



The Joy Of This Moment ~ With Baby

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Becoming a mum is a huge leap ~ the best way to relax and enjoy that new phase of your life is to take time to just 'be'. Koa Whittingham provides ways in which you can really start enjoying the beautiful moments you can have with your baby.
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For thousands of years, people the world over have benefited from practising mindfulness – deliberately keeping your attention in the present moment, without judgment. In fact, mindfulness practices are a part of many religious and spiritual traditions. If you have ever attended a yoga class, or tried meditation, or found yourself peacefully absorbed in a physical activity like running or swimming, then you've already experienced moments of mindfulness in your life. Recently, science has confirmed that mindfulness has psychological benefits. Living mindfully can improve emotional stability and wellbeing, decrease stress and assist in recovery from depression and anxiety. Mindfulness enables you to let go of worrisome, self-critical thoughts and, instead, keep your attention on the moment by moment experience of your life. All of this makes mindfulness relevant to expecting and new parents.

Living mindfully – keeping your attention, without judgment, in this moment, with your baby – is a tremendously useful skill for a parent to have. After all, the here and now is where your baby is! With your own attention in the here and now you are more likely to notice your baby's cues, needs, feelings and patterns. This noticing is the first step towards getting to know your unique baby, responding to your baby's needs and developing a strong, loving relationship with her.

Living mindfully also has benefits for you during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Becoming a parent can be an emotional roller coaster, and along the way you will probably experience physical discomfort, sleep deprivation, a steep learning curve, and a lack of time for yourself. With mindfulness, this enormous personal adjustment becomes gradual and manageable – you don't need to become a confident, skilled and happy parent all at once, you just need to live through this one moment. Living mindfully is naturally joyful. When you are living mindfully, you are more likely to notice all the little rewards in life. Small, rewarding moments – a cup of tea while

'Not only does [mindfulness] give you greater opportunity to notice your baby's needs, feelings and cues, this also gives you greater opportunity to notice what is rewarding in that moment'

baby is sleeping, reading a magazine while giving baby a cuddle – get turned into nourishing 'me time'. Instead of getting caught up with worrisome or self-critical thoughts, you can let those thoughts go, keeping your attention instead on the present moment. Doing so will help you to remain open to discovering all that is wondrous about your baby and about your new life as a parent.

So how do you start living mindfully? It is actually very simple. Mindfulness is the skill of keeping your attention in the here and now. If you deliberately spend time practicing bringing your

attention back to focus on the present moment, without judgment, then you are practicing mindfulness. You can do this not only while performing yoga or sitting on a meditation cushion, but also while walking through the park, feeding your baby or even while having your morning shower. This is good news for new and expecting parents, because it means that you can have a rich mindfulness practice without finding extra time in your busy day.

No matter how you choose to practise mindfulness, the key is to notice when your awareness has wandered. Perhaps you've started dwelling on the past, or worrying about the future, or maybe you've simply started to write a shopping list in your head! When

you notice your attention has wandered from the present moment, then take a moment to bring

yourself back into the here and now. Notice the sights, sounds, sensations of the moment. What can you see? What can you hear? What do you feel in your body? If you are pregnant then tune in to your belly and notice what your baby is doing. Can you feel him moving? If you are a parent then notice your child. Look at him. Listen to him. What is he doing? Pay attention to your child as if you were noticing him for the very first time.

When you first start practicing mindfulness you'll probably be surprised at just how often your mind wanders. Don't be put off by this. The

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she is in the here and now. Not only does this give you greater opportunity to notice your baby's needs, feelings and cues, this also gives you greater opportunity to notice what is rewarding in that moment.

Want to practicing mindfulness, as a new parent, with your baby? You can try being mindful of you baby with the following exercise:

MINDFULNESS OF BABY

Get into a comfortable position with your baby.

Perhaps your baby is in your arms or maybe you are watching your baby in her cot or on a rug.

- Bring your attention to focus on your baby.
- Slowly cast your eyes over your baby, noticing the details of her body...
- Noticing her toes, her legs, her arms and hands, her little fingers...
- Noticing her face and the details of her features.
- Really pay attention to your baby, as if you are seeing her again for the very first time.
- If your baby is in your arms, notice the weight of your baby and the feeling of her against your skin.
- If your baby is in her cot or on a rug, you might like to gently touch your baby, noticing how it feels to connect to her with touch.
- You might like to smell your baby, noticing her unique baby smell.
- Notice your baby's breathing, the gentle rhythm of your baby's in and out breaths.
- You might like to gently place your hands on your baby's chest or back to really focus on the breathing.

You may find that thoughts arise—perhaps distracting thoughts about other things, or perhaps thoughts about your baby. Maybe you find that worried thoughts, or guilty thoughts or sad thoughts arise about your baby... If so, gently let these thoughts go and place your attention back to your baby as she is in this moment...

You may find that feelings of love arise, or you may not. Either way, this is fine. See if you can simply be with your baby as she is right now, without pressure on your baby or on yourself to be any particular way.

If your baby becomes unsettled or is fussy, it is okay to try to settle her. As you are settling her, try to stay aware of your baby, try to be genuinely open to her fussiness, try to really notice what she is like when she is fussing.

When you are ready to end the exercise, do so gently, bringing your increased awareness of your baby with you into your everyday life...

As you continue practising mindfulness, you will find it easier to maintain your awareness in the here and now, and you will begin to truly enjoy all that this present moment, with baby, has to offer.

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Amy Giannakis
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a daily activity, such as having a shower, washing the dishes or feeding your baby, and resolve to perform that activity, once a day with mindfulness. Even short practice sessions, for as little as 5 minutes a day, may be beneficial.

As your ability to be mindful grows, you can also practise being mindful moment by moment in your life. With greater awareness of your own awareness, you can start to notice when you get caught up with your own thoughts, imaginings and judgments and choose to instead keep your focus on the present moment. For example, if your baby is taking a long time to fall asleep, it is natural for anxious thoughts to begin to surface ('Why won't my baby fall asleep? Other babies self-soothe... What's wrong with her? What's wrong with me? Have I done something to cause this?'). With mindfulness, you can notice these thoughts without getting caught up in them. Instead, you can choose to notice the present moment for what it is and to gently bring your attention back to your baby as



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purpose of mindfulness practice isn't to stop your mind from wandering; rather, it is to notice when your mind wanders and to gently bring your attention back to the here and now. You might need to do this many times.

Also, remember that a key aspect of mindfulness is that it is nonjudgmental. Living mindfully means noticing the here and now of your life in a manner that's open, gentle and kind. So when you notice the sights, sounds and sensations of the moment, try to hold them gently. If anxious or self-critical thoughts arise, then try to hold these thoughts gently too while bringing your attention back to the here and now.

Although mindfulness is a very simple activity, it is a skill that can be difficult to maintain. So, just like other skills such as riding a bike or baking a cake, getting better at mindfulness takes practise. If you think that learning to live with greater mindfulness may be beneficial to you, then try to commit to practicing mindfulness regularly. Choose



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