

Shaping Contact with the Present Moment for Parents and Children

When teaching present moment awareness, or mindfulness skills, it's important to assess what your client is capable of doing. Mindfulness can be broken down in different components, for example, observing, describing, acting with awareness, and allowing without judgment. However, mindfulness can also be conceptualized in terms of an increasingly sophisticated sequence of skills that can be strengthened through practice. Thus, shaping can be a useful way of fostering mindfulness in parents or children unaccustomed to its use. Here's an example of how you might break down mindfulness practice into smaller steps.

Conduct present moment awareness exercises focused on

- The parent or child's external physical sensations (externally – sound, light, texture, breeze, smell; e.g., noticing taste while eating chocolate or mint; noticing the smallest sound in the room)
- How the parent or child's internal physical sensations (internally – breath, muscle tension/relaxation, noticing different parts)
- What the parent or child's mind is saying/what pictures he/she is seeing (e.g., notice thoughts and picture come and go, notice them stay or change)
- A pleasant memory (note that memories show up and are part of the parent or child's "present" experience)
- A sad or uncomfortable memory (E.g., can use physicalizing here – in other words, asking the parent or child to describe the emotion they experience in terms of color, shape, size, texture)
- Helping notice when one gets hooked by or fused with "sticky" thoughts
- Helping notice changes in one's body when they get "hooked" by or fused with a thought
- Helping a parent or child gently bringing herself back once she/he notices being "hooked"
- Practicing this in the world (outside the therapy setting) with pleasant events...
- And then practicing present-moment-awareness with unpleasant events