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## Know! To Join the Meditation Movement

Even in the best of times, the teen years are full of ups and downs. Throw in a pandemic that impacts young people's academic, social and extracurricular lives and it takes those highs and lows to an entirely new level. Over the past year, more teens than usual have reported feeling overloaded with stress, which can and has led to anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, physical illness and poor coping skills, including the use of drugs and alcohol.

When we or our children are stressed, our bodies enter a fight or flight mode. Long ago, it was a survival mechanism, a matter of life or death. Most times nowadays, we are not in physical danger, but our bodies still respond as if we are. Our hearts beat faster, our breath quickens and our adrenaline spikes. Continuous cycles of stress and our body's response to it can be extremely hazardous to our health—and that of our students. So, what can we all do to take a step back, calm down and work through or prevent some of the discomfort that overwhelming stress brings?

One powerful way to combat stress and its negative effects is through meditation. Meditation is all about reducing the "chatter" in our brains, disconnecting and simply being in the present moment, without judgement. Meditation centers around breathing and anyone of any age can practice it, without the need for special equipment.

Regular meditation is known to not only decrease stress and help control anxiety, it:

- Promotes overall emotional well-being.
- Increases focus and attention span.
- Improves sleep.
- Enhances self-awareness.
- Creates kindness.
- Aids in treating addiction(s).
- Assists in managing pain.
- Decreases blood pressure.

With all these benefits and more, it's no wonder meditation has grown in popularity, even within schools.

Go ahead and give it a try, then encourage your child to do the same. It's not complicated, but it can be challenging. So, get comfortable, set a timer and get started with these basic meditation steps adapted from [Mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org):

1. **Take a seat or lie comfortably.** Find a place to sit or lie down that feels calm and quiet to you.
2. **Set a time limit.** If you're just beginning, it can help to choose a short amount of time; as little as two to three minutes or as much as 10 minutes.
3. **Notice your body.** You can sit in a chair with your feet on the floor or loosely cross-legged, you can kneel, you can lie down—all are fine. Just make sure you are stable and in a position you can stay in for a while. You may close your eyes.
4. **Feel and focus on your breath.** Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes in and as it goes out. Notice how your chest, shoulders, rib cage and belly move as you breathe. Make no effort to control your breath. Simply breathe naturally.
5. **Notice when your mind has wandered.** Inevitably, your attention will leave the breath and wander to other places. When you get around to noticing that your mind has wandered—in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes—simply return your attention to the breath.
6. **Be kind to your wandering mind.** Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of the thoughts you find yourself lost in. Just come back.
7. **Close with kindness.** If your eyes are closed, open them when you are ready and gently lift your gaze. Take a moment and notice any sounds in the environment. Notice how your body feels right now. Notice your thoughts and emotions.

That's it! That's the practice. You go away, you come back and you try to do it as kindly as possible.

Meditation is for anyone and everyone looking to establish or improve mental clarity and emotional calm within. Regular and ongoing practice can help our children and ourselves find serenity, achieve peak performance in various aspects of all our lives and tap into our best selves.

*If you or your child are struggling with stress and anxiety, you are encouraged to seek help. Do not hesitate to reach out to your family physician to guide you in the right direction.*

## Sources

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[Cleveland Clinic: How to Use Meditation for Teen Stress and Anxiety. Dec 2020.](#)

[Healthline.com: 12 Science-Based Benefits of Meditation.](#)

[Mindful.org: How to Meditate. Jan 2019.](#)

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