



# Mindfulness and Social and Emotional Learning for Parents and Caregivers

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Welcome to the world of mindfulness! We are excited that you have joined us to learn ways to support your own well-being and that of your child. Simple exercises will help you feel more at peace and will enable you and your child to manage the stress of daily life. Following is information about what mindfulness is and how to practice it with your child.

*Mindfulness strengthens our ability to remain calm, respond thoughtfully, and have greater compassion for ourselves and others.*

**WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?** Mindfulness is the practice of noticing what we are feeling, thinking, sensing, and doing in the present moment.

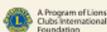
**HOW IS MINDFULNESS PRACTICED?** Simple mindfulness practices use an anchor—such as the breath, a bodily sensation, or a feeling—to focus attention. The goal is to focus attention on the anchor and notice when attention drifts. When attention does drift, return your attention to the anchor. Deep breathing is one mindfulness activity that can be practiced to experience an immediate sense of peace and calm.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?** Mindfulness helps us to be our best.

- When you and your child pause and do mindfulness activities together, you both slow your heart rates, which lowers blood pressure and gives a sense of peace and calm.
- Deep breathing and focusing support brain functioning and sharpen the ability to concentrate so that you and your child can relate well and learn together.
- Practicing deep breathing several times per day helps to develop the positive brain habit of pausing and responding with compassion rather than reacting with judgment and anxiousness.
- Pausing and responding with compassion helps to intentionally choose helpful words and actions.

*Without mindfulness, we tend to be impulsive and reactive, which causes stress and anxiousness that impacts everyone around us.*

**HOW DOES MINDFULNESS SUPPORT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING?** Mindfulness concentrates primarily on breathing deeply and focusing attention on the present moment, fostering emotional calm and mental clarity. Social and emotional learning (SEL) develops skills and concepts that promote five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Together, these two approaches deepen the ability to understand and manage inner life skills while engaging in relationships and activities in the outer world.





# Tips for Doing Lions Quest Mindfulness Exercises with Children

At this stage of life, children are separating their opinions from those of their parents and caregivers. Language skills are fairly well-developed and they are getting skilled at expressing their own opinions and feelings verbally. Therefore, the focus of mindfulness exercises at this age is on deep breathing and developing a sense of autonomy and emotional self-regulation and expression.

*Mindfulness exercises may be beneficial to practice as a family as well as one-on-one with your child.*

Following are simple tips for engaging your child with mindfulness exercises:

**TRY OUT THE EXERCISES FOR YOURSELF.** It’s always best to do the exercises yourself before sharing them with your child so that you are comfortable and familiar with them. By doing these exercises yourself, you may discover that that you are becoming a more patient and responsive parent. Notice how your calm behavior supports the social, emotional, and academic learning needs of your child. Mindfulness is for adults, too!

**INTRODUCE MINDFULNESS AS A FUN ACTIVITY.** Tell your child that you are going to do something fun together that will help you both feel more peaceful and ready for a good day. Children this age like variety, so make sure the exercises include interesting opportunities to practice quieting the mind and body as well as reflecting together about what your child experienced at the end of the mindfulness exercises.

**PARTICIPATE WITH YOUR CHILD.** Let your child know that you will be participating in these exercises. Children are much more likely to do these exercises if you share in the experience.

**FIND A QUIET AND COMFORTABLE SPACE.** Find a place with enough space and no distractions. A quiet space is ideal, as it supports turning the attention inside. Some people like to dim the lights. Turn off all media unless you choose to play soft instrumental music in the background.

**PROMOTE AUTONOMY AND CHOICE IN POSTURE AND REFLECTION.** Get into a mindful posture, which is generally a comfortable seated position, either in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. You and your child will sit up straight with hands on the thighs. Let your child choose whether to close the eyes or gaze softly toward the floor. Because this age group likes autonomy and choice, you may want to give the option of sitting, lying down, or standing. For lying down or standing, ask your child to find a comfortable position that can be held for up to 10 minutes. At the end of the exercise, let your child choose ways to reflect together—writing, talking, drawing, etc.

**CREATE A DAILY HABIT.** Young children love routine. Doing a simple mindfulness exercise at the same time every day helps to create a powerful daily habit. Consider doing mindfulness exercises after breakfast or before bed.





## Introduction to Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing is the foundation of mindfulness practices. This brief exercise will acquaint you and your child with this simple practice that you will be using with each mindfulness exercise going forward.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*I thought it would be interesting if we started doing some mindfulness exercises that could get us ready to have a good day. Have you heard the word mindfulness before? (pause)*

*I understand that mindfulness means paying attention to what is happening right now in our bodies, minds, and all around us. When we do this, through deep breathing and focusing attention, we can focus and not be thinking about and doing other things. We might feel more peaceful and at ease when we are quiet and still, concentrating on what is happening right this moment. And it can help us feel less stressed out when life gets complicated. Let's try a simple mindfulness exercise and then we'll talk about it.*

*Let's find a comfortable position and sit straight up, placing your hands on your thighs. You can close your eyes if you like or just gaze softly downward in front of you. (pause)*

*Notice how that feels. (pause)*

*Place your hands on your belly and notice what happens when you breathe in through your nose (pause) and out through your mouth. (pause)*

*Notice how your belly pushes out like a balloon when you breathe in and falls back toward your body when you breathe out. Feel the rhythm of your breathing as your belly rises when you breathe in and falls when you breathe out. (pause)*

*Let's breathe like this with the belly rising and falling for three big breaths. (pause)*

*Notice where you feel the breath most prominently. Is it in your nostrils? Chest? Belly? (pause)*





Just notice as you continue to pay attention to the rhythm of your breathing for three more breaths. (pause)

If your eyes are closed, open them now. Thanks for doing this with me.

### Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

**Reflecting Questions**

**What?** What did it feel like to sit in your mindful posture? What did you notice?

**So What?** What did it feel like when your belly was rising? When it was falling?

**Now What?** How do you feel now? Would you like to do this again?



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## Mindful Self-Management Exercise: Pausing the Action

This exercise helps with controlling our impulses when faced with strong feelings by identifying feelings that start as challenging thoughts, inserting a pause to interrupt the “thought-feeling-action” chain, and reframing these thoughts to take positive action.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's do a mindfulness exercise that focuses on the skill of self-discipline—pausing ourselves when faced with a challenging situation so that we can choose a positive response. Just like using a remote control to pause the action on a TV screen, we'll learn how to use our own remote control to pause ourselves. Find a comfortable position, sit up straight, and place your hands on your thighs. If you want to stand or lie down, find a posture that will be comfortable for several minutes. Close your eyes if you like or gaze softly downward.*

*Breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth three times. (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*As you are breathing in and out, think about a situation that caused you to feel a strong emotion—one that might have led you to respond without thinking. The situation might have made you feel sad, disappointed, angry, frustrated, or embarrassed. (pause)*

*Imagine you are watching yourself in that situation on a TV screen. (pause)*

*Notice that strong feeling coming over you and feel that need to respond. (pause)*

*You have the power to pause the scene and create a positive ending. Imagine you are holding a TV remote control. Make a fist with your thumb on the top and press your imaginary PAUSE button. You have now given yourself time to decide how the scene will end. Return to mindful breathing as you think of some ways to respond to the challenging situation in which you felt a strong feeling. (pause)*



Pressing **PAUSE** creates some space and time for you to choose positive words and actions to respond to what is happening. You might say to yourself: "When I have feelings I need to face, I'll press **PAUSE** to create some space. Positive thoughts will help me choose the best response that I can use." (pause)

Hit the **PLAY** button on your remote. You now have given yourself the space and time you need to choose a more helpful response. Imagine yourself responding with positive words and actions. Giving yourself a **PAUSE** can allow your feelings about a situation to change. Notice any change in the feelings you have now. (pause)

Take two deep breaths to finish the exercise. If your eyes are closed, slowly open them.

If you are able, share the **TV Remote Control** handout.

### Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

**Reflecting Questions**

- What?** What did you notice happening when you felt a strong feeling?
- So What?** Why do you think it might be helpful to insert a PAUSE in a challenging situation? In what ways did your feelings change after the pause, if at all?
- Now What?** In what other situations might it be helpful to use your imaginary PAUSE button?



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# TV Remote Control

When I have feelings I need to face,  
 I'll press **PAUSE** to create some space.  
 Positive thoughts will help me choose.  
 The best response that I can use.



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## Mindful Self-Awareness Exercise: Identifying Feelings

One of the most important skills for mental health and well-being is being able to identify what you feel and how feelings are expressed in the body. This exercise will help you and your child explore what you are feeling at any moment and how that feeling shows up through facial expressions and body postures.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Today, let's do a mindfulness exercise that helps us explore our feelings and show those feelings through facial expressions and body postures. Then we can know ourselves better and also tune into the feelings of others. Find a comfortable seated position, sit up straight, and place your hands on your thighs. If you want to stand or lie down, find a posture that will be comfortable for several minutes. Close your eyes if you like or gaze softly downward. Begin to bring your attention to your breath. (pause)*

*Start to notice the rhythm of your breath as you breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Once you are aware of that rhythm, begin to breathe more deeply, bringing the air all the way into your belly on the inhale and releasing the air out on the exhale, allowing your belly to go back toward your spine. (pause)*

*As you breath, do you notice any feelings in your body? Just notice and try to name one if you can. (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*Think about a time when you had a strong feeling. What did it feel like in your body? How was your face reacting? As you think about this, you may notice that your body and face are reacting right now. We typically have a physical reaction to our feelings, and those feelings affect our facial expressions and our bodies.*

*Let's see if you can show me some feelings with your body and your face. I am going to call out a feeling word, one at a time. When you hear the feeling word, show me that feeling with your face and your body. For example, if I say happy, show me with your face and body what that might look like right now. Maybe a big smile and hands in the air.*



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Read the following words and allow your child time to respond with facial expressions and body postures: happy, sad, scared, angry, impatient, proud, worried, frustrated, puzzled, thrilled, exhausted. Allow your child time to respond with facial expressions and body postures. You may want to participate.

*You really had a lot of facial expressions and gestures to show all of those feelings! Take two deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth to finish the activity. If your eyes are closed, slowly open them.*

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice about the connection between feelings and your face and body?
- So What?** Complete the sentence: I am feeling \_\_\_\_ today, and I feel it mostly in my \_\_\_\_\_. Put a name to the feeling you had and where you felt it.
- Now What?** How can the expressions and postures of others help you know what they feel?





## Learning to Calm Down and Reflect

It's completely normal during times like this to feel difficult emotions. Identifying and naming these feelings, as well as learning ways to respond calmly are useful self-management skills that will help children and adults have a better experience.

Here are some ways for naming, calming, and reflecting on emotions:

1. Notice the feeling in your body and acknowledge the feeling is natural for the situation.
2. Find a word that names your emotion as accurately as possible.
3. Calm your emotions by:
  - Taking 10 deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly
  - Going for a walk to remove yourself from the situation
  - Writing down your feelings
  - Talking about your feelings to a trusted family member or friend
4. Reflect on what happened and how you can prepare for or prevent a similar situation in the future.

*Everyone experiences a range of different emotions throughout the day.*

## Building Your Child's Social and Emotional Competence

Self-management is a social and emotional learning competency that helps children effectively regulate their emotions, control impulses, manage stress, and set and achieve goals. These activities help children build emotional awareness, reflection, and calming skills.

**Take Inventory!**

Take a "feeling" inventory over the next few days, observing how they feel throughout the day. Pay attention to the situations that caused their feelings and their reactions. Use the steps to calm and reflect on difficult emotions.

**Draw a Poster!**

Draw a poster with imagery they would associate with before, during, and after feelings using the steps to calm and reflect on difficult emotions. Then come up with a positive saying that can be adopted by the family as a motto.

Many children are experiencing feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear due to the onset of COVID-19. They need a chance to share their thoughts and feelings and ask questions. Make sure you are accurately informed and ready to educate your child knowing the information is evolving all the time. Get information from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html>



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## Mindful Self-Awareness Exercise: Building Self-Confidence

This exercise will help you and your child learn how to build self-confidence with positive statements that you say to yourself.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's begin our time together by getting peaceful and quiet inside as we discover how saying positive things about ourselves can help us have a good day every day. Positive statements remind us of our strengths and talents that make us special. These positive statements build our self-confidence—knowing we are important and skillful.*

*Let's begin by getting into a comfortable position. Sit up straight like a string is pulling your head upward and place your hands on your thighs. Close your eyes, if that feels comfortable, or gaze softly downward. Bring your attention to your breath. (pause)*

*Start to notice the rhythm of your breathing as you breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. (pause)*

*Once you are aware of that rhythm, begin to breathe more deeply for several breaths, bringing the air all the way into your belly when you breathe in (pause) and pushing it all the way out when you breathe out. (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, think about one thing that you like about the way you feel right now and think it to yourself. For example: "I feel calm and peaceful right now." (pause)*

*Now think about some characteristics about yourself. Think of one positive thing you could say about one of your characteristics. Examples include: "I feel healthy." "I am kind and helpful to people." "I can do what I set my mind to do." "I am good at \_\_\_\_ and that makes me feel good about myself." Practice thinking one of these positive thoughts to yourself. Notice how you feel when you think it. (pause)*



*Bring to mind something that you like about your physical appearance. Create a positive statement in your mind about your physical appearance. Examples include: "I (like/enjoy) my hair because my hair is curly/straight/natural." "I (like/enjoy) my clothes because my clothes are colourful." "I (like/enjoy) my smile because my smile makes me happy." (pause)*

*Think of something at school that you are good at and think of a positive statement about it. For example: "I am good at (language arts/math/science) because I (love stories/like solving problems/like experiments)." (pause)*

*Think of a relationship you have. Then think of a positive statement about that relationship. For example: "I am caring in my relationship with (my mom/my friend/my cousin) because (I like her/we are friends/my cousin is nice to me)." (pause)*

*There are so many wonderful things about you to say positive things about! Let's breathe two more times to finish the activity. If your eyes are closed, slowly open them.*

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice about the way you feel when you think of something positive about yourself?
- So What?** Why do you think giving yourself positive statements is helpful?
- Now What?** What is one positive statement that you could say about yourself every day to make you happy?



## Mindful Self-Management Exercise: Managing Stress

This exercise will help you and your child manage stress by learning to be present with thoughts and emotions without reacting to them every time.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your child.
- Use the script to guide the exercise. Adjust language as needed.
- All exercises begin with **Breath Awareness** followed by a **Mindfulness Activity** that teaches a practical mindfulness skill.
- Each exercise ends with **Reflecting Questions** to discuss with your child. Invite your child to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

### Breath Awareness

*Let's begin our time together by getting peaceful and quiet inside so we can learn how to manage our stressful thoughts and emotions without always reacting to them. Let's get comfortable and sit up straight as if your head was attached to the ceiling. Place your hands on your thighs. Close your eyes, if that feels comfortable, or gaze softly downward. Begin breathing slowly and deeply, in and out, in and out. (pause)*

*As you are breathing in and out, notice any thoughts that may arise. (pause)*

### Mindfulness Activity

*Continue breathing slowly and deeply. Imagine each thought is like a cloud, drifting overhead in the sky. The thoughts are drifting toward you. As they drift, thought clouds may settle over you for a little while, and then continue on their journey. (pause)*

*We know that some of our thoughts may be stressful and may cause us to have strong emotions, such as anger, worry, sadness, or frustration. This is normal. Notice any emotions that come up as you watch the thought clouds approaching. (pause)*

*Notice where you might be feeling these emotions in your body. (pause)*

*Imagine placing that strong emotion on a cloud and watching it slowly drift away from you. (pause)*

*Focus on your breathing instead of focusing on the emotion, and notice how it starts to float away. Your thoughts and emotions come and go. Sometimes they stay with you for a while. You can simply notice them without reacting to them, which will help them float on by. (pause)*

*You can say this rhyme to yourself: When a cloud of emotion hangs over me, I notice it and let it be. I watch it floating over my head, traveling somewhere else instead. (pause)*



*When you are distracted by a thought or emotion, imagine it floating by on a cloud and bring your attention back to breathing slowly, in and out. Notice if that makes you feel more peaceful. Let's take two more deep breaths to finish the activity. If your eyes are closed, slowly open them.*

If you are able, share the **Clouds of Emotion** handout.

## Reflecting

Take this opportunity to have a conversation about your shared experience using the following reflecting questions:

### Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice in your body today when you recalled strong emotions?
- So What?** Why do you think it may be helpful to imagine our strong emotions floating by on a cloud?
- Now What?** How might you use the emotion cloud image to help you when you are stressed?



## Clouds of Emotion

When a cloud (of emotion) hangs over me,  
I notice it and let it be.  
I watch it floating over my head,  
Traveling somewhere else instead.

