



STRATFORD SCHOOL OF
MEDITATION

MEDITATING WITH KIDS



So how do we meditate with children?

The biggest question that I get asked is how do you meditate with children, and the main reason why this is asked is because people imagine that in order to meditate, we must sit on the floor in silence, cross legged, and most children cannot (or we assume cannot) do that.

And the first thing that I say to this is that when we talk about meditating in silence cross legged on the floor, that is down to our preconceptions.

That somewhere along the way we have decided (through what we have seen and been taught), that that is how we must meditate.

So the first place that we are going to start this week is to talk about what comes to mind when we say the words, meditate or meditation, because in 2022 it's really important to understand how the practice of meditation is evolving and changing.

Meditation at the core, is the practice of bringing one's awareness back into the present moment. By bringing your awareness to your breath, your body and the moment, you create an awareness, an awareness of yourself, your presence, your thoughts, but you are able to become an observer rather than be attached to everything.

Meditation can help you come back to a place of balance, of being centred and grounded, but meditation does NOT mean that you must sit in silence, cross your legs, OR turn your mind off.

Turning the mind off is another big misconception (and obstacle) that people have about meditation.

Let's clear something up here...

Meditation is not all about stopping your mind from thinking. This would be impossible! We humans have over 60,000 thoughts in a day, and it would be physically impossible to switch our mind off.

Meditation is about becoming a conscious observer of the thoughts that go through our mind, it is about

witnessing those thoughts, and allowing them to 'just be'.

It is about knowing that we are NOT our thoughts, we do not need to engage with all of them - we can let them come and go like bubbles.

Another misconception that we need to address at the beginning is that...

Meditation isn't about being Buddhist. Whilst certain religions rely heavily upon the teaching of meditation, meditation is not exclusively owned by any one particular school of thinking. You do not need to be a Buddhist in order to meditate!

So how DO we meditate with children then?

We are going to look at the how to, next week, but in its most basic forms, **we meditate with children in a way that allows them to connect to themselves, and connect to the present, but we do it in a person centred way.**

This means that we allow them to be at the centre of the process. We do not expect them to sit rigid and listen to an hour long guided meditation, rather we invite them to collaborate with us and we give them the tools that allow them to participate, and go off on their own meditation journey.

In order to keep children engaged we must make our meditations engaging, and spark imagination and joy.

Meditating with children allows us to be creative in how we achieve a meditative state, i.e create a state or a feeling, and can include modalities such as storytelling, singing, breath work, gentle movement, actions.

Very different to what you may have experienced in an adult based mediation session.

Creating the foundations and setting the scene - step one in kids' meditation.

The first thing to do is to let the child/ren know that you are about to engage in a really lovely and fun activity with them.

Set the scene - maybe get some scatter cushions or yoga mats out, close the blinds or curtains, a little like we would approach nap time when children are younger, we need to create the mood and atmosphere for kids' meditation.

Please note: Kids often resist this setting to begin with. Not all. Some will come in and relax willingly, but in certain age groups they may enter the setting and run around, roll around, throw cushions, your aim is to remain as calm and relaxed as possible.

Clearly invite the class to come and join you for a story. This is a phrase that kids will be familiar with and a story is a great way to think of a guided meditation.

As we work our way through the weeks of this course, we will cover techniques and exercises to use to teach kids meditation so below is purely an introduction.

Key Points For Teaching Kids Meditation

Set the scene

As discussed above, set the scene, create the mood, cushions, blankets, mats, maybe even little teddies with really young children.

Be clear about what is happening

Instruct clearly that you are going to do a short meditation, with really young children, you may want to begin by telling them that you are going to have a little time where you all relax together. Be clear that this is 'time out' 'chill time' 'time to relax' and that they need to come in and sit or lie down.

Start with a quick Q&A session

Kids love to know what they are doing and why, and to feel involved, so ask them if they know how to meditate (depending on the age group) (kids aged 8+) or ask them if they know how to relax. Listen to their answers and stories, and let them know that it feels lovely, calming, peaceful, and invite them to do it as a group.

Maybe start with some breath work

A great place to start is with some basic breathing exercises, that will bring everyone into the space, disconnect them from whatever it was that they had previously been doing and help them to calm themselves, and feel centred and grounded.

In an adult meditation session we call this process the induction, a ten minute stage of a class, workshop or session where we help people to slow down their breathing and come back into their breath and their body.

However, when it comes to teaching kids meditation, especially with little children, the whole exercise itself can take just ten minutes, so we want to be bringing them into that space and that moment, much quicker.

This week we are going to look at breathwork, and it will be the base for this week's self study homework, so you will find the breathing exercises towards the end of this handout, but also in a separate handout.

Use a prop

Kids love props and using a prop, such as a hand puppet will bring a story element to the meditation and give them something that helps with picturing things (visualisation).

For example, if using the *little green frog meditation* a green frog hand puppet captures their attention from the beginning.

Props can also be used to demonstrate instructions, things that you ask the kids to do during the meditation.

Here is an example: for big exhales, open the frog's mouth nice and wide and make a big exhale noise as you do so. Kids love to

mirror what the puppet is doing and it engages them in the meditation activity.

Use characters

Leading on from what we have just said about props, using characters, such as the little green frog, will enable you to create a story which we will come to shortly, and using a story, based around a character/prop helps demonstrate the actions that you will be asking the kids to engage in.

Example: the little green frog takes a big deep breath in and fills his belly (use your hand to expand the puppets belly), he then lets his breath out again with a big happy sigh.... (let the belly deflate using your hand and make a long happy sigh sound).

Use storytelling

Storytelling is used in adult meditation if you think about it. Guided meditation is a form of storytelling, particularly if we are doing a guided visualisation meditation.

Building the story of a character, how they are feeling, and how their feeling changes as they do the things such as breathing, really engages children as they identify with the character in a much easier way than they may do with you. It also helps them relate through empathy.

So there are some starting/foundational ideas on how to meditate with kids, very different to how we meditate with adults isn't it.

There are other things to use such as: music, gentle drumming, instruments, beanbags to place on the stomach to be aware of posture and breathing, we are going to cover these things as we

progress through the course but below is a basic kids meditation teachers box idea.

Basics to have in your kids meditation teachers box

- **Hand puppets**
- **Relaxing music**
- **Battery operated candles**
 - **Bean bags**
- **Small toy animals or teddies**
- **Light cotton colourful scarfs**
 - **Bubbles**

We also need to be aware of some of the basic things to teach children before beginning a meditation, things such as position, posture and breathing. These are important for comfort, guided breathwork, and free flowing energy.

3 important steps to take

Position

You can choose the position depending on the theme and intention of your session. Do you want your kids sitting or lying down? You may want to start the session with them sitting, and then progress to a lying down position, or you may do the entire session sitting.

Posture

You want your children sitting with a straight spine and the best way to do this is to sit cross legged. You can ask children to imagine a piece of coloured string that runs from the top of their head all the way down their spine, and they are a puppet

and someone is pulling the string at the top of their head,
making their spine nice and straight.

Breathing

We want nice big deep belly breaths, for children you may use metaphors to describe this, the most common one is to explain that their belly is like a big beautiful balloon and we are going to fill the balloon and then let it fall again.



**Okay, let's start with some gentle, short,
breathing exercises.**

This week we are going to practise a simple breathing exercise that we can use with children that will help them regulate their

breathing. If we can regulate the breathing then we can slow down the entire system and this leads to a feeling of calm and balance.

Ideally with children and young people, we want things to be short meditations and techniques that they can use, and get results from quickly.

They do not have the commitment that, say, an adult who has chosen to take up meditation may have. They need something that demonstrates visible results in order to be inspired to stick to it.

So, this week we are going to take a breath work meditation, and adapt it for the different age groups.

Breath work is great because it can be practised without the need for spoken meditation or listening to something, so kids of all ages can go off to a quiet spot and do this in the middle of their busy day.

Birthday Cake Breathwork Meditation.

Imagine that in front of you, there is a nice birthday cake. It can be whatever kind of cake you want it to be (when adapting this to use with kids you would maybe elicit a cake from them, as a group creates it, i.e chocolate, and it has sprinkles on it).

The cake has lots of lovely candles on it, and they need blowing out, but oh look, the cake looks delicious, I bet it tastes amazing, I wonder what it smells like?

Smell the cake (deep breath in through the nose)

And blow out the candles (bg exhale through the mouth. With lips pursed as you would if you were blowing out the candles).

You repeat this three times, and on the last breath you finally manage to blow out all of the candles.

This of course can be adapted to use with different age groups, with older kids you may not engage so much in creating the cake, just tell them to imagine a cake and let them go and do this on their own, with clear instruction from you of simply 'smell the cake'..... 'Blow out the candles'. You may also want to add in counting with older kids, smell the cake, 2,3,4,5,6,7 and blow out the candles, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11.

Breathing in the light

Another great little meditation technique that can be adapted to all age groups is the breathing in the light meditation.

Close your eyes, imagine a bright white light is all around, a white healing light, and breathe in the light...

Take a nice big deep breath in... breathe into your belly...

And fill it as much as you can with this bright healing light...

Breathing in and out...

Just keep breathing in that white light and allow is to relax every single muscle, and every single bone in your body...

You can do this whenever you want to, it will relax you and wash away any stress, or tension.

Note: Adapt this to your age group, younger kids may not understand the concept of the word healing so replace it perhaps with magic energy.

Brushing hair - morning routine

One of the most effective ways to teach kids of all ages fast and easy to do meditation and mindful techniques, is to turn an every day routine that they already have into a mood enhancing ritual.

By adding the technique onto something that they will do everyday anyway, it is easier to remember to do it, but also, to create a new daily habit. By doing it for 28 days in a row, the brain creates a new habit, and if done over an 8 week period, new neural pathways are created in the brain and the habit becomes a long term habit.

Brushing hair

As the child/ren brushes their hair, they can count each brush stroke, in nice slow counts, that mirror their breathing.

So, breathe in.... Brush....

Breathe out.... Brush

Then add on a number to count to for each in and out breath for example:

Breathe in for 4, brush, breathe out for 4, brush.

This helps a child to instantly balance themselves and regulate their emotions, and can be adapted in difficulty for each age group.

HOMework FOR THIS WEEK

Practise the breathing techniques and send in a short video recording of yourself practising a couple of them, please submit work to:

hello@stratfordschoolofmeditation.com