

- Encourage the children to stand tall, as if they were a tree.
- Ask them to breathe in and imagine what it would feel like to be strong like a tree.
- Encourage them to notice any sensations within their body as they keep breathing.
- Continue this for a few minutes before asking the children to bring their awareness back to the room.



5. Bubble mindfulness

- Ask the children to stop and breathe.
- Whilst breathing, ask them to pay attention to any feelings.
- Now ask them to pay attention to any thoughts.
- Now ask them if they have any sensations in their body.
- Encourage them to notice all three.
- If there is anything that they would like to let go of, encourage them to put them all in a bubble and blow it away.
- Continue this for a few minutes.



4. Attitude of gratitude

- Ask the children to focus on their breathing. If they wish, they can close their eyes.
- Encourage them think of one thing that they are grateful for and encourage them to keep this image in their mind.
- Ask them to notice any feelings or sensations that arise.
- Continue this for a few minutes.



Mindfulness Based Activities

The Mind

1. Count to ten

- Encourage the children to focus on their breathing by counting the number of in breaths and out breaths.
- Reassure them that it is completely natural for their minds to start wandering off to other things.
- Encourage them to notice when their minds wander and to gently try to bring their attention back to their breathing and start counting at one again.



2. Thoughts in the sky

- Ask the children to focus on their breathing.
- Encourage them to imagine any distracting thoughts or feelings as clouds in the sky, floating away gently.
- Continue this for a few minutes.



3. Waves

- Ask the children to focus on their breathing.
- Encourage them to imagine any distracting thoughts or feelings as waves in the ocean, coming and going, rolling in and leaving again.
- Continue this for a few minutes.

