

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness mean noticing that your mind is focusing on upsetting thoughts and consciously letting go of these thoughts by refocusing attention on the present moment. This means paying attention to what we are thinking so that we can say “I don’t need to think about that right now” or “This doesn’t need to upset me right now”.

This is harder than it sounds and it is necessary to practice, but we believe learning to practice mindfulness and let go of negative or distressing thoughts can help people to be more effective parents.

What is Mindfulness Practise

Mindfulness is a skill that can be learnt like any other. There is nothing mysterious about it. It’s like learning to ride a bike or cook good meals or play football or cricket. The most important thing is that you try it out and regularly practise the skills. You start with easy practise - maybe just 5 minutes a day and as you start to feel more comfortable you might extend the length of your practise. Sometimes you will feel like you are really getting the hang of it. Sometimes you might feel overwhelmed and discouraged. What is certain, however, is that if you keep practising, your skills at mindfulness will improve.

So what is mindfulness practise? Mindfulness is simply about focusing all of your attention on the present moment, whatever you are doing.

If you are eating, you notice yourself eating.

If you are washing the dishes, you are aware of the sounds and feelings that happen during this – the temperature of the water, the feel of the soapsuds, the sounds you are making.

This simple ability to focus your attention on the present is useful when you are a parent. It means you may start to notice your children in a new light – really notice what they are doing.

Mindfulness is about getting your emotions, thoughts and actions all working together so that you can parent mindfully, even when your life and circumstances are really hard. You cannot prevent stressful situations in life, but you can control your reactions to them. Practising mindfulness can help with this.

When people start doing mindfulness exercises they are often surprised at how difficult it can be to keep their mind/attention focused on the present moment. We are so often distracted by a million and one other thoughts such as – “Did I put Jake’s lunch box in his bag this morning?”, “I need to buy some bread when I go out shopping”, “I really lost it with the kids this morning. I’m a useless parent!” You may find yourself daydreaming, thinking about the future, or remembering incidents from the past. All of these thoughts are perfectly normal. It is difficult to slow down our minds and take them off automatic pilot.

We make better decisions, are better at noticing the positive things in our lives and able to reduce our stress, if we are able to switch off these negative thoughts, even for a minute or so.

Mindfulness exercises are about noticing that your mind has wandered off, becoming aware of the thought that has popped into your mind, and gently letting go of it so that you can refocus on the present moment.

Mindfulness is about doing this over and over, every few seconds for several minutes. It is harder than it sounds. But if you practice, you may find that you are able to be more present as a parent.