

Importance of Mindfulness

During these unprecedented times of Covid-19 we all feel a little like a fish out of water. Learning new behavioral repertoires that encourage self-isolation and social distancing go against almost every social skill we have ever learned. Humans have evolved over the millennia to be a social animal, but more importantly we have evolved to be a cooperative social animal, whose very nature inclines us to help the herd before we help ourselves. This drive of evolution has helped shape our society's and cultures and during this time, has helped us understand the need to act as one unit to contain and control a threat to our tribe.

One of the things that can help us during this time is mindfulness. When we become stressed by situations around us, our bodies utilize a defense system that is often referred to as Flight or Fight. This system has evolved to keep us safe from dangers by allowing us to react very quickly to stimulus in the environment that we may perceive as threatening. This system does not require us to think instead it acts on instinct. The downside to this quick movement and action is the lack of clarity and thinking as the prefrontal cortex (our thinking Brain) takes the back seat. Due to humans ability to use advanced language we do not need to see the proverbial lion in the bushes to get caught in this "flight or Fight" trap. Our very own thoughts can catch us in a spiral of thinking and worry that we interpret as a threat, just as if the lion was sitting with us in our own living rooms.

The practice of mindfulness techniques, while not a cure all, can help us tap back into our bodies, and by doing this create a state where we can help to calm our limbic system. This in turn helps us to Hack our prefrontal cortex and reengage our thinking brains. By spending some time dropping into our bodies, and noticing the breath, and the sensations of feelings we begin to calm the mind. When we expand our awareness even further, and begin to utilize our bodies and move them in a conscious way by becoming engaged in what we are doing, we become fully present. We as childcare professionals have all seen a child who when absorbed with their task, hands engaged eyes and ears and senses attuned to the object of discovery, they exist in a world all their own. No distractions no sudden movements, no sense of rush or unease. This is mindfulness in practice.

We can do simple things during the day to help ourselves become more mindful. These things do not need to be long or drawn out. Small steps build large repertoires of behavior and help us to establish healthy habits.

- Things like focusing on your breath. Becoming aware of how your breath feels as it drops in to your body and goes back out.
- Pressing your fingertips together or stretching your arms or neck, remind yourself as you do that you have a body that you can move
- Becoming aware of your surrounding and using your senses, name and acknowledge three things you hear, and three things you see, and three things you can touch and three things smell and something you can taste. Remind yourself as you do that you have a body that senses things
- Sometimes just the simple act of stopping and kissing your children on the head, or listening to the plop of the water while doing the dishes, or the feel of your pets fur when they come over and lay their head on your lap.

Dr. Russ Harris the author of the Happiness Trap (2014) has some powerful practices that can help with mindfulness. His exercise of Dropping Anchor helps us to defuse ourselves from thoughts that may no longer serve. For more information on this practice please find Dr. Russ Harris EBook link here:

https://www.actmindfully.com.au/upimages/The_Single_Most_Powerful_Technique_for_Extreme_Fusion_-_Russ_Harris_-_October_2016.pdf