Mindfulness and Parenting

Parenting can bring waves of feelings. There are high and low emotional tides, and in between there is always movement. As caregivers navigate this complex moment in time, mindfulness can help adults to care for themselves and build protective factors.

“Mindfulness is the basic human ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us.”¹

Caregivers of children have significant responsibilities. They must meet children’s basic physical and emotional needs and teach children developmentally appropriate life skills.

In order to provide steadfast support for children, adults need to find ways to meet their own basic physical and emotional needs too. During this stay-at-home time, families may find that some previous sources of comfort and enjoyment are less available. It is possible that additional stressors are present in their place. It is important for adults to find alternative forms of relief and balance.

Whether they find themselves in choppy or in quiet waters, caregivers can benefit from taking a moment to reflect, calm down and check in with themselves. This may look different for everyone — deep breathing, guided meditation, prayer, thoughts of gratitude or a walk. The goal is to take a few seconds or minutes to stop doing and just be. This mindful moment can offer awareness of feelings in mind and/or body. An article in the journal Preventing Chronic Disease states that mindfulness can contribute to, “the treatment of difficult and chronic clinical problems (e.g., chronic pain, mood disorders, substance abuse)…as well as for stress in healthy populations.”² The article promotes the benefits of mindfulness activities for stress management and well-being.

Caregivers who take time to check in with themselves can develop an “intentional and nonjudgmental conscious awareness of the present moment.”² It is common social practice

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to check in with others to see how they are doing. When caregivers ask themselves questions such as, “How am I feeling?”, “What do I need?” or “What has been the best part of today?”, they may become more aware of where they are feeling strong and where they could use some reinforcements.

In an article by parent and physician Dr. Kelly Ross, she writes that her best advice to new caregivers is to, “take care of yourself.” Noting the intensive commitment of attending to children’s needs, the author points out the importance of caregivers being responsive of their own needs as well. Dr. Ross writes that self-care is, “something that is so hard to do at times and yet so vital.” Mindful practices of deep breathing, meditation or other approaches can help caregivers to relax and help them notice what self-care might be helpful for them.

Dr. Ross’s specific recommendations for self-care echo the Strengthening Families Protective Factors™ — Social and Emotional Competence of Children, Concrete Supports in Times of Need, Social Connections, Parental Resilience, and Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development. She notes that a caregiver, “who is well-rested, eats a healthy diet, gets plenty of exercise, maintains close relationships with friends and gets help when [they] realize [they are not] coping well, is far more equipped to be the best [parent they] can be than one who doesn’t do those things.” Taking time to check in with themselves allows caregivers to note how their body and mind feel and to consider how they might approach their needs and build on their strengths.

Mindfulness offers a pause for caregivers to care for themselves, considering their own needs, strengths, and desires. There are many ways to approach this practice, and children can do it too. Consider these resources.

**Monster Meditations from Sesame Street** build skills such as patience and uses the five senses to be aware of one’s environment, featuring Cookie Monster, Elmo, and others.

**The Benefits of Yoga,** from HealthyChildren.org, promotes the physical and mental benefits of unplugging and trying yoga breathing and moves.

**Mindfulness Practices for Families from Zero to Three** are designed for both caregivers and children. They include helpful techniques, such as balloon breath, pleasure gazing and even a craft idea or two.

Here are five mindful parenting tips from ZeroToThree:

- Listen to your child with your full attention.
- Accept your child (and yourself) without judgment.
- Imagine your child’s feelings and match your response.
- Manage your own feelings and reactions.
- Show compassion for yourself and your child.

**Sources**


**USING PENELOPE? NEED HELP?**

Penelope Q & A sessions are available upon request for all PAT Affiliate programs in Pennsylvania. Contact Alexia Brown for more information or to schedule a session.
Recently, Parents as Teachers National Center and Center for Schools and Communities (the umbrella under which PA-PAT works) responded to the injustice and inequity impacting our communities.

We See You.
We Hear You.
We Care About You.
Your Lives Matter.

The past weeks have again highlighted social injustices in our society. We stand in solidarity with our communities of color, vulnerable youth and marginalized populations. We mourn the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and countless others who have died unjustly because of systemic and institutionalized racism, implicit bias and prejudice.

We are not going to be silent. We recognize that some of us have years of experience and formal training in social justice education and community advocacy, and some of us have begun engaging in the work more recently and/or more informally. For all of us, antiracism and allyship are ongoing processes of learning, unlearning and working toward a practice of humbled solidarity.

To our Black and Brown colleagues, partners, educators, children and youth, families and communities: We stand with you in this fight for social justice and will continue to advocate and be a voice for equity, justice and hope in our organization, state and nation.

Inequities and Injustice Magnified in Uncertain Times

Our hearts are heavy.

As a nation, we have now surpassed 120,000 deaths from COVID-19 in just a matter of months. Infections and deaths from this novel virus have disproportionately affected Black, Native American and Latinx communities: communities from which we come, and among those we serve. And, now we have watched — horrified — as George Floyd, an unarmed Black man was killed before our eyes while in police custody, an incident that has been repeated far too many times across our country.

Our hearts are heavy.

Parents as Teachers is a child and family serving network collaborating with families across the country and around the globe to ensure all children develop, learn and grow to realize their full potential. We do this by supporting and engaging parents and caregivers. We do this by addressing the social determinants of health that negatively affect family well-being, like trauma and violence. We do this by providing access to community resources. We do this by advocating for our families and equippping and encouraging them to advocate for their own families and communities. We also do this by offering and connecting families to resources to deal with social isolation during a pandemic and by offering resources on how to deal with trauma, including how to talk with children about matters beyond our collective comprehension.

Our hearts are heavy.

These are difficult and uncertain times. The physical distancing and social isolation needed to stay healthy in a global pandemic is challenging our human need for connection, and our palpable indignation at the injustice built upon generations of systemic racism is calling us to act. We stand with the invisible and unheard who make inevitable noise until awakened change comes and we are ALL seen and treated as the valued individuals we are.

We will rise up and speak out against oppression, injustice and inequity in all of its manifestations, and model the way for others.
How to Prevent Heatstroke

Sometimes, babies are so peaceful and quiet in the backseat that we can forget they are even there. Although it might be tempting to leave a sleeping baby in the car so we don't have to wake them up while we quickly run into the store, leaving a child alone in a car can lead to serious injury or death from heatstroke, even in cooler temperatures.

On average, every ten days a child dies from heatstroke in a vehicle. In more than half of these deaths, the caregiver forgot the child was in the car. A car can heat up 19 degrees in just ten minutes and cracking a window will not help. Young children are particularly at risk, as their bodies can heat up three to five times faster than an adult's can.

Reduce the number of deaths from heatstroke by remembering to ACT.

Avoid heatstroke-related injury and death by never leaving a child alone in a car, not even for a minute. Make sure to keep your car locked when you’re not inside so kids don’t get in, unattended.

Create reminders. Keep a stuffed animal or other memento in your child's car seat when it is empty, and move it to the front seat as a visual reminder when your child is in the back seat. Or place and secure your phone, briefcase or purse in the backseat when traveling with your child.

Take action. If you see a child alone in a car, call 911.

From Safe Kids Worldwide

WANT TO SHARE YOUR STORY?

Please send your success stories or program news to share in future News Briefs to Kimberly Taylor Carmo or join us on Facebook at Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers or Pennsylvania Strengthening Families.