

CORNERSTONE
DAY SCHOOL

Parents Matter

FEBRUARY 2019



Mindfulness and Parenting

Have you ever arrived home from a long day at work, pulled your car into the driveway and thought, “How did I get home?” Were you so lost in thought that you didn’t notice the drive, the sights along the way or that you sat in traffic? If you’re like most people you’re answer to these questions is yes. Everyday activities, responsibilities and multi-tasking can distract us and interfere with our ability to remain present and in the moment. These thoughts can add to our level of stress and may increase our tendency to react to a situation in an impulsive, judgmental manner.

Mindfulness, a practice that is central to Buddhist philosophy, has to do with the quality of awareness a person brings to everyday living. It is mindfulness that helps us pay attention to being present in the moment. As referenced in LeftBrain-Buddah.com, it is a technique “that shifts your thoughts away from your usual preoccupations toward an appreciation of the moment and a larger perspective.” The five senses are essential to the process, as individuals are encouraged to observe and describe what they see, feel, hear, smell and taste in the moment, on purpose, and without judgment.

Mindfulness has been used effectively to address mental health issues such as depression, eating disorders and anxiety. Karen Pace, author of *Can mindfulness practices strengthen your parenting skills?* states, practicing mindfulness on a daily basis improves the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship. As parents there are many times our children challenge us as they ride the roller coaster of adolescence. Inherent to adolescence are rapid changes in emotions, cognition and physical and social growth. Parents, according to Pace, tend to react to their child’s behaviors in a reactive, judgmental, stressful manner. Practicing mindfulness before reacting to your child allows you to take a step back, consider your child’s perspective and actions. This planned response is non-reactive and leaves you better equipped to address the issue at hand. The long term effect of parenting mindfully, according to Pace, is that children learn to better navigate their own emotions and develop their own mental health and well-being.

The following ideas are suggested by behavioraltech.org and leftbrainbuddha.com to help you incorporate mindfulness into your daily lives:

- Set your phone alarm to remind you to stop and notice what is going on around you, and inside you, one or more times each day.

- Set some time at the end of your workday to take a moment to breathe mindfully before shifting into “parent mode”. You can take a few deep breaths before entering the house, noticing the sensations associated with breathing.
- Set your wake screen on your phone or computer to an image that prompts you to pause before using the device. You might want to consider a scene from your favorite vacation spot.
- Take time (at least three times a day) to take three deep breaths; notice where you feel the breath (e.g. your belly, chest, mouth, and nose), breathe in 5 seconds and out 7.
- Practice mindful eating and drinking; slow down and savor the sight, taste, smell, and texture of the food.

In addition you could access the free app *Calm* to guide you through the skills of meditation and mindfulness.

Practice mindfulness daily, it only takes a few minutes. The more you use mindfulness, the more readily and easily available it is to you. You can draw upon it for stress reduction, improving overall happiness and improving your parenting skills, helping you through those challenging adolescent years.

Resources:

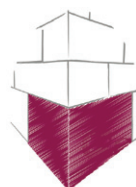
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Parents Matter is published regularly throughout the school year as a service to the parents of students enrolled at Cornerstone Day School. Each issue highlights an important topic for parents with practical suggestions for helping their child continue to grow and overcome their emotional challenges.