



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 adolescent. Simple exercises will help you feel more at peace and will enable you and your adolescent to manage the stress of daily life. Following is information about what mindfulness is and how to practice it with your adolescent.

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.

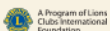
HOW IS MINDFULNESS PRACTICED? Simple mindfulness practices use an anchor—such as the breath, a bodily sensation, or a feeling—to focus attention. The goal is to focus attention on the anchor and notice when attention drifts. When attention does drift, return your attention to the anchor. Deep breathing 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 adolescent 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 adolescent 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 Adolescents

At this stage of life, adolescents are becoming more self-directed and are able to think and reason abstractly. They are able to recognize, identify, observe, and label thoughts and feelings, and their developing language skills help them express and reflect on those thoughts and feelings. However, because adolescence is the most rapid period of growth and development, thoughts and feelings can become overwhelming and confusing. That is why mindfulness and other self-regulation practices help adolescents thrive, as well as manage stress, anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviours that can emerge during this time. In addition, adolescents need autonomy and freedom of choice to feel like they have some control over their experiences.

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

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

TRY OUT THE EXERCISES FOR YOURSELF. It’s always best to do the exercises yourself before sharing them with your adolescent 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 adolescent. Mindfulness is for adults, too!

INTRODUCE MINDFULNESS AS A FUN ACTIVITY. Tell your adolescent that you have some interesting exercises that the two of you can do together to help manage stress and have a good day. Make mindfulness part of having some quality time together.

PARTICIPATE WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT. Let your adolescent know that you will be participating in these exercises. Adolescents 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.

GIVE YOUR ADOLESCENT AUTONOMY 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 adolescent will sit up straight with hands on the thighs. Give freedom of choice about whether to close the eyes or gaze softly toward the floor as well as whether to sit, lie down, or stand. If you or your adolescent choose to lie down or stand, find a comfortable position that can be held for up to 10 minutes. At the end of the exercise, suggest a variety of ways to reflect together—writing, talking, drawing, etc.

CREATE A DAILY HABIT. Adolescents like to mix things up. Choose a couple of times in the course of the day where mindfulness could become a powerful daily habit. Sometimes you can do it after breakfast and sometimes before bed. If you get a schedule going, soon you will both become better at expressing feelings, maintaining self-control, listening, and having positive relationships.





Introduction to Mindful Breathing

Mindful breathing is the foundation of mindfulness practices. This brief exercise will acquaint you and your adolescent 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 adolescent.
- 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 adolescent. Invite your adolescent to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

Breath Awareness

I thought it would be interesting to start doing some mindfulness exercises together because they can help us with managing stress and becoming more present. Have you ever 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. And that will help draw our attention away from distractions and into the present moment where we can feel peaceful and relaxed no matter what is going on around us. And I know it can relieve stress and give us this power to choose how we will respond in any situation—with kindness and curiosity. It sounds like it will get us ready to have a good day. Let's try a simple mindfulness exercise and then we'll talk about it.

Let's find a comfortable position and sit up straight, placing your hands on your thighs. You can close your eyes if you like or just gaze softly downward. If you want to stand or lie down, find a comfortable posture that you can hold for several minutes. (pause)

Notice how this position 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 spine 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 five deep abdominal 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? What might be useful about doing this when we're not present?



Lions Quest is a social and emotional learning program of Lions Clubs International Foundation.

Don't Let Stress Get You Down

Adolescent stress can affect their health, behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Helping your adolescent learn to recognize and develop strategies for managing stress in healthy ways can lead to life-long physical and psychological well-being.



Here are some strategies for managing stress:

- **DEEP BREATHING** Take a deep breath, count to ten, exhale and relax
- **EXERCISE** Walk, run, ride a bike, swim, dance, and get moving to create a feeling of calmness and well-being
- **ACTIVITIES THAT BRING COMFORT AND PEACE** Hobbies, sports, and other safe, enjoyable activities that provide a sense of accomplishment that can help relieve stressful feelings
- **POSITIVE THINKING** Believing that a situation will work out for the best by looking for positive aspects of the situation that helps reduce stress
- **PERSPECTIVE** Putting things in perspective helps relieve stress because it forces you to recognize that not everything is under your control and that some things are less important than others

Building Your Adolescent's Social and Emotional Competence

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

Reframe It!

Reinforce stress management skills by thinking of stress-reducing motivational mottos to help overcome stress.

Present It!

Create an inspirational presentation to share with others who may be experiencing stress at this time that educates about the healthy ways to manage stress and include the strategies listed above.

Many adolescents 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 teen 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>



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 adolescent 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 adolescent.
- 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 adolescent. Invite your adolescent to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

Breath Awareness

Today, let's do a mindfulness exercise that helps us experience emotions from the inside out and see how we show our emotions through our facial expressions and body postures. We can also talk about how this can help us better understand others as well. Find a comfortable seated position. Notice your body. Place your hands on your knees. Close your eyes, if that feels comfortable, or gaze softly downward. If you want to stand or lie down, just make sure you are comfortable enough to stay there for several minutes. Bring your attention to your breath. (pause)

Start to notice the rhythm of your breath as you breathe in and out. 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)

Mindfulness Activity

In your mind, slowly do a scan through your body, starting with your feet, leading up to your calves, through your knees, and up to your thighs. Notice any emotions. (pause)

Continue scanning your belly, chest, and out through your arms, wrists, and fingers. (pause)

Then go back to your chest and around your back. (pause)

Go up your neck, through your face, going all the way to the top of your head. Be curious about any feelings that you notice. (pause)



Maybe you felt many different emotions in your body after the body scan. One way we can identify emotions is to pay attention to what we're feeling in our body and give that feeling a word description. We then become more self-aware of the connection between emotions, the body, and our expression of those emotions. I am going to call out an emotion one at a time. When you hear the emotion, show me that emotion with your face and with a body posture without talking. For example, if I say happy, show me with your face what that might look like right now and how your body would look. (pause)

Call out several emotion words and pause between each one to give your adolescent time to demonstrate that emotion. You may want to do this yourself. Examples include: happy, sad, scared, angry, impatient, proud, worried, frustrated, puzzled, thrilled, exhausted.

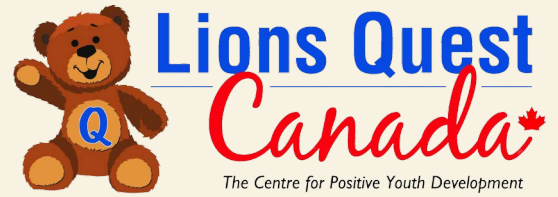
Let's take three more deep breaths. If your eyes are closed, slowly open them. (pause)

Reflecting

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

Reflecting Questions

- What?** What did you notice today about the connection between your emotions and the way your face and body express them?
- So What?** Why do you think it is important to identify and name your emotions and know what they look and feel like? Why do you think this might be important for relationships?
- Now What?** What will help you recognize emotions as you feel and express them?



Mindful Self-Management Exercise: Responding Using S.T.O.P.

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 adolescent.
- 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 adolescent. Invite your adolescent to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

Breath Awareness

Today, let's focus on a mindfulness skill of pausing when facing a challenging situation so that we can respond in a positive way. Find a comfortable position, sit up straight, and place your hands on your thighs. Close your eyes, if that feels comfortable, or gaze softly downward. If you want to lie down or stand up, just make sure you are in a comfortable position that you can hold for several minutes. Breathe slowly and deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth three times. (pause)

Mindfulness Activity

As we know, it can feel like we are travelling through life at high speed. So much activity can cause us to react without thinking and say or do something we later will regret. (pause)

Think about a time when you reacted quickly to something in a hurried or stressful moment. (pause)

For example, maybe someone treated you unfairly or criticized you in public. (pause)

Maybe you then said or did something you later regretted. (pause)

Your powerful thoughts and emotions were causing you to travel full steam ahead without using the brake. In these situations, we don't realize that we actually DO have time to use the brake. We can insert a Mindful STOP to pause and choose our response. (pause)

*A Mindful **STOP** means to physically Stop your thought or action, **Take** a breath (or as many as needed), **Observe** how the situation is making you feel, then **Proceed** mindfully with a response that will help you solve the problem. Feel what it would be like to stop an action or thought. (pause)*





Feel what it is like to observe something quietly and objectively. (pause)

Imagine what it will feel like to proceed after taking this time to choose rather than react. Now imagine yourself back in that stressful situation and you are about to react. (pause)

Imagine yourself, instead, hitting the brake and inserting a Mindful STOP. (pause)

In that moment, stop the action (pause), take a breath (pause), observe how you are feeling (pause), and proceed with a positive and helpful response. (pause)

Notice any changes in how your mind and body are feeling now. (pause)

You can use a Mindful STOP whenever you feel yourself in high gear and about to lose control. (pause)

Take a couple of deeper breaths. If your eyes are closed, slowly open them.

If you are able, share the **Mindful STOP** 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 in your body and with your feelings when you were practicing the four parts of STOP during this exercise?
- So What?** Why do you think it might be helpful to insert a Mindful STOP in challenging situations?
- Now What?** What are other examples of when you might use a Mindful STOP?



Lions Quest is a social and emotional learning program of Lions Clubs International Foundation.



Mindful Responding Using the S.T.O.P. Method



S—STOP what you are doing.

T—TAKE a breath.

O—OBSERVE how you are feeling.

P—PROCEED mindfully with a helpful response.



Mindful Self-Awareness Exercise: Building Self-Confidence

This exercise will help you and your adolescent learn ways to build self-confidence by acknowledging your own unique qualities and abilities.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your adolescent.
- 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 adolescent. Invite your adolescent to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

Breath Awareness

Let's begin our time together by getting into a comfortable posture as we explore ways to build our self-confidence using self-compliments. Sit up straight as if 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. Breathe slowly and deeply—in through your nose and out through your mouth—three times. (pause)

Mindfulness Activity

We know that we are all unique, one-of-a-kind individuals with qualities and strengths that help us be good people and accomplish things. This builds our self-confidence—the sense of being worthwhile and valuable. Feel that sense of worthiness in your body. (pause)

We can build up our self-confidence by recognizing our strengths and traits and by encouraging ourselves with self-compliments. Think about one or two things about your body that you are most happy with, such as the colour of your hair or eyes. Imagine saying a compliment to yourself about that, just like you would to a good friend. (pause)

Notice how you feel when you give yourself a compliment. One way to compliment yourself about your qualities and abilities is to say a positive statement to yourself. Start with "I" and use a prompt such as: "I am (quality) and capable of (skill)." For example, "I am kind and capable of good listening." (pause)

Now use the prompt that we just learned, saying to yourself, "I am" followed by one of your qualities. Then describe one of your abilities, talents, skills, etc. that you can do as a result of the quality you thought of. For example: "I am athletic and capable of playing soccer." This self-compliment could relate to sports, academics, art, music, relationship skills, or anything else about you. Think of a quality now and put the self-compliment into the prompt: I am _____ and capable of _____. (pause)

Let's try another one. (pause)





Feel in your body what it's like to compliment yourself. (pause)

Imagine developing the habit of giving yourself self-compliments for the good qualities and abilities you have and watching your self-confidence get stronger. Take a couple of deep breaths 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 happening in your body when you gave yourself a compliment?
- So What?** Why do you think it might be a good idea to compliment yourself?
- Now What?** What are times in your daily life when you could regularly compliment yourself?





Mindful Self-Management Exercise: Managing Stress

This exercise will help you and your adolescent learn to manage stress by being present with strong thoughts and emotions without reacting or hanging onto them.

- Each exercise takes 10 minutes or less.
- Familiarize yourself with the exercise before using with your adolescent.
- 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 adolescent. Invite your adolescent to stay in mindful silence until the Reflecting Questions.

Breath Awareness

Let's begin our time together by getting into a comfortable posture to explore how to manage stress by being present with strong emotions without reacting to them. Sit up straight and 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. (pause)

Do a quick body scan, starting with your feet, calves, knees, and legs. (pause)

Notice the rise and fall of your belly and chest. (pause)

Relax your neck and shoulders. (pause)

Sense your face, the top of your head, and your back. (pause)

Feel your sitting bones, hamstrings, and feet. (pause)

Notice any thoughts and emotions that are popping up. (pause)

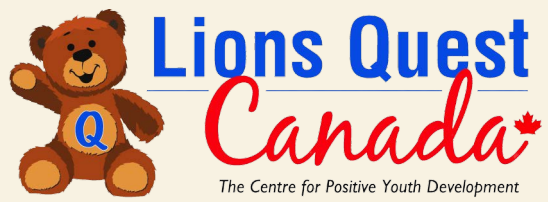
Mindfulness Activity

Thoughts and emotions come in and out of our minds and bodies all day like trains pulling into a station. (pause)

Sometimes powerful thoughts and emotions get stuck in the station and stay with us for a while before moving on. (pause)

The longer they stay in our minds and bodies, the stronger they may grow, causing discomfort. (pause)

Take a deeper breath and think of a strong thought or emotion that you recently experienced. (pause)



Notice in your body where you feel it. (pause)

It might be a tension or a tightness. (pause)

Imagine these thoughts or emotions approaching your mind on a train entering your station. (pause)

The train may stop and be with you for a while. (pause)

Use your deep breathing and focus on your breath instead of your thoughts and emotions. (pause)

While breathing, imagine yourself physically taking a step back and allowing the train to pass. (pause)

You don't have to react to the thoughts and emotions. You don't have to get on board the train. The thoughts and emotions will move on to the next station as you let them pass through your mind. (pause)

As the train departs, feel the distance between you and those thoughts and emotions. Notice any easing of the discomfort as the train moves further away. (pause)

The next time you have a strong thought or emotion, practice noticing it but not reacting to it. Have you ever heard the phrase "train of thought"? It means the series of thoughts a person can have about a topic or emotion. You can say this sentence to yourself: When a train of thought is approaching, I don't have to get on board. (pause)

Let's take two deep breaths to finish the activity.

If you are able, share the **Train of Thought** 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 when you recalled a strong thought or emotion?
- So What?** Why might it be helpful to imagine strong emotions travelling through on a train?
- Now What?** How might you use the train image to help you when you are feeling stressed?



Train of Thought



When a train of thought is passing,
I don't have to get on board.