

# Social Emotional Learning & Mindfulness for Kids



Parents, teachers, and caregivers can use play to teach important social-emotional skills to kids. Playful activities that also teach social and emotional skills broaden a child's vocabulary for expressing emotion and communicating effectively with others. Social-emotional learning and mindfulness help children in every day life improve identification of problems and stressors, but also importantly recognize their own

emotional response to challenges. These skills lay the foundation for a successful personal and professional future by enabling ease with problem solving and coping with stress throughout life.

Learn more about these skill sets below. Try the suggested activities and create a personalized mindfulness tool kit for your child to practice social, emotional and behavioral skills at home or on the go!

## Social Skills

Helping your child learn social skills is important because it gives kids a greater sense of control and assists them in connecting with others. Connection is important throughout life and supports health into adulthood. Realize that developing social skills takes time and practice for children. Try to “catch” (identify) when your child demonstrates positive social skills and provide positive reinforcement for the witnessed behavior. Explain to them why that skill is important.

### Examples of Social Skills:

Sharing, Expressing feelings, Asking for help, Showing gratitude, Being flexible when things don't go their way, Making eye contact when talking, Respecting personal space, others, self, and things

### Try It – Gratitude Video

Gratitude: have your child think of people who are important in their life and encourage them to record a video, draw a picture, or write a note to describe what they like about that person or why they are grateful for them. Help your child to share this with the other person. When delivering this message, encourage your child to use their social skills such as eye contact, being positive, sharing with others, and being respectful of personal space.

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## Relaxation & Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the simple practice of bringing a gentle, accepting attitude to the present moment. With practice, mindfulness can promote a sense of relaxation that promotes happiness and self-control and relieves stress. Mindfulness also trains the brain to learn to take pauses when stressful triggers are faced. These pauses can then allow time for a thoughtful and healthy response in the face of adversity. Mindfulness, therefore, has been shown to reduce reactivity, hyperactivity, anxiety, and hostility, while improving behavior, attention, social skills, coping, and overall well-being.

### Examples of Activities:

Concentrating on the in and out breath (Example: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 4 counts, repeat), Playing music and picking out the unique sounds, Slowly tasting and then chewing a piece of dried fruit and identifying the textures, sensations, and flavors as they change, Going for a sensory walk and being aware of the many sights, scents, textures, and sounds

### Try It – Calm

Calm Corner: Create a calm corner using your mindfulness tool kit.

Breathing: Have your child lay on their back and place their favorite stuffed animal on their chest. Instruct them to watch their stuffed animal move as they breathe in/out.

Credit: Robin Ortiz, MD, Shannon Worthman, Lauren Genzone, Kaitlyn Tollefson, Michelle Tollefson MD

## Feelings

It is important for children to become more aware of their own feelings in order to develop empathy for others. Bodily awareness of an emotion (e.g. noticing heart rate, breathing, muscle tension, stomach sensations) assists them with identifying their own emotions and recognizing various emotions in others. Having words to describe feelings during intense emotions is an important component of social-emotional learning for children.

### Examples of Feelings:

Angry, Excited, Frustrated, Sad, Happy, Surprised, Worried, Confused

### Try It – Paper Plate Emotions Mask

**Masks:** Cut a paper plate in half. Write an emotion on the back side of the plate. Together, draw the nose and mouth of each emotion's face (smile, frown, confused).  
**Charades:** Take turns holding the mask up to the bottom half of your face and making your eyes and eyebrows match the emotion on the mask. Have the other person guess which emotion you are expressing.  
**Next level:** Ask the person to come up with a coping skill that could be used when feeling that emotion

## Behavioral Coping

When children learn that they can use different behaviors to cope with their emotions, it increases their sense of control. Most kids engage in some positive coping behaviors already but it's beneficial to help your child learn even more. Taking time to explain to a child the power they have to identify feelings and pick positive coping behaviors is a great way to support their social-emotional learning.

### Examples of Positive Coping Exercise:

Talk with a trusted grown-up or friend,  
Spend time alone – go to a calm down corner,  
Read a book, Do something creative like color,  
Stretch or do yoga, Use positive self-talk, Deep breathing

### Try It – Behavior Piggy Bank

Together, create fake coins or dollars out of construction paper or cardboard with different positive coping behaviors on each. Come up with a list of different prizes (i.e. fun family outing, new book). Every time your child utilizes a positive coping behavior, they can put that coin in their piggy bank (mason jar). Once they have filled up the piggy bank, or at the end of the week, they can choose one of the prizes from the list. You can also make each prize worth a different amount of coins, so your child can also save up their positive behavior coins and 'cash in' whenever they have saved up enough money.

## Designing a Calm Kit for Kids

### Mindfulness & Emotions

Discuss with your child that being mindful involves checking in with their feelings and with what is happening around them. Learning to be mindful is a powerful tool for your child to have and can help them deal with strong emotions.

Create or print out a sheet that has multiple drawings/ names of emotions on it. Practice with your child having them identify what emotion they are feeling. Examples are available online.

### Make a Calm Kit

Find a container such as a box or jar. Fill it with favorite household items your child finds comfort in. Have fun filling the calm kit with your child. Getting your child involved in collecting the items will make them more likely to use it. Get creative! Look to indoor and outdoor settings to find interesting items.

Thrift stores are often great places to find treasures for your kit. Have fun! Play! Experiment! Remember that your child's mindfulness practices and calm kit will change as they get older, so consider updating it from time to time with new items.

Below is a list of suggestions to help you get started with creating your child's first calm kit. Consider making a smaller, portable calm kit for use during long car rides or while running errands. Finally, create a calm and quiet space for your child to use the kit if possible. Consider making a smaller, portable calm kit to keep for long car rides or while running errands.

### Calm Kit Ideas

- Smell: Scented stickers / vanilla scented rice in a bag or jar
- Listen: Plastic eggs or spice jars filled with items such as rice, lentils, dry beans, and other objects
- See: Galaxy jar (plastic water bottle filled with corn syrup, water, a drop of dish soap, glitter, and other small objects)
- Feel: silly putty, fabrics with different textures, pillows, fidget toys
- Calming items: blanket, stuffed animal, pictures of favorite things/people, pillow
- Breath Focus: pinwheel, bubbles
- Creativity: crayons and paper, mandalas to color, a puzzle
- Movement: stretch bands, cards for different yoga/ stretch poses

**Safety: Small items should not be used by young children. No items should be put in or near the mouth. Do not put water beads down a drain.**

*This information is not to be used as medical or mental health advice. If you have a medical problem, are in pain, or feel very stressed, please talk to a trusted adult, counselor, doctor, or medical professional.*