

When Your Kids Push Your Buttons

We all have moments where we feel stressed or swamped or overwhelmed. Our fight or flight response is set off, and we're no longer thinking or acting at our best. We might lose our patience or make rushed decisions that don't really reflect the kind of parent we want to be. With practice, we settle more easily when knocked off balance. Not only does that support our own state of mind, but our families benefit, too.

If you have time to sit right now, go ahead. Or if you're only able to pause briefly between one task and the next, just stay standing exactly where you are.

Starting by taking a deep breath. Bring your attention to how that experience feels. You might notice movement in your chest or belly, rising and falling. Or if it feels more natural, pay attention to the air moving in and out of your nose and mouth with each breath. Breathing in ... and breathing out.

There's nothing mysterious about the practice of mindfulness. There is nothing we can force to happen. Our mind gets caught up somewhere, and we guide it back. Almost soon as you start, you may feel like your thoughts wandering off again. That's normal. Continue to breathe naturally, and when you notice thoughts or emotions or anything else taking over, come back to the next breath.

With each breath, noticing yourself breathing in ... and then breathing out.

If it's helpful, you can count your breaths. Breathing in one ... breathing out one. Breathing in two ... breathing out two. When you get to 10, start with one again.

Our thoughts can feel all consuming. We get caught up in worries about the past, fears about the future, or more immediate difficulties. Allow yourself a brief rest by attending to the feeling of your next one breath. Breathing in ... and breathing out.

Notice where your thoughts are again right now, and gently guide your attention back. Continue counting wherever you last recall.

If you'd like, expand your attention in these last few moments before ending. With each in breath, observe all of your experience right now. For better or for worse, this is how things are. Everyone has moments like this.

And then on each out breath, wish for yourself whatever you would wish for a close friend. May I find kindness and my sense of humor. May I stay strong but keep it light. Not creating an expectation or pushing yourself, but creating a wish or a reminder for yourself.

In with a sense of openness, out with your best intentions. In the midst of this moment of stress, may we all find a sense of relief.

Even without time for this whole practice, you can always take 10 focused breaths. In any moment, all we fully control is our own choice about what do or what not to do next. As this practice of settling your mind becomes more familiar, it will also become a more natural part of your day.