

Focus on the Present Moment: Mindfulness & ADHD



Mark Bertin, MD is a board certified developmental behavioral pediatrician and a frequent lecturer on topics related to child development, including autistic spectrum disorders, ADHD, and parenting. He is the author of *The Family ADHD Solution* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and *Mindful Parenting for ADHD* (New Harbinger, 2015).



CHADD: What is mindfulness?

BERTIN: Mindfulness is a way of relating to our life; it is a practice of being less distracted. It's a balance of focus with an attitude that is more open-minded, compassionate, and aware. It is bringing our full attention to whatever we're doing moment to moment. If we're not paying full attention to what we're doing in the present moment, we're basically on autopilot. We're not making choices.

Mindfulness allows us to become more attentive to everything happening around us. It allows us to practice responsiveness rather than immediately reacting to everything that's happening.

What are the benefits of practicing mindfulness?

Mindfulness supports stress management. We all live under stress, and for many people, having ADHD amplifies stress. Using mindfulness to manage stress has many benefits. When we're less stressed we're more likely to be less reactive. With less stress we're likely to think more flexibly instead of falling back on more fixed or habitual ways of thinking. We relate to people around us differently by not using as much energy on our own stress.

Mindfulness also helps create change. If we've always handled certain situations or behaviors in the same ways, it can be hard to change. Mindfulness teaches us to pause and focus, giving our brain time to rewire and make new choices.

Is it possible for someone with ADHD to practice mindfulness?

Anyone can practice mindfulness—even if you're someone who is always on the go, or you have a busy mind, or you don't sit still for long. There are many ways to develop the mindfulness traits of focus, attention and compassion. Yoga is a form of practice; there's also a walking practice. Meditation is a tool to try. There are classes offered all around the world teaching these different forms. Explore and find what fits most naturally to you.

What about teaching and encouraging children to practice mindfulness?

The biggest part of teaching children mindfulness is using it yourself. Show it. Live it. Children will begin to benefit by having people who practice mindfulness around them. The core ideas of mindfulness are the same for any age. You want to teach attention, awareness of emotion, compassion, and working on responsiveness. You can find engaging ways to teach these concepts to children.

One situation in which to teach and encourage mindfulness with children is with transitions. If children are finishing one activity, teach them to pause. Pause for a second, take a breath, and think about what should be the next best step. It gives children an opportunity to access what they know and begin to make different choices. 📍

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