



An A-Z of Mindful activities...



Rialtas na hÉireann
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A is for Affirmations

Affirmations are positive statements that can help a child to overcome negative thoughts. They often start with “I am”, “I can” or “I will”. When repeated often enough they can make a real difference to a child’s beliefs about themselves. I often explain this to kids as literally tricking the brain into a new way of thinking.

You can choose 3 positive affirmations; for example – “I am kind, I work hard, I don’t give up”. You can ask your child to repeat this as they get dressed for school. Helping your child to choose affirmations that they are drawn to. You can verbally repeat or have your child make their own colourful words of positivity that can be placed somewhere that they will see them e.g. In a mirror, on their bedroom shelf, in a pencil case or lunch box. If you have a teen or a tween they can set their alarm for a few times throughout the day, to remind them of their affirmation “I am strong”, “I am resilient” etc. or indeed set as their screensaver. The more we see it and repeat it the more we believe it. It won’t happen straight away - but believe me it comes!



B is for Bubble Breathing

If you have bubbles great but don’t worry if you don’t – your child can use their imagination

Step 1 Ask your child to imagine they are holding a bubble

Step 2 Close their eyes and take a deep breath

Step 3 Hold their breath for a moment then breathe out slowly as if they are blowing a great big bubble



Step 4 Ask your child to imagine that they are blowing a worry inside of this bubble – something that is bothering them. They might see a picture in their mind or maybe just the word. Ask them to imagine that the bubble floats away high up into the sky carrying their worry away.



Step 5 Repeat until calm and grounded

C is for Colouring

Colouring can be a lovely mindful activity. Asking your child to pay attention to how the pencil feels in their hand or maybe the smell of the crayons. We don't have to colour inside the lines. Anything we colour is just as it should be. Mindful colouring can be a great way to relax and distress. It can help concentration and focus. Just choose your favourite animal, phrase or word and have a go.



D is for Drawing



Blind Mindful Drawing

Draw a self-portrait with eyes closed. Look for objects to draw with eyes closed. This is a great way to help children tune into their senses and lots of fun. They can give each other instructions and turn it into a game.

E is for Eating



Mindful eating can be practiced by being truly present by tuning into each of the senses. Paying closer attention to the sensations of eating can increase our enjoyment of food and deepen our appreciation for it.

Start off by getting in the zen zone by closing eyes paying attention to what you can hear. Then open eyes and look at your chocolate. Notice its shape, colour, any lumps or bumps. Now smell it keep your hand flat because it might start to melt with the heat of your hand. Notice how it smells. Now we will notice how it feels – is it smooth maybe hot or cold? Now the best bit - taste. Put it in your mouth and notice how it feels on your tongue. Think now about how the chocolate got to your house – the growing, preparing, packing and lastly be thankful for the lovely chocolate!

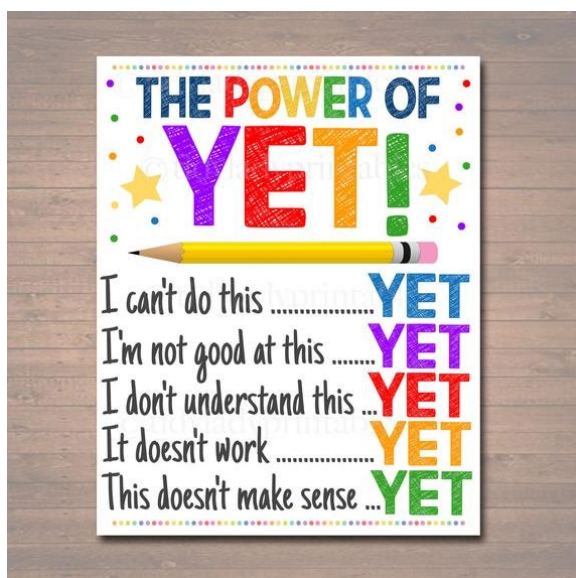
F is for Feathers



Feathers can help us to pay attention to the present moment. We keep them in our Wellbeing Toolkit. Hold a feather in one hand and gently brush your other palm backwards and forwards with it. Notice how this feels – is it hot, is it cold,

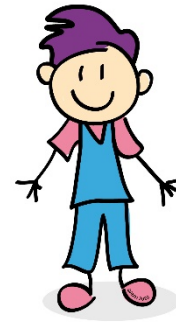
soft, hard, does it tickle? Now brush it down your face from your forehead down to your chin. Close your eyes as you do so. This is great for small children at bedtime to help them feel more relaxed. You could also use the feather as a pretend paint brush and paint an animal or character on their face whilst they have their eyes closed.

G is for Growth Mindset



We talk to children about having a growth mindset in our Healthy Me programme. What is a growth mindset? Having a growth mindset is the ability to see failure as an opportunity to learn, to grow and to try harder, not as an opportunity to simply give up because you're finding something difficult. Games that promote a growth mindset that you can play with your children are:

- Jigsaw puzzles
- Building towers
- Brain teasers Sudoku crosswords etc.
- Drawing making creating
- Learning an instrument or a new skill
- Putting something together using instructions



H is for Hand Massage

Jin Shin Jyutsu

The activity is a traditional Japanese Hand massage called Jin Shin Jyutsu which is a 5000-year-old healing art based on the belief that all of our body parts are connected to one another.

How does it work?



The philosophy underlying this massage is the vital energy (Ki in Japanese), flows throughout the body in a series of channels called meridians. Each finger is connected to a different organ and emotion and by holding and massaging them, it is possible to heal our inner body, improve energy flow, balance our emotions and improve health.

How do I do it?


Start by massaging the centre of your palm in circular motions with the thumb from the other hand. Then take it in turns to apply pressure to each finger and thumb, you can do this by pinching it between your forefinger and thumb starting from the base to the tip, massaging in circular motions or squeezing with your fist.

This is a great technique for reducing stress in both adults and children and can also be a great strategy to help focus and concentration. Simplify this for kids using age appropriate words for each finger feeling.

I is for I Am



Positive self-talk can have such a powerful effect on your mindset. Whether you repeat them out loud, in your head, write them down, stick them up somewhere, on your phone wallpaper. Each time you say or read it you are literally rewiring new positive pathways in your brain.

 Adults and children alike should choose three positive words about themselves, kind, strong, confident, funny, capable etc. And should repeat at different times throughout the day. Maybe when they are brushing their teeth or in the shower or bath, whatever works.

This is so powerful and you may not believe it to start with, but with repetition and conviction you will start to retrain yourself and your child to think positively towards self.

J is for Jar of Joy

The concept of a jar of joy is simple – fill the jar with happy memories, jokes, funny and favourite things, and whenever you are feeling a little bored or down crack open the jar and read one of the notes. It will be a jar of happiness and an instant mood booster



K is for Kindness

Kindness – the quality of being friendly, generous and considerate.

We talk about of the in importance of being kind to yourself on our Healthy Me programme and how it helps us to be kind to others. A game of kindness bingo is a nice activity that all the family can join with.



L is for Laughter



Watch some funny films, tell jokes and just have a giggle. Notice how it feels

Laughter really is the best medicine. It relaxes the whole body, boosts the immune system, triggers the release of endorphins and relieves your stress response.



M is for Mindful moments



day in school for example.

Try to incorporate mindful moments as part of everyday family life. Maybe it is when children are brushing their teeth or out for a walk. Encouraging them to stop what they are doing, check in with their breath and each of their senses, talking through them slowly really helps them to do this at other times throughout their

N is for Night Times

Mindful tips for good sleep

- **Watching TV or engaging with a screen disrupts our production of melatonin so be sure to turn them off for at least an hour before bedtime**
- **A nice warm bath with a few drops of lavender essential oil**
- **Choose calming bed time stories**
- **Have a bedtime catch up where you ask one thing about today that made you happy, one thing that you learned and one thing that you are thankful for.**
- **Deep breathing exercises**
- **Tense and relax – ask your child to tense their muscles all over their body from their face to their toes. Hold for 3 seconds and relax. Repeat a few times**
- **Listen to a calming meditation or visualisation – there are lots of great ones on YouTube**
- **Cuddle – because you just can't beat a hug with someone you love.**



O is for Order

Sort out your child's space, donate old clothes to charity and find new homes for toys no longer used. This is a great lesson to children to 'let go' of things and to give to others. Not to mention the therapeutic properties for you of clearing out.



P is for pebbles of positivity

We have all seen these over the last year haven't we? But if you haven't painted your own pebbles you are missing out. It's a good idea to remind children of the smiles that they will create for the person who finds them. Simply paint and put a nice positive reminder on there and hide in your local area to share the positivity.



Q is for quiet

Hands up who has been hiding in the bathroom for longer than usual just to have 5 minutes' peace to yourself. With many of us working and schooling from home 24/7 its perfectly understandable to crave a little alone time.



It's equally important for children to have their own quiet space. This can be in a quiet corner of their bedroom, or maybe on a beanbag in the corner of the living room. When we are in schools delivering healthy me to our younger students we encourage them to create a Wellbeing toolkit. It can include things that can help your child to be in the present moment, so things like feathers, spiky balls, bubble-wrap, bubbles, colouring book, positive affirmations, shells, photos. So a good idea is to keep the wellbeing toolkit in the 'Quiet zone' and remind children to use this to self-regulate.

R is for Rainbow walk

This is a lovely activity for all ages which encourages mindful walking and awareness of one's surroundings. For younger children it's great for developing colour recognition and older ones for instilling a bit of purpose into their walks. Using cardboard and colouring pegs attach the coloured items to each part of the wheel.



S is for senses hunt

A scavenger hunt is a great idea for helping kids to notice their senses. You can have them hunt for items that are cold, smooth, red, powered by batteries, something found in nature, something you can eat and so on. There are lots of templates online you can print out or make your own.



This is such a fun game for children as well as being a great activity for improving concentration, colour recognition, body awareness and balance.

U is for Unique

[illegible]

V is for visualisations



Programme your own personal 'happiness switch' by putting pressure on the fleshy part between your fore finger and thumb. As you do so, close your eyes and think of a happy memory or something that makes you laugh or smile. Take some deep breaths as you do this, and smile to yourself as you keep thinking about these happy memories. You have now programmed your happiness switch which you can use at any time you

need it, just simply apply pressure to the same area again and those thoughts will come flooding back.

W is for Walking



Walking every day is so good for us all. You can make your walk a mindful walk by taking in the details of what's going on around you. Stopping to notice a beautiful flower or a funny shaped cloud in the sky. Maybe you can

ask your children to pay attention to the noises they hear on their walk or maybe you could bring an old egg carton and fill it with nature treasure. Taking photographs of your walk is another way of incorporating mindfulness to everyday life. You could create a scrapbook with photos of these special times.

X is for express yourself



The theme for this year's Children's Mental Health Week was 'Express Yourself'. Expressing yourself is about finding ways to share your feelings, thoughts or ideas through activities that spark joy. This could be art, music, writing, dance, drama or simply anything that inspires your child and makes them feel good.

It is important to remember that being able to express yourself is not about being the best at something. It's about finding a way to show the world who you are and how you see the world – things that help you feel good about yourself, bring you joy and make you smile.

Together you can make a list of things that bring you joy for each family member – pop it somewhere that it can be seen every day.

Y is for Yoga

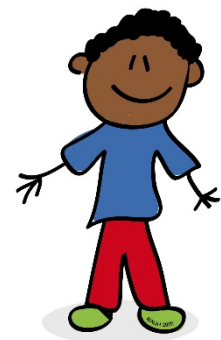
Yoga is a fantastic exercise for all the family. It encourages movement, and slow breathing and is a great tool to help children to self-regulate.

Below are some poses you can try with your children and a positive affirmation for them to repeat mentally (inside voice) whilst they focus on their breathing

Sunshine Pose – Child stand with arms and legs stretched wide – I am Happy

Mountain Pose – Feet together arms down by sides with palms facing out – I am Brave

Tree Pose – One foot placed at inside of other ankle hands joined together above head - I am Strong



Downward Dog – Bending over on tip toes with head hanging down and hands on the ground (Like a dog stretching!!) I am friendly

Butterfly pose – Sitting on the floor soles of feet touching each other held by hands and then start flapping knees up and down like a butterfly - I am kind

Child pose – Curl up into a ball head down on mat arms placed on the mat by sides - I am calm

Z is for Zen

The best thing any parent can do is allow there to be times of relaxation and quiet. Allowing your child to see you practice yoga, read a book or journal will teach them mindful habits that will serve them well as they grow. Family life is busy but making time for things to slow down is so beneficial to everyone. Good luck on your mindful mission!





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