

The Benefits of Mindfulness for Children

Words: Lauren Hoffmeier



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We all have one thing in common: a birthday. We may have no memory of that first crucial day in your life, but all of a sudden you were here. We had no idea what this place was or what to do with it and now there was a big demand for us to be a part of it. So right off the bat, we all started life dealing with stress. We learned to walk, talk and started school. We worried about our grades or problems at home. We made friends and even met a few bullies. We were put face-to-face with a world that harboured lots of opinions and many expectations. Needless to say, childhood was stressful.

Aristotle once said “the habits we form from childhood make no small difference, but rather they make all the difference”.

There are a few moments in childhood development known as critical (or sensitive), and one of those periods occurs between the ages of two and seven. This is a time when the cell connections in the brain are more receptive than normal to influences in a child’s environment. A time when language forms and associations are made. In short, this is a time when we develop the road map on how to exist, which is a lot for a child to handle.

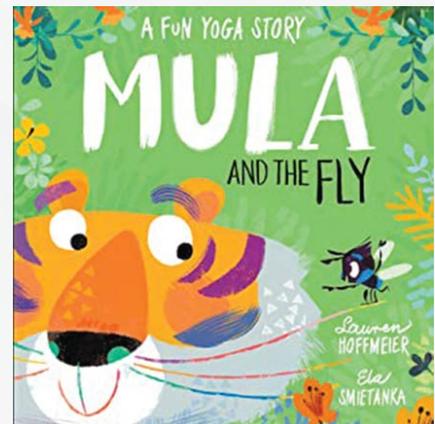
I distinctly remember having one fear as a child and that was the fear of

growing up. I was amazed by how well adults handled every situation and thought, “I’ll never be able to do that.” I didn’t realise how much of an illusion this was because they were just as terrified, dealing with things they were never prepared for. (Sounds familiar?) This goes on to show that not only are children dealing with stress, but the grown-ups are as well.

Happily, there is a way to help deal with all of this stress. It’s something called mindfulness. Mindfulness is a free and non-invasive tool that reminds us to simply observe our thoughts without judgement. This extraordinarily simple tool has been scientifically proven to reduce stress.

It’s something that can easily be practised at home by simply encouraging your child to focus on their breath or take a mindful walk, help cook a mindful meal, fill in a colouring book or even listen to a guided meditation.

Through the practice of mindfulness, we begin to activate our learning centre - known as the prefrontal cortex - the part of our brain that focusses on cognition, problem-solving and even personality. This makes mindfulness an important tool for children to have in their back pocket as they continue to develop, especially as the practice has been



Mula and the Fly: A Fun Yoga Story,
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shown to improve grey matter density - the substance in the brain responsible for processing information.

“When you get in touch with what awareness really is, you then realise that those thoughts ‘are not me and they’re not mine’ and you can observe them like a scientist: what is the nature of this thought? Where does it come from?”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D, founder of Mindfulness-Based Stress-Reduction (MBSR).

When a child has developed this sense of self-awareness, they are able to observe their feelings. They build the life skill of self-soothing and the capacity for compassion by helping their peers. They learn that they are not controlled by their emotions and



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that their emotions come and go, just like a breath, which is a great stress-reliever. The extraordinary thing is that children have an innate sense of the practice because mindfulness comes so naturally to them.

Mindfulness inspires a focus on the breath in order to calmly observe the present moment. Not to immediately react to a trigger, but to reflect. This is a skill that empowers children to manage their anger better, resolve learning difficulties or deal with personal issues. With this calm sense of observation, the child builds the foundation that will set them up for life. A foundation that allows them to make sound decisions and encourages a curiosity in the world around them in order to access a greater capacity for learning. It helps cultivate the ability to be present and the benefits of mindfulness in children are invaluable.

- ➔ **Reduces stress**
- ➔ **Improves relationships and communication skills**
- ➔ **Improves learning skills and cognition**
- ➔ **Improves focus and attention**
- ➔ **Improves impulse-control and self-regulation**
- ➔ **Improves mental wellbeing**
- ➔ **Increases compassion**
- ➔ **It's absolutely free!**

Practising mindfulness during a child's critical period sets them up to access their full potential, laying the groundwork for an awe-filled and inspiring life. It only grows stronger with time, allowing them to calmly understand the inner and outer self and participate fully in the world around them.

Mindfulness is a superpower hiding in plain sight every time we take a breath and let it go.



Lauren Hoffmeier was raised in the heart of New York City with a performance background in opera and musical theatre. She is the author of *Mula and the Fly: A Fun Yoga Story*, a picture book series that softly introduces children to yoga. The fun characters and engaging stories promote a happy and healthy lifestyle to encourage positive mental wellbeing during early development.

Lauren is a certified vinyasa yoga instructor and graduate of Boston University. In this brilliant world of oddballs and misfits, she aims to inspire positivity by encouraging an international mindset of joy and uniqueness.

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