

The Happy Family— Healthy Brain Connection



**Strengthening Families
Program** by Dr. Karol Kumpfer



FAMILY GOALS:

1. Stomp the ANTs and practice positive self-talk. Believe in your ability to create a strong, loving family using these lessons.
2. Eat family dinner (or any meal) together 3–5 times a week using a Conversation Jar.
3. Have 10–15 minutes of one-on-one time every day with each child using the “My Time” concept. Allow the child to choose the activity; praise as you play.
4. *Choose a set day and time for the coming weeks to watch all ten DVD lessons together and practice the skills you’ve learned using pretend situations. (For example, every Monday evening.)

FAMILY FUN:

Make a family Conversation Jar using the handout. While eating together, share what you like about each other or nice things you have done and discuss a topic from the jar.

***Day & time we will watch:**

POWER PHRASE:

“Daily playing one-on-one with each child and eating pleasant family meals together helps build strong and loving families.”

- **Stomp the ANTs (Automatic Negative Talk) and believe in your ability to create a strong, loving family**
- **Eat family dinner (or any meal) together 3–5 times a week**
- **Spend 10–15 minutes of one-on-one play time with each child**

Strengthening Families Program Essential Skills



INTRODUCTION

- ☐ Do “My Time”—10 to 15 minutes of one-on-one play time daily
- ☐ Use Mindfulness to squash ANTs (Automatic Negative Thoughts)
- ☐ Eat healthy food and have family dinners



LESSON 1

- ☐ Look for the good; give compliments daily
- ☐ Ignore minor annoying behavior; praise the positive opposite
- ☐ Stop criticizing family members
- ☐ Use instant stress busters



LESSON 2

- ☐ LUV-Listen (Listen, Understand, Validate)
- ☐ Use respectful “I-Messages”
- ☐ Learn the difference between being assertive and being offensive
- ☐ Banish communication boulders



LESSON 3

- ☐ Make and obey family rules
- ☐ Set up a rewards program to practice and learn new skills
- ☐ Teach responsibilities and assign chores
- ☐ Set up positive routines



LESSON 4

- ☐ Use positive discipline to teach and reward behaviors you want
- ☐ Give fair, mild, known-ahead consequences consistently
- ☐ Express love afterwards



LESSON 5

- ☐ Use good problem-solving skills
- ☐ Use win-win negotiation
- ☐ Teach kids pre-problem solving
- ☐ Teach the 5 Cs refusal skills



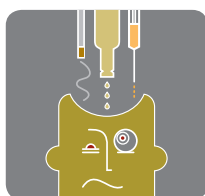
LESSON 6

- ☐ Use effective ways to reduce stress
- ☐ Track anger triggers, and re-program your brain with Step Out of Anger technique
- ☐ Use deep, slow breathing to trigger a relaxation response



LESSON 7

- ☐ Teach kids goal setting for success
- ☐ Make contracts for change
- ☐ Give positive criticism; deliver difficult feedback kindly and respectfully



LESSON 8

- ☐ Alcohol and drugs harm the developing teen brain and hijack the brain's pleasure motivation system
- ☐ Use bonding, boundaries and monitoring skills to keep kids from alcohol and drugs



LESSON 9

- ☐ Help kids make good friends; share “no alcohol or drugs” rule with their parents
- ☐ Monitor all kids’ activities and emotional well-being; trust but verify
- ☐ Help organize good healthy fun for kids



LESSON 10

- ☐ Make family traditions and loving rituals
- ☐ Share family’s pro-social values
- ☐ Appreciate the benefits you get from society; give service
- ☐ Be a positive agent for change

Keeping Your Family Safe and Happy

Bonding, boundaries, and monitoring help keep kids safe and healthy



Below are bonding, boundaries, and monitoring strategies that help protect kids from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and risky behavior. Put an "X" by the ones you already do; circle the ones you'd like to work on. Make a plan and start out small. Add new ones as the old ones become a habit.

BONDING: Creating Warm, Loving Relationships

- ☐ 1. We tell our children we love them and make a point to look for and compliment the good in each family member. We avoid harsh criticism.
- ☐ 2. We spend 10-15 minutes of one-on-one "My Time" with each child almost every day.
- ☐ 3. We eat a meal together as a family at least three times a week, and make our time together pleasant.
- ☐ 4. We hold a weekly family meeting.
- ☐ 5. We spend time together as a family laughing and doing fun things.
- ☐ 6. We talk often to our children about their dreams and goals, ask if they are happy, and ask how we can be supportive.
- ☐ 7. We have positive family customs and traditions.
- ☐ 8. We try to go to school activities such as games and performances as a family.

BOUNDARIES: Setting Clear, Firm Rules

- ☐ 1. We have clear, firm family rules that are fair and consistently enforced.
- ☐ 2. We talk about our rules on no alcohol, tobacco, or drug use; if alcohol or drugs show up at a party, kids are to call us and come home.
- ☐ 3. We encourage and support school work; and we have set times for kids to do homework.
- ☐ 4. We divide household chores among family members.
- ☐ 5. We have rules (curfew) for each kid about what time to be home.
- ☐ 6. We encourage our kids to participate in activities that promote a positive sense of self.
- ☐ 7. We help our children develop skills in goal-setting, communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

MONITORING: Knowing where your kids are, who they are with, and what they are doing

- ☐ 1. We find out where our children are going, who they'll be with, what they'll be doing, and when they'll be home before they leave.
- ☐ 2. We get to know our kids' friends' parents and share our rules about no alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.
- ☐ 3. We see that our kids stay in an alcohol- and drug-free social environment.
- ☐ 4. We make sure our children don't have access to our alcohol, tobacco, or prescription drugs.
- ☐ 5. We promote fun, positive alternative activities to teen alcohol and drug use.

Family Conversation Jar

Encourage family talks with this fun and insightful activity



Having conversations with your kids is an effective way to help prevent underage drinking. The following activity can help. Cut out the questions found below, place in a jar, and put it in the center of the dinner table. During the family meal, take turns drawing questions from the jar. Some questions are specifically for parents to answer (marked on the side with a "P"), but make sure everyone gets a chance to answer each of the other questions.



Family Fun: Have your kids decorate a jar. The following items can be helpful:

- Colored paper, cloth, or paint
- Family photos
- Pictures cut out from magazines
- Ribbon, string, raffia, straw, cotton balls, etc.
- Glue, tape, scissors, markers

Questions for Parents:

What beliefs give you strength?
What was your first job? Did you like it?
Did you have any pets growing up? If so, tell me about them.
What was one thing your parents made you do that you hated?
What kind of food did you hate as a kid but love now?
Why is being honest so important to building a stable society?
What was your least favorite subject in school? What was your favorite?
When you were my age, what did you want to be when you grew up?
What was one thing you did when you were a kid that made you the happiest?
What was one thing you did when you were a kid that made your parents proud of you?
Did you take family vacations when you were a kid? Where did you go? How did you get there?
Who was your best friend growing up? Tell us one of your favorite stories about things you did together.

Questions for Everyone:

If you could have anything for dinner, what would you have?	What do you like best about life?	Who is your best friend and why?
What is your favorite place in the world and why?	Tell us about your favorite memory.	What could you do to make the world a better place?
If you could be on any television show, what would it be?	Tell us one thing that is really important to you.	If you could have any animal as a pet, what would it be?
What is the best present you've ever received?	Tell us one thing that is nice about yourself.	If you could pick a new first name, what would it be?
If you could live anywhere in the world, where would you live and why?	Tell us about something that makes you laugh.	What was the very best thing that happened to you today?
If you had three wishes, what would they be?	Tell us whom you admire most and why.	If you could add one item to your bedroom, what would it be?
What would you do if you were President?	What was the hardest choice you ever made?	If you could visit any city, where would you visit?
If you won a million dollars, what would you do with it?	Tell us one way you want to improve your life.	Why is driving drunk so costly and harmful to society?
If you could have any job, what job would it be and why do you think you would like it?	What holds you back from doing what you really want to do?	If you could be any animal, what animal would you be?
If you could invite three famous people (present or past) to dinner, who would they be and why?	What is one thing you could do to help our family?	If you had to leave the earth on a space ship and take 4 friends with you, who would you take?
What is the one thing you think should be invented to make your life easier or more enjoyable?	Tell us what things make you feel loved.	If you were allowed to stop doing one chore around the house, what would it be?
If you could go anywhere for your next vacation, where would you go and what would you do?	(Fill in the blank) When I feel sad, I need	How can using drugs or alcohol underage limit your possibilities?

Planning for Family Dinners

Make mealtime fun, healthy, and easy



Pleasant family dinners are a good way to share values and help kids bond with family. A little advanced planning will make dinner time easy. Fill out this menu with favorite, brain-healthy meals and repeat them every 30 days. Pre-teach table manners and make mealtime pleasant by complimenting those who use them; don't allow criticism at the dinner table. Use a Conversation Jar, and share kind deeds you've done.

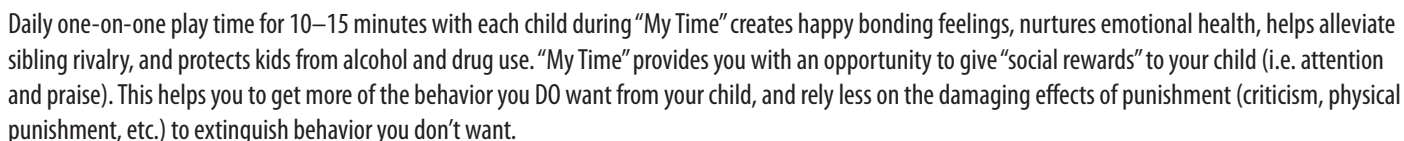
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____	Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____	Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____	Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____	Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____	Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____	Veg _____ Fruit _____ Grain _____ Protein _____ Cook _____ Helper _____ Dishes _____
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FOODS THAT PROMOTE BRAIN HEALTH

This list of food will help your family have healthy bodies and brain. Watch out for common food allergies, such as eggs, dairy, gluten, nuts, etc. The brain must have healthy, nutritious food with plenty of vitamins, minerals, and micro-nutrients found in whole foods to operate properly. Plus, there are millions of microbes in our guts that help us process food. They need good nutrition to survive.

- Eat whole grains, not refined flours
- Eat leafy green vegetables every day
- Use frozen vegetables, if fresh is too expensive
- Eat fresh fruit every day (oranges, apples, bananas, blueberries, etc.)
- Eat low-fat cottage cheese as a good source of protein
- Eat eggs often (good for all meals)
- Eat all kinds of beans (dry is cheaper)
- Eat fish weekly (tuna is cheap) or take fish oil capsules
- Drink water or fat-free milk, not soda
- Use healthy spices: cinnamon, curry, garlic, sage, and turmeric
- Eat all kinds of nuts
- Eat red or white potatoes with the skins on, or sweet potatoes

Daily one-on-one play time with each child will make everyone happier



DO:

- ## DON'T:

- ## TRACKING PLAY TIME

[illegible]

Stomping the ANTs

Getting rid of pesky Automatic Negative Thoughts



Automatic Negative Thoughts or “ANTs” as Dr. Daniel Amen calls them, often tell you lies like: “You’re no good,” “Nobody likes you,” or “These kids are driving me crazy!” This negative self-talk can dramatically affect your mood. Here’s why: Whenever you think a thought, your brain releases neurochemicals that create feelings. Positive thoughts release positive chemicals and you feel happier. Negative thoughts release chemicals that make you feel angry, sad, or stressed.

You can stomp the ANTs by re-stating negative thoughts in a more truthful way. Instead of thinking “I never do anything right,” replace it with: “I may make some mistakes but I have a lot to offer.” Or when you’re feeling overwhelmed think, “I can do this!” You can change your self-talk to be more hopeful, positive, and accurate. You’ll feel happier and more confident.

**For more information, read *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund Bourne.*

Below are 10 “species” of ANTs that creep into our thoughts and ruin our day. Put a check next to the type of A.N.T. that bothers you and write an example in the blank space. Then stomp them by writing a more hopeful, accurate, and positive way of viewing each situation.

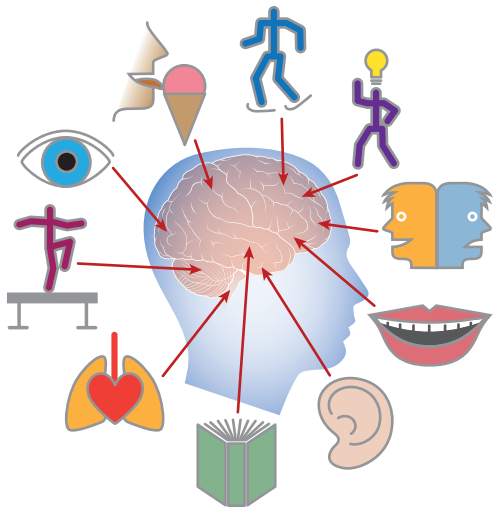
SPECIES	A.N.T.	SQUASH ANTs WITH TRUTH
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. All or Nothing Thinking	“There’s nothing to do.”	“There are probably lots of things to do if I think about it.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Always Thinking	“No one ever plays with me.”	“That’s silly. I have played with lots of kids.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Mind Reading	“The teacher doesn’t like me.”	“I don’t know that. Maybe she is just having a hard day.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Fortune Telling	“The whole class will laugh at me.”	“I don’t know that. Maybe they will like my speech.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Labeling	“I am stupid.”	“Sometimes I make mistakes but I am not stupid.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Focusing on the Negative	“My whole party was ruined by his teasing.”	“My party was fun except for the few minutes he was teasing.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Thinking with Your Feelings	“I feel like such a loser. How can anyone like me?”	“I may need to change a few things but I’m a good person.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Magnifying and Minimizing	“I got a terrible report card.”	“I may have gotten one ‘C’ but my other grades were good.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Blame	“It’s the teacher’s fault.”	“I need to look at my part of the problem.”
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Guilt Beatings	“It is all my fault and I’m a horrible person.”	“It was just an accident and I can do things to make it better.”

THE PENNY GAME

To become more aware of your ANTs, use this kid’s game by Richard Brozovich, Ph.D. and Linda Chase in *Say Goodbye to Being Shy*. Put ten pennies in your pocket every morning for a month. Every time you think a positive thought about yourself, move a penny to your “good” pocket. If you give mind-space to any ANTs, move a penny back to the holding pocket. Try to get all ten pennies in your “good” pocket each day. Note of how many you got each night. At the end of the month, reward yourself according to how well you met your goal.

Understanding Brain Development

How the choices we make change our brain and make us who we are

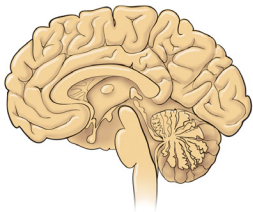


Our brain is the most amazing “computer” that has ever been created. It has billions of neurons that make connections and control hundreds of body functions—including everything we think, feel, say, or do—all at the same time! Forty percent of our neurons are “wired” or connected at birth. The other 60 percent are waiting to be wired by our learning and experiences. Everything we think, say, or do causes new neural growth which changes our brain structure. This means that teens can direct the development of their own brains. The ages between 12–25 is a critical time of brain development. Important connections are being made that link brain areas together, helping us become smarter and make better decisions. Alcohol suppresses brain activity, harming its development. It is essential to protect it from alcohol and drugs during this critical “wiring” period.

“Teens, through their choices and actions, have the power to direct the development of their own brains....[They are] laying the neural foundations that will serve them for the rest of their lives.”

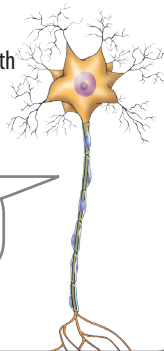
– Dr. Jay Giedd, MD, Chief of Brain Imaging, National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH)

Your amazing brain has over 100 billion neurons that communicate with each other—and the rest of your body!

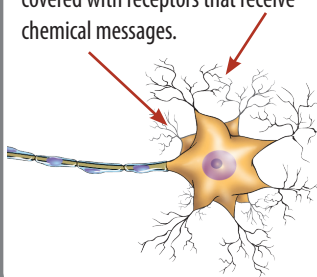


A neuron looks a little like a tree, with branches, a trunk, and roots.

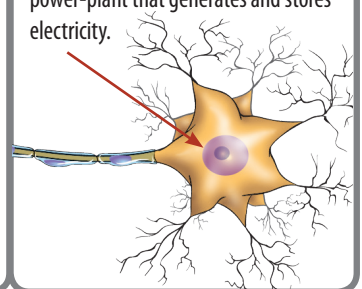
Hi! I'm a neuron.



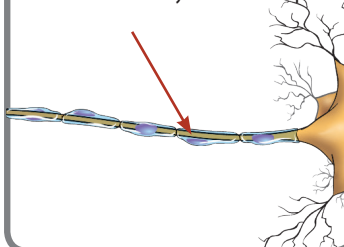
The branches, called Dendrites, are covered with receptors that receive chemical messages.



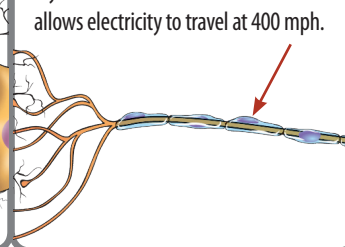
They surround the Soma, a tiny power-plant that generates and stores electricity.



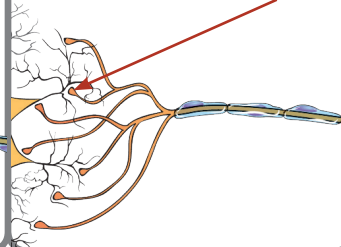
The Axon, or trunk, carries electrical signals from the power-plant to the roots. The electricity travels 200 mph!



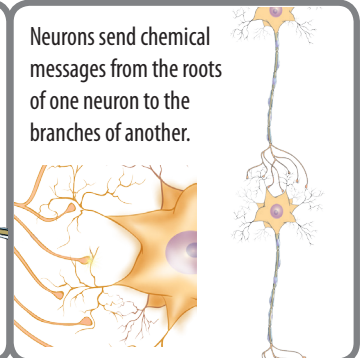
As our brain develops it covers the axons with a white waxy coating called the Myelin Sheath or “White Matter.” This allows electricity to travel at 400 mph.



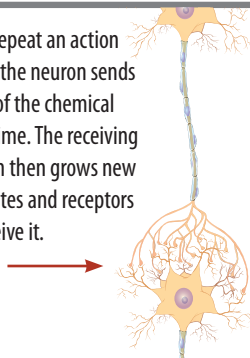
At the tip of each root is a tiny pouch that stores powerful brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.



Neurons send chemical messages from the roots of one neuron to the branches of another.

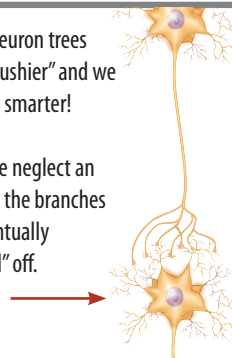


If we repeat an action often, the neuron sends more of the chemical each time. The receiving neuron then grows new dendrites and receptors to receive it.



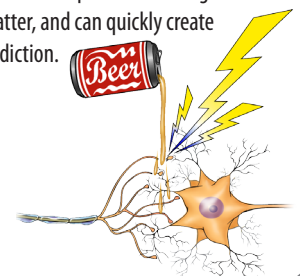
Those neuron trees grow “bushier” and we become smarter!

But if we neglect an activity, the branches are eventually “pruned” off.



What we chose to learn, do and say becomes “wired” into the physical structure of our brain! The more we study and learn, the smarter our brain grows—not just in that one area—but smarter over-all! With a little effort and practice, we can change our brain for the better, which changes our habits, and improves our life.

Alcohol before age 21 slows down brain development. It damages White Matter, and can quickly create addiction.



How to Have a Healthy Brain

8 brain-healthy tips to be smarter and feel better



Your brain is the most important organ of your body and directs everything you think, say, or do. It makes you who you are! If your brain works well, you're happier and more successful. If it doesn't, you'll have a hard time in life. So follow these tips to have a healthy, happy brain!

1. Protect your brain

from **neurotoxic chemicals** like **alcohol**, **drugs** (even marijuana), **nicotine**, excessive **caffeine**, and breathing toxic fumes, which can damage brain function.

Protect your brain from falls, injuries, big bumps: Always wear a seat belt; use a helmet when you blade, board, bike, or do contact sports. Your brain is like soft butter; your skull has hard ridges.

4. Engage in aerobic exercise

that gets your heart pumping (sports, dance, brisk walks, etc.) at least 5 times a week. It improves learning and memory by increasing blood flow to the brain, and it generates an essential brain growth hormone called BDNF in the hippocampus. Exercise helps protect brain cells against stress and increases feel-good chemicals that improves mood. For a quick mental boost, stand and rise quickly up and down on your toes 20 times.

6. Use Mindfulness

to correct the Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs) that put your brain at risk for anxiety, depression, relationship problems, etc. (See Intro handout #7.) When you feel angry, sad, or anxious, write down the thoughts going through your head. If they are negative, question and replace them with a more hopeful way of thinking.*

2. Eat brain-healthy food like **whole grains**; **fruits and vegetables** such as dark green lettuces, berries, broccoli, apples, oranges, bananas, pumpkin, spinach, and tomatoes; **nuts and legumes** such as walnuts, almonds, peanut butter, and beans; and **healthy, low-fat protein** found in food like Greek yogurt, non-fat cottage cheese, eggs, fish, and poultry. Begin each day with a glass of water to hydrate your brain, a healthy breakfast with low-fat protein, and a multi-vitamin. Studies show children learn better when they have excellent nutrition.

Avoid junk food, sugary drinks and cereals, drinks with caffeine, highly processed foods with artificial ingredients, foods high in sugars and syrups (including high-fructose corn syrup), and hydrogenated oils. *For more information on healthy eating, visit ChooseMyPlate.gov*

3. Get enough sleep

each night. Getting less than seven hours of sleep at night decreases blood flow to the brain. It also contributes to depression and suicidal thoughts. In one study, teens who slept five hours or less a night were 71 percent more likely to suffer depression and 48 percent more at risk of becoming suicidal.

5. De-stress your brain and think positive thoughts.

Chronic stress reduces brain cell growth, affecting memory and mood. Take a few moments several times a day to breathe slowly and deeply through your nose, tense and relax your muscles, and clear your mind with a peaceful thought.

7. Avoid too much "screen time"

and junk culture. Teens who play violent video games show increased activity in the emotional arousal part of the brain and decreased response in the area governing self-control. Students who spent ten hours a day online developed less gray matter in the thinking part of the brain, compared to those who spent less than two hours a day online.

8. Study, read, and learn.

Your brain is like a muscle—the more you use it, the stronger it becomes.



Four Family Fun

Four areas to have fun as a family



Sometimes families can get bogged down in stress and contention. Often what is needed is some humor and light-hearted family fun. Take a few moments as a family to list what the kids find fun and write it on this sheet. Make sure everyone is represented, including you as parents. Then make sure to schedule specific times every week to have fun.



1

FUN

THAT'S FREE



2

FUN

OUTSIDE



3

FUN

INSIDE



4

FUN

THAT COSTS

A fun family activity we will do next week:

Ideas for family fun with exercise:

1. Bean Bag Tag: One person is "it" and has a small bean bag. On the count of three, family members scatter and the person "it" runs after them, throwing the bean bag to try to hit someone. When a person is hit, he or she is the next one "it." (Make a bean bag by putting dried beans into the toe of a sock and tying the end with a double knot.)

2. Simon Says Dance: Play some fun dance music and take turns being "Simon the Leader." Whenever the dance leader calls out "Simon says. . ." and does a move, family members have to imitate that move. If "Simon" only demonstrates but doesn't call it out loud, whoever imitates the dance move is the next "Simon."

3. Find-a-Ball: The goal is to collect newspaper "balls" and be the first to place them in a circle drawn on the floor. Each family member wads 1/2 sheets of newspaper into five "balls" and puts a piece of tape on each ball with his/her name on it. The person who is "it" puts the balls around the house in different rooms. At the count of three all players race to find and gather their balls and be the first one to put all five balls in the circle.

4. Capture the Towel: Unroll three (joined) sheets of a paper towel. Cut it into four long strips forming "tails." Each person tucks the end of the paper towel strip in the back waist of his or her pants or belt. At a given signal, family members run, with each trying to capture the towel of another while trying to keep his or her's safe. Blow a whistle at the end of three minutes. The person with the most towels wins.

Mindfulness

Page 1—Brain exercises to increase focus, reduce stress, and improve relationships



WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is the skill of training your brain to pay keen attention—in a calm, compassionate, and curious way—to what is currently happening to and around you, so you can focus on the present moment instead of being distracted by disturbing thoughts, regrets over the past, or worries about the future.

Mindfulness helps you become more aware of your thoughts, feelings, and actions—and the effect they have on others—so you can react wisely and peacefully in every situation.

You can train your brain to be mindful by doing a few simple exercises every day to improve your mental focus. Even kids can learn to do them! The most important exercise is the “Breath Awareness”, also called the “Mindful Breathing,” exercise. Each time your mind wanders from what you’re thinking about, gently bring your attention back to the thing you were focusing on.

Mindfulness is developed through a few formal exercises you can do each day, but it can also be practiced informally during the day whenever you want. Take a breath and focus your attention on what is currently happening before you respond to something or someone. Practice each new skill separately at first; then use them all together to become mindful.

BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

Practicing Mindfulness has been shown to

- Decrease the body’s stress response
- Lower blood pressure
- Reduce anxiety
- Slow down the aging process
- Increase ability to regulate emotions
- Increase feelings of peacefulness, enjoyment, and well-being
- Increase density in the good judgment part of the brain

WHY MINDFULNESS WORKS

When you take deep breaths, the air passes over nitric oxide cells in your nasal passage, which triggers the release of nitric oxide. The nitric oxide relaxes your blood vessels, increasing blood flow to the brain. As you fill your lungs with air, your diaphragm causes your belly to rise, which puts pressure on the vagus nerve, which runs from your brain down your spine. This pressure triggers a release of serotonin, a chemical that helps to calm your body.

1. Breath Awareness Exercise

Each Mindfulness exercise begins with this Breath Awareness exercise. Begin by doing the 5 Ss:

1. Sit up straight. *(Unless you’re doing a body scan.)*
2. Sit still. *(Unless it is a Mindfulness Walking exercise.)*
3. Sit silent.
4. Shut your eyes. *(Unless it is a Mindfulness Walking exercise.)*
5. Shush your brain chatter. *(Take a big, deep breath through your nose, and while you exhale, say “Shhhh. . .” to yourself as you draw an imaginary line from your forehead to your chest.)*

Next, breathe deeply: Focus your attention on the feeling of the air as it enters your nose, fills your lungs, and then exits your nose or mouth. Count five breaths, and then start counting to five again. Continue counting breaths for two minutes. When your attention wanders (and it will), gently bring your attention back to your breathing. Increase the time until you can do it for 10–20 minutes.

2. Advanced Mindful Breathing

While you are doing the Breath Awareness exercise, visualize a quiet inner center in your chest. As you exhale, feel the peace at that quiet spot. Feeling into this center can help you sense your true worth and find comfort in difficult times.

Some people call this area an “inner center of wisdom.” When they have to make a decision, they “feel within” to sense what their intuition, or “gut” feeling, says about the right path to take.

This process may work because the heart and gut are surrounded with millions of neurons that connect with the brain. That’s why your brain can send a feeling of “butterflies” to your stomach if you are nervous, or send a sense of “love” to your chest. Further, your eye sends more messages to your brain than you consciously recognize. These are recorded in your brain and may form a source of intuition that helps you recognize what would be helpful or harmful if you mindfully “feel within.”

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3. Observe & Dismiss Negative Thoughts

Mindfulness includes the ability to mentally stand back, observe your thoughts, and dismiss negative ones without dwelling on them. This includes learning to accept things in the past that you can't change. Once you have made amends and asked for forgiveness, recognize that you can now at least act wisely and kindly to make a better future.

When troubling, negative thoughts arise, take a deep breath and repeat a coping phrase, such as "It is what it is." Use this exercise to label and dismiss negative thoughts that are troubling or limiting:

1. Write down recurring negative thoughts on your "Automatic Negative Thoughts" handout from this lesson. Beside each negative thought, write a more hopeful statement.
2. Sit quietly and begin a Breath Awareness exercise.
3. If a troubling thought or emotion comes to mind, imagine yourself sitting by an open window watching small, puffy white clouds drift by. Then mentally place your troubling thought on a bit of imaginary cloud—and let the cloud drift out of view.
4. Return your focus to your mindful breathing.

4. Think Compassion, Not Criticism

An essential part of Mindfulness is the ability to view yourself and others with a compassionate, kind eye. When we view others with a critical, judgmental eye, we filter reality through our own prejudices, which prevents us from seeing reality. Recognize that all people suffer hardships, and all people deserve compassion. Let it begin with you, knowing that what you give out will return to you multiplied.

1. Decide that you will stop looking at others with a critical eye, and choose to feel compassion instead.
2. Close your eyes and begin a Breath Awareness exercise. As you breathe in, repeat: "May I feel compassion towards myself and others." As you breathe out, repeat: "May my critical eye depart."
3. As you breathe, visualize your body becoming filled with a gentle compassion for humanity, and the negative, critical part leaving your body. Repeat daily.
4. Track your progress. Carry a note card and put a mark each time you think a critical thought. Immediately follow those critical thoughts with the words, "... Just like me." Or, smile and silently say, "I wish you well."

Note: You can feel compassion for yourself while still acknowledging the need for change. Also, compassion never means you tolerate abuse.

5. Mindfully Observe Your Amazing Body

Pretend you are seeing your body as an amazing, biochemical machine for the first time. Focus on its abilities with a childlike awe.

1. Lie down in a quiet, comfortable place, knees slightly bent. Close your eyes and take three deep, mindful breaths.
2. Focus your attention on your body, beginning with the toes of your right foot. Think about each part of that side of your body, moving up to your neck. Then focus attention on the left side of your body, beginning with your toes and moving up to your head.
3. As you focus on each part of your body, tense and relax it, and imagine your breath flowing to that part. Think about the wonderful things each part can do. Then imagine you can see beneath the skin to see how the muscles and bones work together.
4. When your mind wanders, gently refocus on your body.
5. When you reach your head, take a deep, mindful breath, feel a sense of awe and gratitude for your amazing body, and open your eyes.

6. Mindfully Delight Your 5 Senses

Each day for five days, mindfully focus your attention on a different aspect of your senses. Observe each experience with deep gratitude:

1. **TASTE:** Pick up a small piece of food. Notice how it looks and smells before putting it in your mouth. Then put down your fork and chew slowly as you observe and savor the taste and texture.
2. **SMELL:** During a meal, pause and close your eyes and smell the different foods before you eat. If weather permits, sit near a garden to smell the flowers or grass.
3. **TOUCH:** Feel the warmth of the water on your body as you take a bath or shower. Listen to the sound of the water. Feel the texture of the wet bar of soap in your hand. Be fully present and experience the delight of the feeling of the water. Then touch other textures like trees, grass, etc.
4. **HEAR:** At night, sit by an open window for a few minutes, close your eyes, and carefully listen to and try to identify every sound.
5. **SEE:** Take a walk in nature, or even just around your neighborhood. Try to see it with new eyes. Notice every detail about the place and the people. Be thankful for your sight.

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7. Become a Mindful Parent

One goal of Mindfulness is to become a sensitive, nurturing parent. A long-term study showed that children who had nurturing parents who paid sensitive attention to them were much more secure and successful as adults than those who lacked nurturing parents.

1. Cultivate a non-judgmental attitude toward both your children and yourself, while still providing clear standards for behavior.
2. While your child is sleeping, reading, or quietly playing, look at his or her face. Notice with delight the features, the shape of the head, and the color and texture of the hair. Smile with gratitude.
3. Imagine you can see his or her heart. How is it feeling? Does it feel happy or sad or fearful? Imagine you are saying kind or loving things to your child. How does his or her heart react to your words?
4. Recall your last interaction. How did your child's heart feel in the situation? Resolve to use kind, loving, and peaceful words with your child. Do a "loving-kindness meditation" for each child. (See step 12 of these Mindfulness exercises.)
5. Listen with your full attention when your child talks to you. Put away your electronics. Seek to understand their feelings and needs. Be kind and present. Remind yourself to practice Mindfulness when dealing with your children.
6. Notice and name your emotions during difficult interactions. Help your children notice their emotions as well. Example: "It seems like you might be feeling frustrated."
7. When you are annoyed or stressed, take a deep breath and choose the best response by saying to yourself: "Stop. Be calm. Be mindful."
8. Learn and practice each of the seven key skills in the Strengthening Families Program (see handout 10-7).

8. Mindfully Perform Tasks

Training your brain to focus with intense interest on daily activities that you usually do without much thought increases your ability to be aware. This exercise takes no extra time, as you're doing the tasks already.

1. Make a list of the tasks you do daily that you could focus on, like getting dressed, brushing your teeth, washing dishes, working in the garden, walking to school or work, etc.
2. Begin each Mindful Task exercise with three slow, deep breaths. Then Mindfully focus fully on each aspect of the activity. Notice all the little details you usually take for granted. Example: As you brush your teeth, notice how the toothbrush feels in your hand, how the toothpaste tastes, and envision each tooth as you brush it.
3. If any distracting thoughts arise while you are doing the activity, dismiss them from your mind without thinking on them. Stay focused on the activity.
4. End each with a deep, mindful breath.

9. Be Mindful of Interactions with Others

One of the main goals of Mindfulness is to become calmly aware of your thoughts and feelings during interactions with others, and to manage them well so you can listen objectively and speak and act deliberately, compassionately, and effectively. This will help you get along better with others and have a happier life.

The moment you begin to feel a "Fight, Flight, or Freeze" response in a stressful situation, use the acronym "BOLDT" as a reminder to be Mindful:

1. **B=Breathe**—Take a deep, calming breath and engage your quiet center during crisis or conflict.
2. **O=Observe and question your thoughts**—don't assume they are right. (They are often incorrect.)
3. **L=Let go of judgment**. Calmly, curiously, and compassionately ask questions to understand how they feel about the situation.
4. **D=Defuse the situation by validating their concerns**. Say you see their point of view, even if you disagree.
5. **T=Take a break**—If things get hot, thank the person for listening, tell them you need to think about things, and you will get back to them soon.

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10. Mindful Walking Exercise

The first time you do this walking exercise, choose a place where you can enjoy walking quietly. After that, practice the skill of focusing your attention for a few minutes whenever you walk anywhere.

1. While walking mindfully, breathe deeply and focus on each sensation of the movements of your body as you take each step.
2. Notice how your knees and ankles bend and your legs move.
3. Notice the way your foot feels as you pick it up and place it on the ground. Notice the sound it makes as you step on the pavement.
4. Take a deep, cleansing breath and feel delight and be grateful for your body.

11. Overcome Obstacles

1. Take a deep breath and identify the obstacles that keep you from a daily Mindfulness practice.
2. As you breathe, bring each obstacle as a word into your mental focus. Ask yourself: "What can I learn from it?" and "How can I successfully deal with it?" Make a note of your answers to these questions.
3. Visualize the word clearly written across sliding glass doors that open as you approach them.
4. See yourself walking confidently towards those doors. As you approach, the doors part, and you see yourself walking through.
5. Each time you feel blocked by an obstacle, visualize the doors opening and see yourself walking through them.

12. Loving-Kindness Meditation

A loving-kindness meditation involves Mindful Breathing while you focus on a few positive outcomes you desire for yourself and others. As you breathe in and out, use positive thoughts to direct those good things to yourself and others. Those who practice it report increased positive emotions, reduced stress, an increase sense of purpose, and a stronger social support.

1. Sit quietly, eyes closed, back straight, hands open on your lap with palms up, and your mouth in a soft smile.
2. Take several slow, deep breaths through your nose and exhale slowly, focusing all your attention on the sensations of breathing.
3. Then focus your thoughts on a desire to be happy and well. Imagine happiness and vitality coming to you. As you breathe, repeat three phrases like, "May I be healthy and strong." "May I be happy." "May I be peaceful."
4. As you inhale, visualize your body filling with wellness, happiness, and goodness. As you exhale, visualize distress, suffering, and negativity leaving. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breathing.

5. Focus on a person that you feel thankful for and send vitality to him or her. As you exhale, visualize sending this person happiness, vitality, and goodness. If he or she is having difficulty, imagine he or she is becoming well or full of joy.
6. Focus on a neutral person, or someone with whom you are having difficulty.* Send them wellness and goodness.
7. Focus on the suffering in the world. As you exhale, visualize sending happiness and goodness into the world. Say something like, "May all beings be kind and full of goodness."

*If it is hard to offer loving kindness to a difficult person, realize that it benefits you as well, for you become more compassionate and loving.

Think on this quote from Soren Kierkegaard:

"To cheat oneself out of love is the most terrible deception; it is an eternal loss for which there is no reparation, either in time or in eternity."