

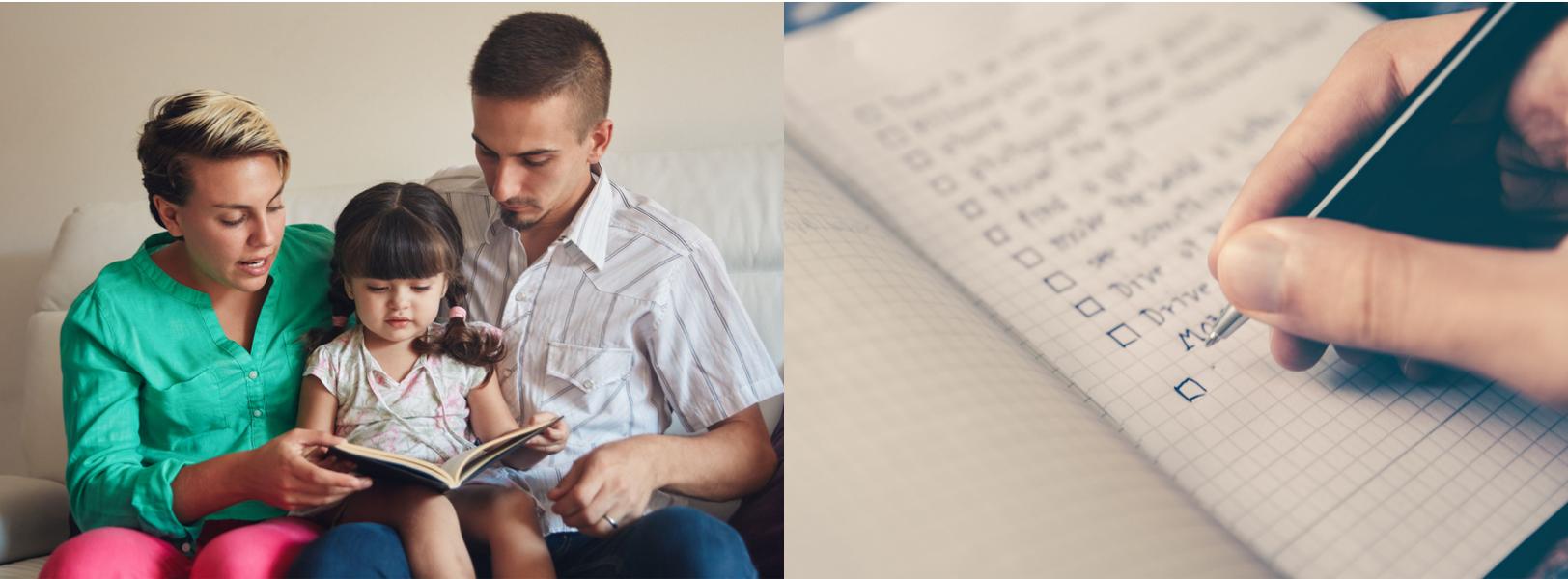
Guide to Applying
MINDFUL PARENTING

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MINDFUL PARENTING

HOW TO BEGIN

BY JOEY FUNG, PH.D.



BEING VS. DOING

As parents, we are constantly doing. As soon as one task is complete, another appears. No wonder we feel exhausted, stressed or frustrated all the time! When we are in the “doing” mode, it is hard to focus in the present moment. We may go mindlessly from one task to another. Even though we are physically there with our child, we may be emotionally somewhere else. This limits our ability to connect and develop a deep relationship with our child.

What does it mean to be fully present with our child? What does it mean to “be” rather than “do”?

Mindfulness could be a solution.

WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

"Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally."

– Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindful parenting is applying this approach to yourself, and to your interactions with your child.

When practicing mindfulness, it is particularly important to connect with our bodies. When faced with a stressful parenting moment, we often go to our negative thoughts (e.g., “why is my child acting this way?” or “I am such a terrible parent”) or judge ourselves or our children. Our bodies anchor us in the here and the now. Listening to our bodies helps us focus in the present moment and replace judgement with compassion. As we recognize where tension is located in our bodies, we breathe space, relaxation, and kindness into them. As we create space within, we can be more thoughtful, and less reactive, in our responses to our children.

Listen to Your Body: *3 Minute Body Scan*

When:

Anytime—while standing in line, during shower, before falling asleep, before or after a difficult conversation with your child, before you cook, before bed

How to do it:

1. Find your breath in your body.
2. Start from either your feet or your head, move your attention through your body: your feet; back; stomach; shoulders; arms; face, jaw, or forehead.
3. Notice any feelings of tension or discomfort.
4. Breathe into each area, releasing tension and imagining each area softening and relaxing. Breathe in kindness and compassion to yourself.
5. If a thought or emotion arises, notice it without judging, then let it go. Breathe.

HOME PRACTICE



1. Mindful Activity

Do one mindful activity with your child, for about 10-15 min. It can be anything, such as a sport, reading together, cooking, drawing, or anything your child likes. Practice moment-to-moment awareness without judgement or evaluation (towards self or child). Be aware of your child, yourself, and the interaction between the two of you.

2. Mini Body Scan

Do a mini body scan at least 1-2 times this week during a moment of stress or during a difficult interaction with your child or partner. Observe your body during moments of parenting stress. Notice whatever is happening in your body, without judging. Breathe into areas of your body that carries tension. Speak words of kindness and compassion to yourself.



3. Mindful Eating

Pay attention to the first bite of one meal per day. As much as possible, turn off your phone or computer during a meal. Focus on eating, rather than work and eat at the same time. Consider practicing it as a family during at least one family meal this week.

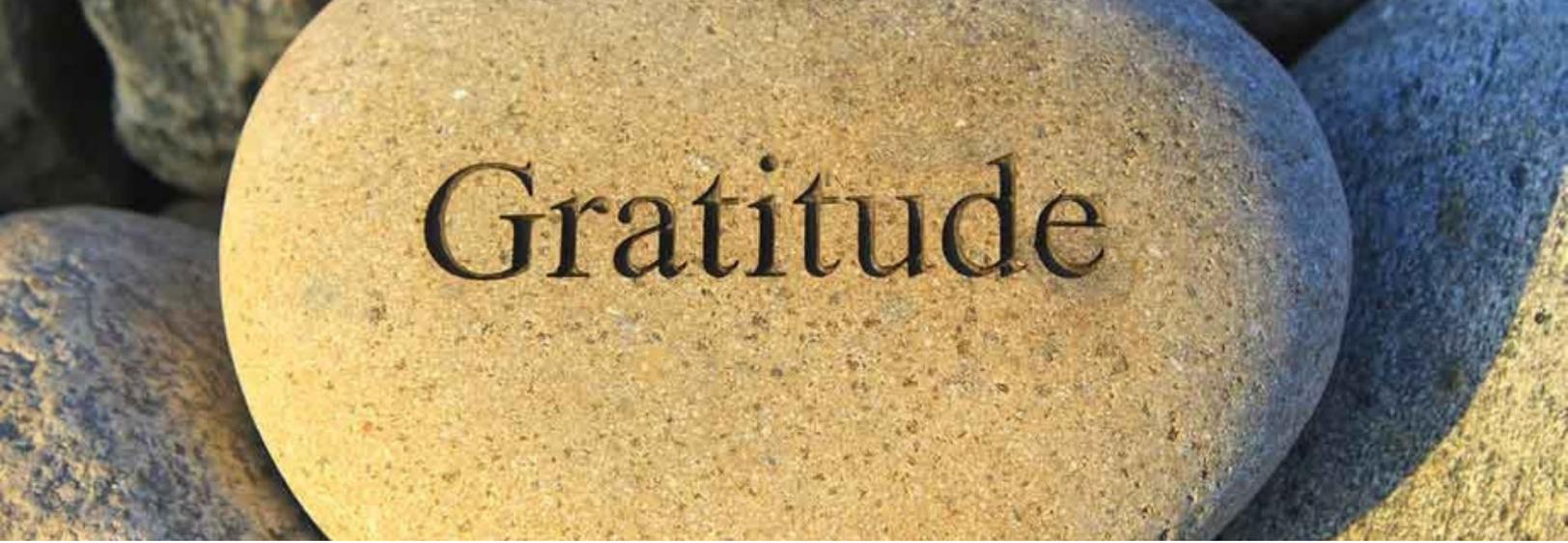


PRACTICING SELF-COMPASSION

As parents, we can be hard on ourselves. Self-compassion is a simple antidote to our tendency to strive for perfection. Practicing self-compassion or kindness does not mean letting ourselves off the hook or not having standards. It means that as parents, we take care of ourselves the way we take care of someone who is very important to us, like our children. Self-compassion is the best gift to ourselves when we feel we have failed as a parent, have been unnecessarily harsh with our children, or feel lonely.

Similarly, we can practice extending compassion and kindness to our children. As we do so, we learn to see things from their perspectives, accept their limitations, and meet them where they are. We are not making excuses for their mistakes or misbehavior but treating them with tenderness and gentleness. Here are some ways we can take care of ourselves:

Visit your favorite café or restaurant.	Read a book or your favorite magazine.	Call a friend or a family member.
Go on a walk and engage your 5 senses.	Turn off your phone for an hour.	Journal.
Exercise.	Take a bath.	Breathe and whisper to yourself, "I'm doing the best that I can."
Go on a mini-date with your partner.	Visit a park and smell the flowers.	Light your favorite candle.



Gratitude

CULTIVATING GRATITUDE

One way to practice compassion is to cultivate gratitude. Gratitude helps make us happier and more resilient, because when we are grateful, we notice and appreciate all that we have. We are more likely to remember the good things when things get hard. Gratitude is more than a feeling. It is a practice. Gratitude is both a noun and a verb. We practice gratitude in order to cultivate it and help it grow.

Write a note to someone to thank them for something kind they did for you.	Write down 3 things you are grateful for about your child before you go to bed.
What foods give you joy? Eat one mindfully this week.	Notice one thing your child does for you, and thank your child.
Tell your partner or friend one thing you appreciate about them.	Each family member share one thing they are grateful for this week before a meal.

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