Smiling Mind's Families Program

Developed in collaboration with our Official Health Partner Medibank



Smiling Mind's Families Programs, supported by our Official Health
Partner Medibank, have been designed to support and enrich the lives of Australian families by introducing simple, practical and fun ways for families to be more mindful, present and engaged with each other.

In today's fast-paced world, family life can, at times, be experienced as overwhelming, busy and stressful. Many families struggle on a daily basis with the sense that there is always too much to do and never enough time to do it. The unfortunate result is that the enjoyable, nurturing and nourishing aspects of family life can all too easily be overshadowed.

The good news is that integrating mindfulness into everyday family life (as opposed to it becoming yet another thing on your 'should-do' list!) can have profound benefits, both for the individuals within families, parents and children alike, as well as for families as a whole.

There is no one size fits all formula for how families can be more mindful. As such we have included a range of different activities for you to explore. We encourage you and your family to try different things, to experiment, explore and have fun as you embark on your mindfulness journey together.

This toolkit has been designed to accompany the Families Programs in the Smiling App. In it you will find information related to the following:

- What mindfulness is
- How mindfulness relates to parenting
- The benefits of mindfulness for you, your children and your family
- How mindfulness is cultivated
- Tips for practising mindfulness with your family

This toolkit also includes an overview of each of the meditations and activities in the Families Programs as well as additional information, tips and worksheets

to help support you integrate mindful activities and meditations into different times of day:



On the go



Bedtimes



After School



Weekends



Meal Times



Any Time



Reading or being told about mindfulness without actually experiencing it yourself is like going to a restaurant to read the menu, without tasting any of the food. Just as the point of going to a restaurant is to taste the food, the point of mindfulness is to experience it. There are, however, some definitions of mindfulness that are a good starting point. This is the one that we at Smiling Mind like:

"Mindfulness is about learning to pay attention to what is happening in the present moment with more openness and curiosity and less judgement."

Mindfulness helps us get better at focusing on the here and now, rather than spending so much time thinking about the past or worrying about the future.

While mindfulness has been around for centuries, it has surged in popularity in recent years due to the large and growing body of academic research that has revealed its many benefits. Just as our muscles are strengthened through regular exercise, important emotional, behavioural, cognitive and relationship skills have been found to be strengthened with regular mindfulness practice. Research has shown that practising mindfulness strengthens areas of the brain involved in the ability to pay attention, be more self-aware and regulate emotion. Strengthening these brain areas can reduce stress, anxiety and depression while increasing physical and mental wellbeing, quality of sleep, cognitive and interpersonal skills, and self-esteem.



How Does Mindfulness Relate to Parenting?

Parenting is one of the most challenging and demanding roles in life. It's also one of the most important as it has such a direct influence on our children. How we parent, influences the development of important life skills and the beliefs our children develop about themselves, others and the world. Good parenting (not perfect, there's no such thing!) requires an awareness of and engagement with one's own inner world as well as the external work involved in nurturing and caring for our children. No small task

Mindfulness can be enormously beneficial in helping us become more aware of our inner life as parents of our habitual, automatic thought patterns and reactions; of the preconceived ideas we may have about our children; of our hopes, expectations and fears for them. Mindfulness helps us become more aware of our emotions before they trigger automatic, knee-jerk reactions. We get better at responding, rather than reacting. Mindfulness also helps us try to see things from our child's point of view and see more clearly what their needs are.

Mindfulness also supports the external work of nurturing and caring for our children by helping us be more present, compassionate and patient as we parent - both with ourselves as well as with our children. It's not about being a perfect parent but working on being more present and aware with ourselves and with our children.



What are the Benefits of Mindfulness for You, Your Children and Your Family?

Mindfulness helps develop important life skills that help all of us relate to what's happening internally and externally with more awareness, wisdom and compassion.

Some of these benefits include:



Reduced stress and feelings of overwhelm



Better quality sleep



Increased ability to focus and pay attention



Ability to calm down and regulate strong emotions



Increased self awareness



Better able to respond rather than react impulsively



Increased empathy for self and others



Improved relationships

Much of our mental suffering, such as stress, anxiety and low mood, arises when our mind is busy jumping around from one thing to another, usually worrying about something that hasn't yet happened (and may not happen) or ruminating about something that's already happened. While it's an extraordinary human quality to be able to project our mind into the past or future in this way, the downside is that it reduces our awareness of the present moment, which can make it difficult to fully engage with what's most important in our lives. Mindfulness helps give our mind an anchor - a place to go that's neutral and unwavering.

"In a family if there is one person who practices mindfulness, the entire family will be more mindful."

Thich Nhat Hanh



Meditation is one of two ways to cultivate mindfulness. It's the formal practice of mindfulness and is essentially the act of bringing our attention back over and over to one point of focus (or anchor) such as the breath, body, sounds or something else in the environment. The goal is not to get rid of thoughts or emotions (this is one of the most common and most unhelpful misconceptions about meditation), nor is it to only have happy, positive thoughts. Instead, the goal is to change our relationship to our thoughts and emotions by observing them with openness and curiosity, as opposed to getting all tangled up with them.

We can also practice mindfulness more informally by more consciously and deliberately engaging any or all of our five senses: sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. In this way, we can do anything mindfully. For example, mindful eating involves really savouring the food you're eating by paying conscious attention to the flavours, aromas and textures. Most people can relate to eating mindlessly - eating while distracted by thoughts we barely taste the food. The experience of whatever it is that we're doing changes when we're mindful. It becomes richer. We notice things we might otherwise have missed.

It's the same with our relationships, whether with ourselves or our partner and children. Engaging with the people close to us more mindfully helps us enjoy and appreciate them more, which in turn fosters closer connections - a big contributor to our quality of life.

The Families Program includes a range of fun, accessible and simple mindfulness practices (both formal and informal) designed to be enjoyed together as a family. They have been designed to be incorporated into your routine with a minimum of effort.







Try to be more mindful yourself.

Children learn a great deal from us simply by being around us and observing how we are in the world. Small children tend to be naturally mindful, engaging with the world around them with wonder and curiosity, noticing small details that we as adults often miss in our busyness. All too often children soon learn that life is about rushing from one thing to the next; and if we're not careful they may learn that pausing to notice and appreciate small details can be frustrating to us as parents. The more we rediscover how to be mindful ourselves, the more we can appreciate and nurture our children's innate capacity to be present in each moment.

You might also consider establishing your own personal mindfulness practice, which will help you naturally embody and model mindfulness to your family. If this is of interest you might like to check out the 'Adult Programs' in the Smiling Mind App. 'Introduction to Mindfulness' and 'Mindfulness Foundations' are a good place to start.



Start small.

While the meditations included in this program are a great way to practise mindfulness with your children, don't underestimate the short, simple activities in this program. Even brief moments of mindfulness are important building blocks.



Explore and experiment.

Different mindfulness activities will resonate differently for different people – children and adults alike. This is normal and perfectly ok. We encourage you to try out as many of the meditations and activities in this program that you feel drawn to.



Have fun.

Try to view mindfulness as something that is fun for the whole family, that can be readily integrated into your usual everyday activities as opposed to something you 'should' do.

On the go

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This section of the Families Programs encourages you to use the times when you're on the move to engage with mindfulness, whether by pausing briefly together as a family as you gather at the front door before leaving the house, or before getting out of the car when you arrive at your destination.



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Pause and go

You can think of this mini meditation as being like a comma in your day. Try linking this mini meditation to activities that are already part of your family's everyday routine as a way of effortlessly weaving mindfulness into your every day!

You can listen to the audio in the Smiling Mind App or simply practise using the following instructions:

- 1 Stop what you are doing be still and silent for a few moments
- 2 Now, together as a family take three big sighs breathing in through your nose and sighing out through your mouth, begin now...
- 3 Look at each other and smile, then proceed with your next activity.



In the car

This short meditation is designed to help support your child to focus on the sensations in their body rather than on worrying about an upcoming event or activity. This can be done together in the car before leaving to go somewhere, or before getting out of the car once you arrive at your destination. Please don't practice this, or any other meditation, while driving.



After school

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This section of the Families Program is designed to help you and your family wind down after school, work or other activities. No matter what kind of day you or your child have had these mindful activities and meditations can help to reset mind and body, bringing more calm and balance into your evening.





Letting Go of the Day

This core meditation practice will help you and your children learn how to let go of the day by learning to focus on the breath. Even though we are constantly breathing, we usually don't notice it. With this meditation we are learning how to pay attention to our breath.



Family Digital Detox

We all get distracted by our phones – kids and adults alike! Come together as a family and put your phones and other devices aside to enjoy a short mindfulness meditation focusing on sounds, breath and body. This meditation will leave your family feeling calmer and more connected.



Tough Day at School

This meditation helps develop the ability to notice where emotions are in the body; to be really curious about them; and to realise that they are always changing just like the weather.





Your child has had a tough day - perhaps a friend wouldn't play with them; they felt excluded by their group; perhaps the teacher told them off for talking in class; or they lost a sports game. We all have bad days. Here's how you can support your child to process challenging emotions after a difficult day:

Listen as your child is telling you about their day and help them recognise and name their emotions.

It's not about getting rid of difficult emotions. Instead try to approach the emotion with the attitudes of mindfulness, that is, with curiosity and openness. Gently investigate the emotion, perhaps asking your child: 'where do you feel this emotion in your body?' See the 'List of Feelings' and 'Where are My Feelings In My Body?' pages to help support you



Try not to be too quick to offer advice allowing space for your child to feel what they're feeling.

This can take a while, try to be patient. Once you notice a shift in your child's emotions or mood ask if they would like to discuss what they can do to make things better. This can be talked about the next day after a good night's sleep.



Do your best to stay calm.

It can be distressing to see your child upset but if you can stay calm and emotionally regulated while listening to them this will support your child as they process his or her emotions. Children learn from watching how we behave. If you can keep calm your child will eventually mirror this. You might consider developing your own personal mindfulness practice if this is something you struggle with.



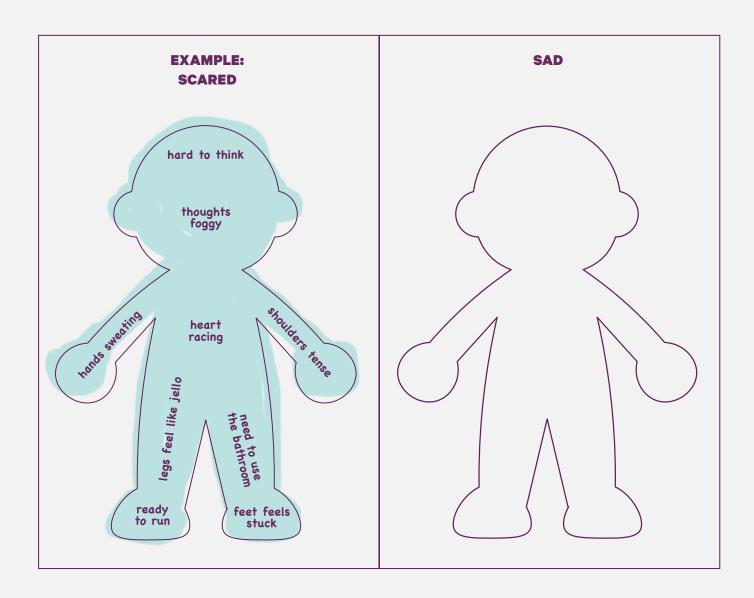


Нарру	Sad	Angry	Other feelings
— Calm	— Ashamed	— Annoyed	— Afraid
— Cheerful	— Awful	— Destructive	— Anxious
— Confident	— Disappointed	— Disgusted	— Ashamed
— Content	— Discouraged	— Frustrated	— Bored
— Delighted	— Gloomy	— Fuming	— Confused
— Excited	— Hurt	— Furious	— Curious
— Glad	— Lonely	— Grumpy	— Embarrassed
— Loved	— Miserable	— Irritated	— Jealous
— Proud	— Sorry	— Mad	— Moody
— Relaxed	— Unhappy	— Mean	— Responsible
— Satisfied	— Unloved	— Violent	— Scared
— Silly	— Withdrawn		— Shy
— Terrific			— Uncomfortable
— Thankful			— Worried

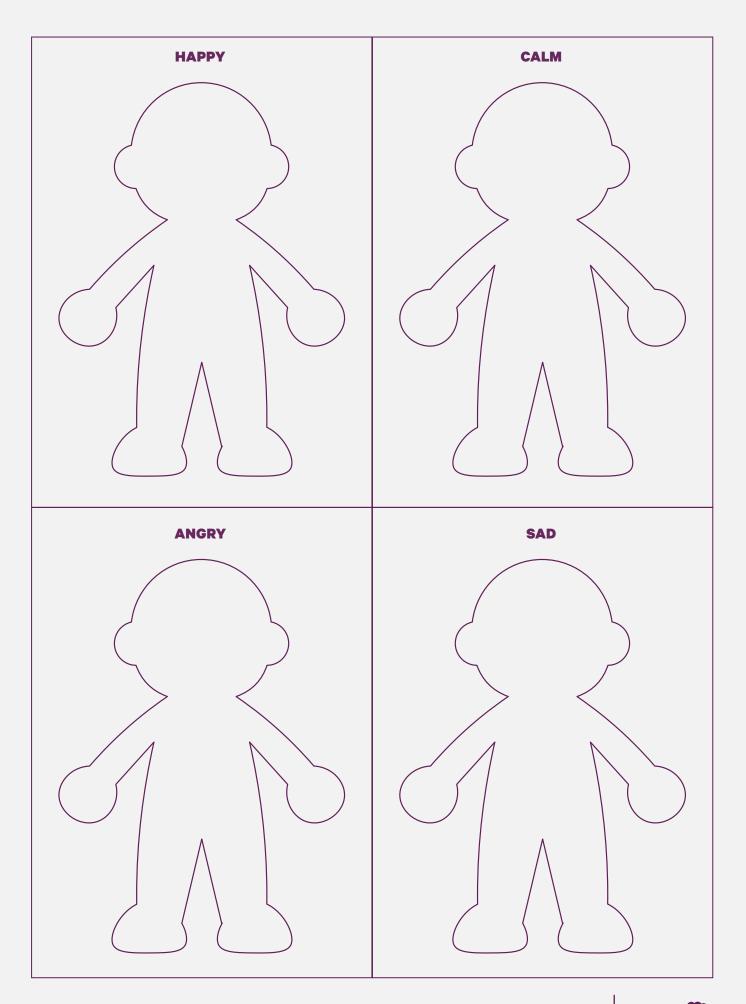




We can identify our emotions by feeling them in our body. Choose a different colour for each emotion — colour, draw and write clues in the bodies!









Meal Time

In this section of the Families Program we have included different activities to help make meal times, which we know can sometimes be particularly stressful and chaotic, calmer and more enjoyable.





Savouring

Being more mindful at mealtimes is all about savouring what you're eating and enjoying each other's company as you eat. Try one or all of the following suggestions and see what you notice!



Unplug from Devices

To be really present with your family at meal times we suggest putting all devices to one side for the duration of the meal. Turn the TV off, put phones and tablets in another room. If this feels too overwhelming, start small and see if you can commit to doing this for at least one meal a week.



Create a Ritual of Silence

Sit down at the table at the same time and before anyone touches any food, pause in silence for a few moments (it could be as brief as 10 seconds). You might ask your family to close their eyes and take three long, slow breaths together. You might invite your family to consider feeling grateful for the meal they are about to eat and where some of the different ingredients have come from. Pausing together for a few moments in this way helps your family be more present with each other.



Cutlery Down

Challenge your family to put their cutlery down between each bite. Doing this helps us slow down and really savour each mouthful. When we eat more mindfully we pay closer attention to what we're eating – we really taste the flavours and more fully appreciate what we're eating. Eating more mindfully also helps us become more attuned to the messages from our bodies telling us when we're full. Consider doing this for at least one meal each week.

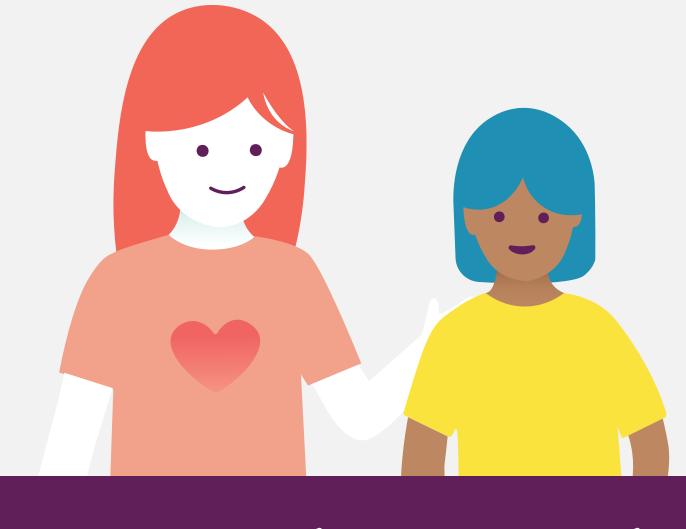


Taking in the Good

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We can help support our brain to see more of the positive by taking a few minutes each day to notice and remember something positive, perhaps a success, an act of kindness or something that made us laugh or an activity that we really enjoyed.

Over dinner take a few moments to take turns sharing with your family 3 things that went well that day and how you contributed to this experience. Maybe you had a success of some kind because you worked hard and kept trying. Maybe you helped a friend or colleague or solve a problem. Take turns sharing and really listen when someone else is talking. You could print out the following worksheet for each family member and keep a record each day over the coming week.









What Went Well and Why?

WHAT:	WHY?
MONDAY	
1.	
2.	
3.	
TUESDAY	
1.	
2.	
3.	
WEDNESDAY	
1.	
2.	
3.	
THURSDAY	
1.	
2.	
3.	
FRIDAY 1.	
2.	
3.	
SATURDAY/SUNDAY	
1.	
2.	
3.	

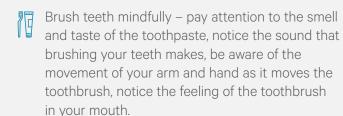
Bed Time

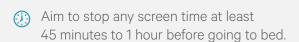
Having a consistent routine when putting your children, as well as yourself, to bed can help to support a good night's sleep. In this section of the program we have included a number of different meditations and a bedtime story designed to help you and your children go to sleep.





Here are some of our top tips for a good night's sleep:





Remove any screens or phones from the bedroom overnight.



Read your children a story or have them read one to you.



Practise gratitude.



Meditate together.





Creating a Mindful Bedtime Routine

Use the following worksheet to help your child establish and keep track of their mindful bedtime routine.

What I Need To Do:



Brush teeth mindfully



Stop screen time before bed



Keep phones and devices out of the bedroom



Bedtime story



Practise gratitude



Meditate

How Did I Go?

Colour in your mark

Monday



Wednesday





Saturday

Sunday



































Getting Ready For Bed

This meditation is a body awareness meditation where you and your children will be systematically guided to notice physical sensations in different parts of the body. The aim of this meditation is to observe these physical sensations with interest and kindness. Doing this helps to calm our minds and body in preparation for a good night's sleep.



Scrunch and Relax

This is a relaxation activity that will support and teach your child to release any tension or stress in their body. It allows them to notice what stress physically feels like and also what a relaxed, calm body feels like. Learning and noticing how our body is feeling is a useful step in helping children learn how to manage stress and anxiety. This activity can be done at bedtime to help prepare for sleep. It will guide you and your child through different parts of the body asking you to scrunch and squeeze different muscles and then relax them.



Section Story

This short bed-time story is designed to help your child settle their mind and body ready for sleep. It involves paying attention to breathing, using their imagination and listening. You can lie in bed with your child and listen to the story as well, in fact we suggest you do this for the first few times.



As you're putting your child to bed discuss with them what it means to be grateful.



Ask your child to share 3 things that they are grateful for. These can be big ongoing things such as friends, family and food or little things that happened during the day such as lying in the sun, playing with a pet or receiving a hug from a friend, things they are grateful for. Consider making this activity a regular part of your family's bedtime routine.



If your child has difficulty thinking of their 3 things you could share 3 things you're grateful for first.



Try to be really present with your child and listen with openness and curiosity as they are sharing their 3 things. Then ask your child what it feels like to think about the things they are grateful for. Consider making this activity a regular part of your family's bedtime routine.









Have a conversation with your child and brainstorm together different ways of expressing gratitude to others. For example, saying thank you, smiling, speaking kind words, giving small gifts, writing letters, emails or texts or doing favours for other people.



Make a gratitude jar for each member of the family. Whenever someone in the family does or says something you are grateful for, write this on a piece of paper and pop it in their gratitude jar (e.g. 'Thank you for taking me to tennis practice today.', 'Thank you for making a delicious dinner tonight.'). This is a great way to foster connection and love by simply noticing and acknowledging all the things your family does for you.



Ask your child what they are grateful for using their five senses: eg. Taste their favourite food; Smell - favourite smell; Hearing - favourite song; Sight favourite colour; Touch - soft toy to cuddle, mum's hand to hold etc.



Weekends

The weekend is a time when families can come together and enjoy each other's company. Setting up a simple weekend routine with 1 or 2 regular mindful activities together can help foster closer connections and help your family prepare for the week ahead. We have included various fun and mindful activities that you might like to try together as a family.



Family Outings in Nature

A substantial body of evidence suggests what many of us already know from our own experience - that being out in nature is good for our well being and mental health.

Taking children to experience nature from a young age is important. There are many different ways of doing this: going to the beach, the local park, bushwalking or even walking around your own neighbourhood or backyard. While going out in nature can at times be met with groans here are some activities to help get children mindfully out and about.

Research suggests that we are happiest when we are paying attention to where we are and what we are doing. Paying attention by more consciously using our senses is one simple way to be more present. The following activities involve using the senses to be present and to pay attention to the natural world - one small beautiful detail at a time.







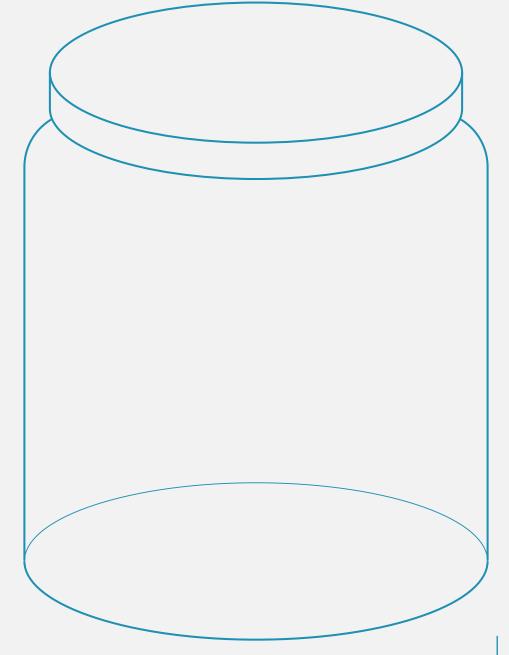
While at the park, or walking on the beach or in the bush ask your child to find objects in the natural surroundings with different qualities using their senses – sight, touch and even smell.

qualities and then draw them in your treasure jar:

something rough;
something smooth;
something heavy;
something light;
something ______ (choose a colour)

something _____ (insert your own!)

Your challenge is to find objects with different





Cloud Watching

Lying down together with your child on the sand at the beach or on the grass at the park, or even in our own backyard – look up at the sky and watch the clouds move above you.



What shapes, animals or objects can you see the clouds make?

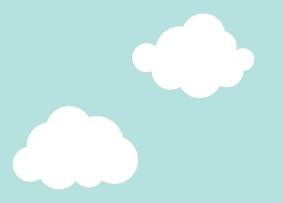


Each time you notice your mind wandering off, thinking about other things, gently bring it back to paying attention to the clouds, their movements and shapes.



Do you and your child see the same things or are they different?



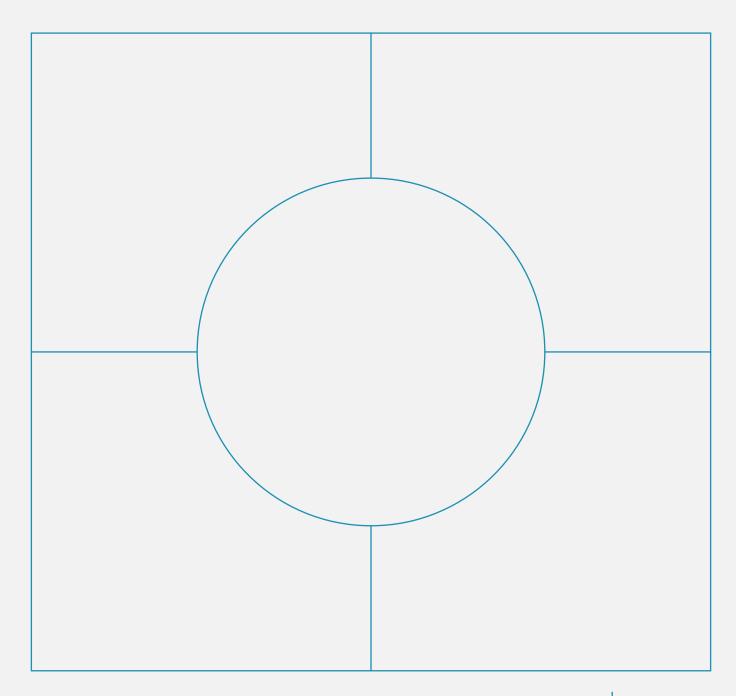






Often we can be in a beautiful place and not really pay attention to our surroundings. Or, we may be with our child and not really be present with them because we are thinking about work, what to cook for dinner or other things. With your child, observe your surroundings mindfully together by taking turns to name:

Write and/or draw 5 things you can see:

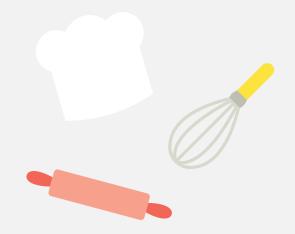




Write and/or draw 4	things you can he	ar:	
Write and/or draw 3	things you can tou	ıch:	
Write and/or draw 2	Write and/or draw 2 things you can smell:		

Mindful Cooking

Cooking and eating breakfast together is a simple and fun activity that the whole family can do together. In this activity you're going to practice mindful cooking and then (this is the best part!) - mindful eating. Most people don't eat mindfully. Instead many people eat on the run or while doing other things.





Decide what you will make for breakfast together. If it is pancakes, for example, discuss the different flavours you can add to your pancakes. Perhaps having all the different flavours on hand - sour (lemons), sweet (sugar or maple syrup), salty (cheese and ham), fruit (blueberries, strawberries and bananas). Or perhaps your children will come up

with their own unique combinations. Give them the opportunity to experiment with different flavours. As you cook, encourage your children to pay attention to their senses by smelling each ingredient one by one; feeling the texture of the batter as they stir; listening to the sounds made while cooking (e.g., the hissing of the hot pan).



When it is time to eat the breakfast you have prepared together, play the mindful eating meditation in the Smiling Mind App. It is a short practice that will really help you and your family truly savour and appreciate the meal that you have made together by encouraging you to slow down and savour each bite using each of your senses - smell, sight, taste as well as touch and sound.





Getting Ready for the Week

This activity involves setting intentions, individually and as a family, for the week ahead. The intentions we set ourselves help remind us of what is important.

Over dinner as a family (Sunday night can work really well) encourage each family member to set their own intention for the week. Or you might like to set an intention for your family as well.

Name:		
Individual intention for the week:	Family intention for the week:	



Making Mornings Mindful

Weekday mornings can be a busy time for families with everyone running around getting ready; remembering to pack everything needed for school and work; making or organising lunches. What would happen if you aimed to do at least one everyday morning activity more mindfully for a whole week? Try it and see!





Set aside some time on the weekend to brainstorm with your child a list of everyday morning activities. Here are some suggestions. You can use these and add others as relevant to your family. Write each of the activities you come up with on individual pieces of paper and pop them in a jar.

- Cleaning your teeth
- Getting dressed
- Having a shower
- Eating breakfast
- Putting your shoes on
- Packing your bag

Each Sunday evening, together as a family, pick one piece of paper out of the jar and aim to do that particular activity more mindfully each morning over the coming week by paying careful attention to your chosen activity as you're doing it rather than doing multiple things at once or thinking about other things. For example: 'Cleaning your teeth' - observe each of your senses as you do this activity, pay attention to the smell and taste of the toothpaste, notice the sound that brushing your teeth makes, be aware of the movement of your arm and hand as it moves the toothbrush, notice the feeling of the toothbrush in your mouth.

Consider making this exercise a weekly family ritual. First, reflect together on what you noticed about doing a morning activity more mindfully each day over the course of the previous week before choosing a new activity for the week ahead.

	Name:	Name:	Name:
Monday	Task:	Task:	Task:
Tuesday	Task:	Task:	Task:
Wednesday	Task:	Task:	Task:
Thursday	Task:	Task:	Task:
Friday	Task:	Task:	Task:
Saturday	Task:	Task:	Task:
Sunday	Task:	Task:	Task:

Any Time

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The practices included in this section of the Families Program are designed to support you and your family whenever you need to reset and refocus. They can be done all together as a family as well as individually and are a useful way of transitioning from one task or activity to another e.g. before settling down to do homework.





Brain Break

Use a 'brain break' to pause and refocus. With practise it can become a helpful habit embedded in your day that helps you reset whenever needed. It can be done all together as a family as well as individually. We recommend practising it all together at first and then encouraging your family members to use it on their own whenever they need it.

- 1 Stop stop what you are doing.
- 2 Be still and pay attention.
- Take 3, or more, deep breaths following the animated visual guide in the Smiling Mind App. As you breathe, rest your attention on the feeling and movement of each breath in your body.



Steady as a Tree

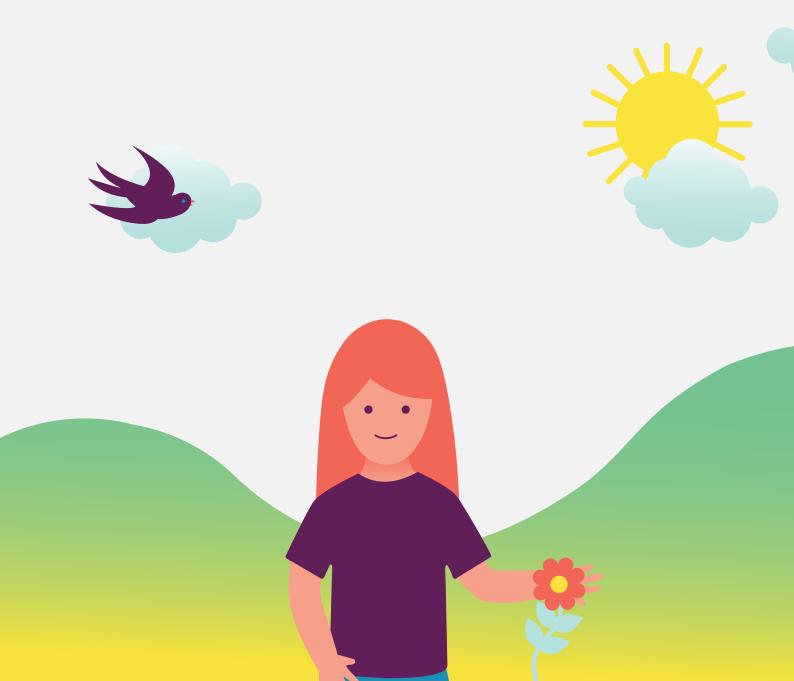
This grounding exercise is a great way to help your child shift from worry and anxious thoughts to being more present and grounded in their body. It involves imagining being a tree and tuning into the feelings in the body. It is a simple, yet effective way of calming down and recentering. While not necessary, we recommend practising this exercise with shoes off.





Find Your Happy Place

This exercise is a visualisation that encourages children to use their five senses to bring to mind a place, real or imaginary, that they can take themselves back to whenever they need as a way to calm themselves in a stressful situation.



Print this planner, and schedule in the activities and meditations you intend to practise as a family over the coming week! Keep it somewhere visible (e.g. on the fridge) and mark them off as you do them!

	Activity/Meditations	Completed?
Monday	Family Homework Night Everyone complete homework together! (Parent, if you have nothing to do, how about reading the paper?) Try the 'Letting Go of the Day' meditation in the 'After School' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	
Tuesday	Family Breakfast Everyone set your alarms 15 minutes early so you can eat breakfast together. Try the 'Taking in the Good' meditation in the 'Meal Times' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	
Wednesday	Family Cleanup Night Everyone pitch in to clean up the kitchen after dinner. Try the 'Pause, Then Go' meditation in the 'On the Go' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	
Thursday	Family Leftover Night Time to clean out the fridge! Pull out all of the leftovers and enjoy a fun family dinner together. Try the 'Taking in the Good' meditation in the 'Meal Times' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	
Friday	Family Game Night Join together for a family game night! Try a different game every week. Try the 'Find Your Happy Place' meditation in the 'Any Time' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	
Saturday	Family Outing Pick a fun family activity to try out with the family. Try the 'Family Outing in Nature' meditation in the 'Weekends' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	
Sunday	Family Dinner To wind down from the weekend and rest up for the week ahead, sit down for a nice quiet dinner together. Try the 'Family Outing in Nature' meditation in the 'Weekends' module of Smiling Mind's Families Program.	

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	Activity/Meditations	Completed?
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

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Smiling Mind would like to acknowledge our Official Health Partner Medibank for their support developing this program and accompanying materials.

Smiling Mind

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meditation accessible to all. Visit us online or download

Smiling Mind is a not-forprofit organisation that works to make mindfulness

the free app to get started.

Illustrations by Beci Orpin









