



Introducing mindfulness



Hello and welcome to this short guide to accompany the first Mind Hug storybook, about introducing the power of mindful breathing to children. Mindful breathing is at the heart of mindfulness, which involves learning self-awareness, acceptance and compassion towards ourself and our surroundings. Mindfulness is a simple and profound practice widely recognised as beneficial for general well-being, including our mind, body and relationships. And it can be nurtured organically from an early age to help children flourish with healthy mind habits and resilience.

In a fast-paced world filled with distractions and sometimes difficult thoughts and emotions, we often become tangled up inside our head. This can change our behaviour or limit our experiences. Mindfulness is about taking care of our mind and body by being *here* and noticing *now*. By giving friendly attention to our breath and physical sensations we can ground ourselves in the present moment and know what is happening inside and around us. By choosing to be mindful we can focus, understand clearly and respond wisely. We can have thoughts and feelings without judging or ignoring them, and break free from churning cycles about the past and future. We can be grateful for our wonderful, incredible mind, while being able to calm its automatic impulses. With mindfulness, we can be open to new experiences and all the opportunities for joy and kindness life brings. Why not start young with practising basic mindfulness skills, when the brain is most eager, energetic and responsive?

As it notes at the beginning of the Mind Hug storybook, it's a journey that explores self-soothing, emotional regulation and empathy, but it doesn't need to use big words.

Some children will understand Mind Hug straight away and may enjoy joining you for activities that link with moments in the story (at the end of this guide). Other children may respond positively, but need help understanding how to take deep, slow breaths. For them, it's best to start with ideas for noticing breath on the next few pages, play a breathing game and then come back to the storybook. Either way, if you are practising mindfulness, children will be curious and will probably copy your actions.

Practising mindfulness is not a panacea, but it can provide practical tools to help us thrive now and in the future. Remember to approach it with a child in a light, playful way. Be gentle with your expectations – if your child is not open to the idea, move on to another activity and perhaps try again another time. It is important not to make mindfulness something they have to do, but something children can choose, find useful and explore on their terms. Look for the Mind Hug logo in the future, as there are new resources coming soon to take the adventure further if you want to.

Relax and have fun!

Sarah Gibbs
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Teach breathing?

Until a heavy cold clogs up our airways, most of us take breathing for granted. It's obviously essential, but it's a background task that our body takes care of without our awareness. Right? And yet, "Take a big breath," or "Breathe deeply," is the first suggestion on our lips for a number of situations. It's easy to presume that we all know how to do it, but it's an especially high expectation of children to presume they know how to do it naturally. And if we want to introduce mindful breathing to them, we should be ready to explain how to take slow, deep breaths and why it's useful.

In the first Mind Hug story Jack and Sarah discover that pausing for a few moments and taking big breaths is comforting when

emotions become strong. For example, big breaths can help us to be calm when we feel giddy or frustrated, more relaxed when we feel anxious, and safe when we are scared. And big breaths can help us to be aware of what is happening around us too.

However, if we jump straight into "Let's do a breathing exercise," it doesn't sound that appealing and children may lose interest. So it's best to use bite-sized information during a few moments of guided awareness together and come back to it again, later, for more. The next few pages are a suggestion of how to explain mindful breathing in small steps, which you may like to follow or use as inspiration to adapt, depending on your child's level of learning.



Noticing breath

See breath

Experiment together by breathing onto a window or mirror and creating a misty patch on the surface. Or on a cold day stop and watch your breath form mini clouds in the air. Whose cloud puffs are the biggest? What do you have to do to make them bigger?

Feel breath

When you can't see your breath (of course it's invisible most of the time) how do you know it's there? You can feel it. Both hold your fingers near your nose and mouth. Slowly breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice how your body moves and how the air feels different. The air going in is cooler than the air coming out. Try to make the flow of air on your fingers feel stronger when you breathe out.

Imagine the process

Take a few moments to marvel at how amazing the breathing process is. With their fingers, help your child follow the path of air through their body. Trace the way breathing in gives our mind and body oxygen and breathing out gets rid of waste and toxins.

Spot the difference

Have a race or do something else that is fun and active. Talk about the difference in your heartbeat and breathing, and how you return it to a calm, steady pattern. Ask your child if they have noticed these things change at other times. Perhaps they were excited or upset? Explain that just like when we calm our body after running, dancing or climbing, we can also start to calm our running, busy mind by using big breaths.



Big breaths

Belly breathe

It's normal for children to interpret a big breath as a big gulp of air. They quickly open their mouth as wide as they can and scoop up air, but it is shallow in their chest. Instead, encourage your child to take big breaths from their belly. Lightly rest hands (yours/theirs/both) on their tummy and ask them to move the hands by taking a big breath in through their nose and out from their mouth. It may help if they imagine that their belly is like a balloon that can slowly expand and contract. Do another slow, deep, big belly breath together and focus on the sensations in your bodies.



Undercover practice

As with all subjects, learning is easy and is best done through play and repetition. Once your child understands how to breathe from their belly, enjoy practising big breaths together without obvious direction. Play around with a few of the following ideas at different times, for a short while. Everyone's favourite – blowing bubbles – can they make

a really big one? Blow the seeds off a dried dandelion head and make a wish. Breathe in the smell of freshly dried laundry. Keep a feather up in the air just with big breaths (not for very long, obviously). Use straws to blow table-tennis balls in a race around obstacles on a table. How loud or long can they toot a party horn? Blow out some candles or blow a toy windmill round.



Towards mindful breathing

The next step towards mindful breathing is encouraging voluntary, deliberate attention to breath. You can introduce this by doing a simple breathing exercise together and talking about when it might be good to do it again, and/or by themselves. First practise on your own, then pick a moment when your child is curious and alert. Invite them to join you for a breath-and-body check. Make it a game about being a doctor if you think that would help to spark an interest. Use a gentle, soft voice as you guide the activity.

- 1 Find or create a calm space. Show and tell your child what to do as you do it together. Get comfortable. Sit, stand or lie with a straight back and soft shoulders.
- 2 Place your hands on your belly. Slowly breathe in through your nose. See and feel how your tummy grows. Pause. Slowly breathe out through your mouth. Feel how your belly relaxes as the air leaves your body. Wait for a moment or two.
- 3 Repeat five times, focusing on your body and the sensation of breathing. You may like to close your eyes. If thoughts pop up or you get distracted, be thankful for having an alert mind and gently bring your attention back to your breath-and-body check.



Linking breath, body and emotion

After the breath-and-body check, ask your child to describe how their body feels. Is it soft and loose? Is their breathing even? Explain that we can be more aware of the way we feel by taking a few moments to check in with our body.

You may like to talk about how emotions feel. Pick an emotion and say how your body changes when you feel it, then ask your child to do the same. If you start, you can share ideas about how to describe feelings to help spark their insight. Colours are often helpful, but also consider talking about one or more of these in your description: temperature, weight, size, shape, movement, images. Describing words, like *fizzy*, *tight*, *jumpy*, can be useful, but be aware that some children may find

this more difficult. Be gentle and curious about what they say. It's important not to make judgements about the colours or words. We are all rainbows and we need all the colours (range of emotions) to be complete, but sometimes one colour, or more, feels stronger than the others for a while.

Explain that when our feelings are strong and thoughts are loud, we can take care and have a Mind Hug with big breaths. A Mind Hug can help us to know what is happening and be calm and clear. And just like with a hug, sometimes it's nice to have a Mind Hug just because we can. It can refresh our mind, make us more aware of the world and help us notice things we may not have noticed before. It's another way to be healthy and look after ourselves. We all have power in our breath, we just need to practise.



Personalise it

Every child is different. If they are not interested in doing the exercise now, you may have a more positive response if you change locations or your choice of pose next time there is an opportunity. Try lying down or being outside. Stand up and stretch. Or ask your child if they would like to try a Mind Hug after reading the storybook at bedtime.



Practising Mind Hugs

Our incredible mind can be quick and curious like a monkey. Different thoughts take our attention. Sometimes emotions behind the thoughts make them stronger. Re-read the story and talk about the ways Jack and Sarah stay with their breath when their minds wander. Practise Mind Hugs together or invite your child to try one on their own.

Make it a game

Can you fill up with air? Focus on your toes and give them a wiggle. Then point and flex your feet. As you breathe in and out, think about each breath going into your body: 1. From your toes to your knees. 2. From your knees to your bottom. 3. From your bottom

to your chest. 4. From your chest through your arms to your hands. 5. From your chest up to your face. Feel your body, from the tips of your toes to the end of your nose.

Count

Count each complete breath. You may like to count on your hand.

Focus on touch

Focus on your fingers. How do they feel on your tummy?

Choose a colour

Is there a colour around you that you find comforting? Focus on the colour.



Mindful moments

Mini moments

Paying attention to our senses is a great way to be mindful in short moments available in a busy day. You can refresh boring, automatic activities by asking your child to notice small sensations, perhaps when cleaning their teeth or having a wash, e.g. can they hear the foam bubbles popping? Being aware of ourselves and our surroundings can also be turned into an on-the-go game, while in the car, walking, food shopping or waiting for an appointment. You can expand on the superpower idea in the Mind Hug story and have fun practising super-sense skills. Start by asking your child to bring their attention to one sense during a few mindful moments. What is it showing them?

Longer moments

When there is more time, perhaps at the weekend, invite your child to become involved with planning and cooking a meal, or baking some biscuits. Go from shop to plate, guiding each step with a gentle focus on their senses. Be curious about the results. Tell your child that they are the head chef and they need to check the food. Ask them some questions: Firstly, how does it look? What does it feel like to touch? Does it have a special smell? Let it rest on the tongue and then chew the food and focus on the flavour. Does the flavour change as you chew? How about the texture? Once you've swallowed, how do you feel? Does it taste different from how you expected?





Activities

Print these pages and explore
mindful moments together





Big breath

Windmill practice

It takes big breaths to make a windmill go round.

Listen to your breathing.

Slowly breathe in through your nose.

Deep in your body, feel your belly expand like a balloon.

Breathe out through your mouth, into a windmill sail.

Feel your belly go down. Watch the windmill go round.

Your breath is powerful, like the wind.

Feel the power of your breath in your body.



Jack is
feeling
fizzy



Sarah is
feeling
messy



Mind Hug art

Body check

Set up a table with these art materials:

- paper
- crayons
- pencils

Take a big breath in ... and ... out.

Focus on your body. How does it feel?

Describe the way your body feels with words.

Here are some examples:

tight like a spring

bright as a light

flat like a pancake

jumpy as a bunny

What colour helps to show the way your body feels?

Draw a picture with the colour.

Take a big breath in ... and ... out.



Mind Hug art

Thought bubbles

Set up a table with these art materials:

- white wax crayon
- white paper
- watercolour paints
- paintbrush
- water pot

Take a big breath in ... and ... out.

What are you thinking about?

Draw a picture of a thought bubble with the white crayon.

How do you feel while you are thinking about it?
Pick one paint colour, or more, that helps to show how
you are feeling. Use a wet paintbrush to wash the
colour over the picture.

Look at the picture and then close your eyes.
Take a big breath in ... and ... out, in ... and ... out.

Let the thought bubble float away.





Sense stretch

Taste trick

Sit down for your snack or meal.
Stop! Don't eat yet.

Use your senses to examine your food.
Take your time.

Now, how does it taste?

1



see

2



touch

3



smell

4



taste



Sense stretch

WOW walk

There is a lot of WOW in now. You can discover more by tuning in to your senses. Give it a go and then you will know.

As you walk, start to be aware of your breath.
Notice how your body is moving. Feel the air on your skin.
Stop! Close your eyes and take three big breaths.
Now open your eyes. What can you ...

1



see,

2



hear,

3



smell,

4



touch?



Mind Hug art / Sense stretch Super eyes

Set up a table with these art materials:

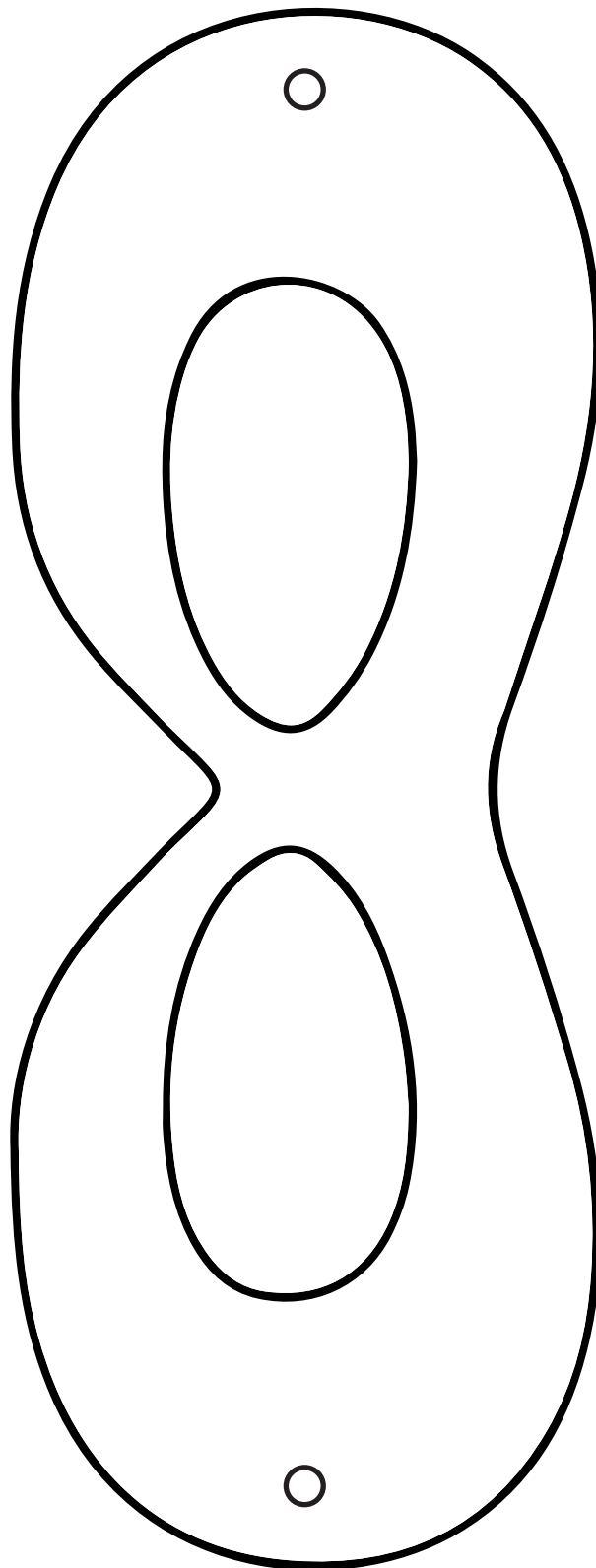
- children's scissors
- pencil or pen
- sheet of colour foam
- fun stickers
- ribbon or string

Cut out the mask template on the next page.
Put it on the sheet of colour foam and draw around it.
Cut out the shapes from the foam.

Decorate the mask with stickers.
Thread ribbon through the side holes and knot.
Wear your mask and ask for help to tie the ribbon
together to hold it in place.

Open your super eyes.
Breathe slowly and deeply three times.
What can you see?

Mask template





Sense stretch

Listen loud

Close your eyes and listen to your breathing.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Turn up the volume on your ears.

Let your other senses fade and become quiet.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Listen to the sounds around you.

What can you hear?

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Listen to the world.

Squeeze your body and r e l a x.



Superpower breath

I have the power

Stand tall, straight back, shoulders soft and down.
Squeeze your body and r e l a x.

Belly breathe

Feel how the soles of your feet touch the ground.

Belly breathe

Feel an invisible thread attached to your head,
gently pulling towards the sky.

Belly breathe

Feel the power of your breath in your body.



Superpower breath

Lift-off

Stand tall, straight back, shoulders soft and down.

Squeeze your body and r e l a x.

Big breath in and bend your knees ...
big breath out as you stand UP, bringing your arms UP too!

Big breath in and bend your knees again ...
big breath out as you stand UP, with your arms UP again!

Big breath in and bend your knees once more ...
big breath out and stand UP, taking your arms UP, UP, UP!

Feel the **power** of your **breath** in your **body**.



First published in Great Britain in 2017 by Circus House Publishing Ltd
7–9 North Parade Buildings, Bath, BA1 1NS
www.circus-house.com

This guide has been made to accompany [*Mind Hug: The first story*](#), which
begins the [Mind Hug range](#) aiming to build foundations
for good mental health from an early age using the power of story.
Part of every book sale supports the charity [Place2Be](#).

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