



Teaching Kindness to Children

Six Mindful Reminders with Whitney Stewart

We're All in This World Together

You know when you're having a bad day and nothing seems to go right? You have that unsteady feeling inside that makes you scared, sad and mad all at the same time. We all have these days — adults and children alike — but we don't always know how to handle them. So, we act out of our confusion. We say a mean word or pick a fight. Or we shut down and feel bad. You may wonder how to find a better way to respond to such situations, and how you can teach children to do so as well. One way is through mindfulness.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness means paying attention, with kindness and patience, to what's going on inside and outside of you right NOW. With mindfulness, you notice the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations you are having in the present moment. You do this in many ways, often by paying attention to your breath, to the sights and sounds around you and to your movements. You also pay attention without becoming lost in judgements. This non-judging attitude can open a path for understanding yourself and for connecting to others with empathy and compassion.

Here are six mindful reminders for teaching kindness:

1 Point Out Kindness

Children learn kindness very quickly when they understand exactly what it is. Notice when they act kind to you, to their sibling or friends, even to an animal. Letting children know they've been kind will encourage them to act with kindness again.

2 Talk About Being Mean vs. Being Kind

Talk to children about how they feel when someone is mean to them, and how they feel when someone is kind. Let them express to you the differences they feel inside. Then talk about how other people might have similar feelings. Share your own feelings about being mean and kind.

3 Say a Kind Word

Everyone likes a kind word when it is genuine. Encourage children to notice and share compliments with others. Teach them that offering kind words does not come with an expectation for anything in return.

4 Be Grateful

Children easily understand gratitude. Ask them to keep a happy list too, and to share with you what makes them feel good about their life. When family comes together, ask each person to share what they feel grateful for. Remind children that even when things are tough, they have good things to remember.

5 Help Others, Together

When you help a friend or family member, invite the children in your life to help you. Ask them what kind act they could do. You might buy or pick flowers for a friend who is sick. Or, make a meal together for someone else and pack it up. Or clean up for a neighbor. Or draw a picture for someone who needs cheering.

6 Loving-Kindness Mindfulness Practice

Try a simple mindfulness practice with your children from the *Mindful Kids* card deck:

1 Sit mindfully, with your spine straight and body relaxed.

2 Hold your hand over your heart, and repeat to yourself: "May I be happy. May I be safe. May I be peaceful. May I be kind."

3 Now think of a friend or family member.
Repeat to yourself:
"May you be happy.
May you be safe.
May you be peaceful.
May you be kind."



4 Now imagine people you don't know yet.
Repeat to yourself:
"May you all be happy.
May you all be safe.
May you all be peaceful.
May you all be kind."

5 Continue your day knowing that everyone wants to be happy, just like you do.