

A background image of a sunset or sunrise over a landscape, with the sun low on the horizon, creating a lens flare effect. The sky is dark, and the sun is bright, with rays of light extending outwards.

The Wise Brain Bulletin

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Teaching Children How to Clear Their Minds

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Consider what thoughts sprout in your mind during a typical day. You spend some of our day thinking about what you are doing in the present moment, yet, you might be surprised how little time you actually devote to this. Some thoughts occur on purpose, using our conscious attention. For other thoughts, we do not decide to think them; they just live in our minds. We spend endless hours on these mind-wandering thoughts.

Our stream of consciousness is simply a flowing series of thoughts running through our minds. Many people's stream of consciousness takes the form of an internal monologue. Consider what form your stream of consciousness takes. Do you think in pictures or words? Do you think in more than one voice? What influences your thoughts? You might find the answers to these questions intriguing. On a recent Internet forum, participants answered these same questions. Most said they think in words as opposed to images or sounds. Most

Greetings

The Wise Brain Bulletin offers skillful means from brain science and contemplative practice – to nurture your brain for the benefit of yourself and everyone you touch.

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notice their internal monologues take the form of a debate or discussion with another voice or person. Their audience or discussion partner changes depending on what they are “speaking” about. Some explain that the content and even the syntax of their thoughts is affected by the last book they read.

A Child's Stream of Consciousness

Do children experience their stream of consciousness in this same way? In 1993, researchers at Stanford University brought children (one child at a time) into a room. One researcher asked an assistant to sit and wait on the other side of the room facing a blank wall. Then the researcher asked the child if the assistant in the chair “is having some thoughts and ideas or is her mind empty of thoughts and

ideas?” Ninety five percent of the three-year-olds responded that the researcher’s mind was empty of thoughts and ideas. Eighty percent of four-year-olds responded in this same way and forty-five percent of six- and seven-year-olds answered that the researcher’s mind was empty of thoughts and ideas. Five-year-olds did not happen to be part of their research pool. In comparison five percent of adults answered as these children did when they were brought through the same process.

The researchers conducting this study concluded that the children who said the researcher was empty of thoughts were simply not aware of their own stream of consciousness. Consequently they were not aware of the existence of the researcher’s stream of thoughts. I disagree with this conclusion.

In his book *The Biology of Belief*, Bruce Lipton writes two- to six-year-olds naturally experience a calm meditative state (called Theta). Seven- to eleven-year-olds experience a quiet, yet open state (called Alpha). On the other hand, adults experience an analytical state (called Beta). Based on this, one could conclude that many children have naturally quiet, empty minds, a state many adults try hard to attain through meditation.

If children already have naturally quiet minds should we teach them how to clear their minds? Based on my experience with children and the research available, I don't believe children, especially young children, need to spend a lot of time learning highly disciplined focused meditation. However, many other types of meditation are fun for children and offer many benefits. With that said, introducing children to meditations that involve focused attention is helpful in small doses so that when they want to clear their minds, they have the skills at their disposal.

In my book, *Sensational Meditation for Children*, I provide four meditations that help children clear their minds. One leads children to focus on their breathing,



another teaches children how to repeat a mantra, the third provides a progressive relaxation meditation to help them sleep, and the fourth guides children to let go of thoughts and emotions down a grounding cord.

What to Expect when Teaching Meditation to Children

As adults we may have difficulty accessing our inner mind to experience the images, sounds, and feelings that arise in meditation. This may be because society puts a premium on a certain kind of rational intelligence, at the cost of imagination and creativity. Children, on the other hand, are by nature imaginative, and happily use their inner and outer senses to explore their inner and outer worlds. I find in general that the children I teach are far more open to the practice than my adult students. They grasp far more easily that a feeling can have color for example.

Although a certain level of quiet is necessary for meditation, this level is



different for children. In fact, strict guidelines and discipline make it hard for children to meditate. Children do not require a dark, quiet room or a place free from distractions when they meditate. Children can easily jump into and out of meditation when something interrupts them. Much of this ability is due to their brainwave state: children naturally exist in a meditative state.

If a child opens his or her eyes and looks around during meditation, this is fine and you can simply encourage the child to place their hands over their eyes. Children might also speak aloud; this usually will not interfere with the flow of their meditation if kept to a minimum, even in a group setting. If the child asks questions during the meditation, softly reply. When he or she makes simple comments or observations, let it become a part of the experience.

Teaching Meditation in Schools

If you are considering discussing meditation with a schoolteacher or school administrator, remember that not everyone is entirely open to meditation.

Although many spiritual traditions practice some form of meditation, some people believe that it conflicts with their religious views, or they simply do not know enough about it to feel comfortable with it. If you use other terminology, however, such as creative visualization, guided visualization, concentration exercises, relaxation exercises, closed-eye processing, inner processing, or mindfulness skills, your audience may feel more at ease.

Grounding Cord Meditation for Children

The grounding cord meditation is a wonderful tool children can use to become still.

Close your eyes. You can put your hands over your eyes if you want to. Now take a deep in-breath. When you breathe back out, feel your body relaxing. We'll take two more breaths. Deep breath in, and relax your legs as you breathe out. Deep breath in, and relax your arms and neck as you breathe out.

Imagine a cord connected to your root chakra at the bottom of your tailbone. Then see this cord go down into the floor. This cord can look or feel like anything you choose. See this cord go down through the floor, into the ground underneath this building. See the cord continue through the ground all the way to the center of the planet. Feel this cord connect to the center of the planet. Now feel yourself attached to the center of the planet by your cord. Once you feel this connection, imagine particles of energy moving out from your head to your root chakra (at the bottom of your tailbone) and down the cord. You might see this energy as particles, or you might see pictures coming out of your head and going down the cord. If you see something in particular go down the cord, it does not mean it is bad. It's just a thought that you don't need right now, energy you don't need and are sending to the center of the earth.



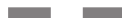
See this energy drop all the way to the center of the planet. You might even hear the energy go down the cord. What does it sound like? Now see energy come from your hands and arms down through your stomach and down your cord. It travels to the center of the planet because you don't need it anymore. Now feel this energy move out from all the areas in your body. Listen to the energy move from your chest down to the center of the planet. See this energy come from your feet and legs and go down your grounding cord.

I'll give you a few moments to do this on your own. Let any unneeded energy fall down the cord. Notice how clear and clean you feel. (Pause.)

Now thank yourself for all the things you released. (Pause.) You can open your eyes whenever you are ready.

After Meditation Questions

1. What did your cord look like?
2. What did you see go down your cord? Did you hear it?
3. Did you feel anything in your body while you did this?
4. Do you feel different?
5. Do you think you could do this meditation on your own?



Sarah Valley (www.sarahwood.com) is a parent-to-parent educator. She began working professionally with children in 1991. A former art teacher, Sarah now teaches meditation to children and trains adults how to teach meditation to children in classrooms, at home, and in therapeutic settings. Sarah's program attracts students from across the US, Canada, Australia and Europe. Sarah is also the author of *Sensational Meditation for Children* - Child-friendly meditation techniques based on the five senses.



Words of Wisdom

People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child -- our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Two thoughts cannot coexist at the same time: if the clear light of mindfulness is present, there is no room for mental twilight.

Nyanaponika Thera

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

Mahatma Gandhi

Observe the space between your thoughts, then observe the observer.

Hamilton Boudreaux

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

Lewis B. Smedes

The practice of mindfulness begins in the small, remote cave of your unconscious mind and blossoms with the sunlight of your conscious life, reaching far beyond the people and places you can see.

Earon Davis

You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.

Lewis B. Smedes

*The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice.
And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is nothing we can do to change
until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.*

R.D. Laing

People will do anything, no matter how absurd, to avoid facing their own soul.

Carl Gustav Jung

There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.

Bryant H. McGill

Your own self-realization is the greatest service you can render the world.

Ramana Maharshi

Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.

Paul Boese



