



The Mindful SEAT

S is for Senses and Sensations Begin by checking in with your senses, starting with sounds. What sounds do you hear near and far? Faraway sounds, closer sounds, the sound of your breath, even sounds from inside your body, like your heartbeat. Now, as you breathe you might notice smells in the air- food, fresh air, noticing smells that are pleasant as well as those that are unpleasant. On your tongue you might discover lingering tastes or perhaps just a taste of the air. Whether your eyes are open or closed, just notice what is in your field of vision as shapes, shadows and colors, as well as the spaces in between these. Lastly bring your attention to sensations up starting at the edges of your body. Notice your back and legs resting on the seat behind and beneath you, the temperature of the air against your skin as well as the texture of clothing. If you feel comfortable, you might begin to explore sensations deeper in your body, but just tuning into sensations ground us in the present, and brings us into the ventral vagal window.

E is for Emotions Now turn your awareness away from just senses, and notice how emotions begin to arise and pass, perhaps even originated in sensations. What emotions are present in this very moment? Joy or sorrow? Anxiety or relief? Rage or peace? Boredom or curiosity, or anything else, just notice these

emotions like visitors from beyond, name them, and watch as they arise and pass in both your body and your mind.

A is for Actions With an awareness of your senses and emotions now, are there any urges or impulses to action that you notice? Do you want to stretch your body? Eat? Punch something? Do something harmful or something productive? Just notice these urges in your body and mind, and watch them pass if you can.

T is for Thoughts Lastly, what thoughts are present right now? Any judgments about yourself or the world? Or maybe if you do notice your mind wandering, you might just nudge it back to the present.

Try the mindful SEAT at different points in your day, both the easier and more difficult ones, and get to know your own mind, body and triggers that much better. You might even write these out about a past event and get some perspective. Once we've identified these sensations as sensations, emotions as emotions, thoughts and actions as just those, we empower ourselves to some perspective and make a healthy choices. It might look like this

Sense/Sensation: *I can see my boss is coming over to talk to me, I feel my heart pounding.* **Emotion:** *I'm scared!* **Action:** *I want to hide and run out of the room.*

Thought: *There must be something wrong with me... Or is there?*

Once we've identified these sensations as sensations, emotions as emotions, thoughts and actions as just those, we can empower ourselves to get some perspective and make a different choice. like a healthy body choice like exercise, a self-compassion practice, a relational choice like reaching out to a friend, or another skill to relax and regulate your mind and body back to safety and thriving. When we slow down, we can watch our emotional responses arise first in the body, almost in real time, and then choose a new response to what we encounter.

The CALM Reminder

A number of years ago I heard a great acronym from a colleague that we can use for a mini body scan or relaxation practice, when we are feeling flooded with strong emotions, anxiety, anger, or anything else setting off our limbic alarm system.

The practice is as simple as the acronym. “The CALM Reminder” helps us check into and then relax four big zones of our body (C-Chest, A-Arms, L-Legs, M-Mouth). Those four zones offer great information about our emotional state. What’s more, when we relax our body zone by zone, it becomes physiologically almost impossible to also be stressed, anxious, angry, or otherwise overwhelmed by difficult emotions.

A Body Scan Practice: The Calm Reminder

This practice can expand or contract depending on the amount of time and attention you have—from just a few minutes, up to ten or fifteen. Start by finding a comfortable position to stand, sit or lie down. Allow your eyes to close if you feel comfortable. Begin with a few expanded breaths, allowing your body to relax as you extend the out-breath.

C-Chest

After a few breaths, bring your awareness to your **chest** and **torso** area. First scan your chest, opening and lifting it, creating enough room for your lungs and belly to fully expand. Bring your awareness to any sensations there.

Is your breath shallow and short, or slow and even? As you regulate your breath, you regulate your body and brain, and in turn your emotions, impulses, and attention. Is your heart beating fast or slow? Is there any tightness or tension in your chest?

Allow your breath to expand your chest, releasing any tension there. Lastly, tense all the muscles throughout your chest and torso, hold for a count of three as you notice what tension feels like, then allow your muscles to relax and feel the tension flow away and relaxation flow in with the next few breaths

A-Arms

Shift your awareness now into your arms, from your shoulders down to your fingers. Lift and drop your shoulders once and let your arms fall to your sides or into your lap. Now scan your awareness upward from your hands through the forearms and upper arms.

Are they shaking or still? Can you just allow them to settle if they are shaking? Are they tensed partly into fists? If so, just release that tension. Are your hands sweaty or clammy?

Scan up your arms to your shoulders, continuing to notice any other sensations that might give you a clue as to your emotional state.

Lastly, squeeze your fists, tense your arms all the way up to your shoulders and hold for three breaths, feeling the tension, and then just release the physical and emotional tension, and let your arms relax completely. Take three more breaths, enjoying the relaxation you feel in your arms.

L-Legs

On the next breath, direct your attention down to your **legs**, from your hips down through your toes, allowing your attention and breath to flow through your thighs, calves, and feet. Often our legs can be shaking with anxiety, or hold tension and stress. Notice if your legs are communicating anything in this moment, and just allow them to become still if they are.

Then, gently begin to squeeze the muscles in your feet, up through your legs and around your waist, holding that tension for three breaths, noting the sensations, and then release. Take three more breaths as you feel the tension flowing out of your legs.

M-Mouth

Lastly, shift your awareness to your **mouth** and jaw, a place where many of us hold tension and clench our muscles without realizing it.

What expression is your mouth communicating inwardly and outwardly- stress, anxiety, anger? Notice this and any other sensations in your mouth and even

the rest of your head and neck. Now clench your mouth and other muscles around it, holding for three breaths and release.

As you let go of the tension, allow your mouth to relax into a small smile to yourself and to the world around you. Take a few more moments to enjoy the sensations of relaxation and smiling.

As you come to the end of your practice, you might take time to reflect on where in your body you tend to hold emotions and tension, and adjust or breathe into those areas before finishing your practice. Remember too that at any point in your busy day you might choose to check in with your body and relax yourself. Perhaps before or during tense moments at work, after you read the news, with a partner or your family, or even before bed, you can CALM yourself down with this simple acronym.

3 R's Practice

The Three R's: An Introduction to Mindfulness

One of the best introductions and explanations of mindfulness comes from my colleague Brian Callahan called "The Three R's" of mindfulness. This practice also teaches us how to can bring mindfulness to everything in our lives. The three R's are Rest, Recognize and Repeat, and in this practice we can also see how mindfulness impacts our brains.

Rest

You can begin by finding a place to rest your awareness. I prefer to use the word rest, as this doesn't have to be a huge effort. Think of an anchor, which effortlessly holds a boat in place as it drifts, but not too far. Perhaps on your breath, perhaps on sounds or other senses around you, or perhaps on an image, in front of you or a mental image.

Recognize

Soon enough, your mind will wander off, no matter how interesting the anchor, or how exciting or boring, your breath might be. In that moment, just simply recognize the fact that your mind is wandering. In fact, *this* is the moment of mindfulness, not the fact that your mind has wandered, but that you recognized it. When you recognize *where* the mind has wandered, that's a moment of insight, getting to know your mind's habits. The more you practice, the more you see what your mind (and body) do in different situations.

Each time you name where the mind has gone, you practice "naming it to tame it" and quiet the limbic response, directing blood to the outer cortices and out of the amygdala and alarm system and strengthening those brain regions associated with self regulation.

So that the reality is not that mindfulness is keeping your mind perfectly still or thought-free but in fact every time your mind wanders, even if it wanders 1000 times, its just 1000 opportunities to practice mindfulness and gain yet another insight into your own experience to respond more skillfully.

Return

Once you've noticed where and when your mind has wandered, gently guide your awareness back to your anchor. As you do this, you are "working out" and building capacity and connection in the prefrontal cortex where you regulate your attention.

But each time we direct our wandering awareness back with kindness and compassion, like a child or puppy who has wandered off, we practice building the muscle of self compassion. If we can forgive ourselves for a little mind wandering in a moment of meditation when the stakes are low, we can practice forgiving ourselves and being kind in more challenging circumstances as well. The muscle of Self-compassion continues to grow.

Repeat

Guess what, your mind is going to keep wandering, so we just start fresh again in the cycle, constantly reborn in the present moment with another opportunity to practice.

The Three R's is something we can practice both formally and informally. Formally essentially means as a meditation, or like a workout for your brain. Take ten or thirty or however many minutes to rest your awareness on some kind of anchor-breathing, sounds, sensations or whatever, and recognize when your mind wanders and return. But we can also informally in daily life practice the three R's as well, to walking, to eating, to working, to conversations, and in that way bring awareness and compassion to anything that we do.

5 Mindful Walking ideas for Kids and Teens

I never learned mindful walking as a kid nor did I ever even hear about it until my first Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course in my early 20's. Shortly after that, my practice of mindful walking deepened when I went on my first retreat with hundreds of participants in the rolling hills of southern Vermont, and a morning mindful walk was part of the ritual. From that simple practice of mindful walking, a mindful awareness began to permeate so many other daily activities and my life and outlook began to fundamentally change.

But a few childhood memories stand out from before I ever learned “mindful walking,” and these still resonate in my teaching kids and teens today. One of my favorite memories is the sweet Audobon Society camp where I spent a number of summers growing up. One particularly vivid memory stands out to me: a group of eight-years-olds walking in the woods, following our counselors’ instructions to make no sound and leave no trace. In that way, we would walk softly on the earth, not frighten away the animals and be able see more on our journey. Or, as an adult, I look back and wonder, maybe the counselors were just trying to get us to quiet down.

It was years later doing the silent walking on the Vermont retreat that I reflected back in those childhood memories of walking silently in the woods. It takes so much intentional focus, concentration, body awareness and deliberate intention, or, well mindfulness, to walk as silently as possible, especially over crunchy leaves and sticks in the forest. I share this story often when I teach ways to playfully engage kids, schools, counselors, families and even camps in ways to integrate more mindfulness.

With this inspiration in mind I want to share **six** different ways we can bring more mindfulness into walking to kids and teens.

a. Silent Walking

Like my own experience as a kid, the basic instruction here is simply *to walk as silently as possible*. Maybe even add in the suggestion of leaving no trace behind that someone could follow our footsteps and track us. When we deliberately walk as silently as possible, whether it's over a carpet, creaky floor boards, or crunchy leaves on the forest floor, we are marshalling all of our attention to the act of walking, aware of the sounds and sensations in our muscles and at the soles of our feet. What's more, making something playful is one of the best ways to teach,

and certainly one of the most fun ways to learn. So find a reason to be a spy or scout, a Ninja, a tracker, or someone else who has to move in absolute silence, leaving no trail behind them, and watch how attention and awareness shift right into the present.

b. Silly Walking

I believe that Jan Chozen Bays is the first one who was inspired by the old Monty Python, *Ministry of Silly Walks*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCLp7zodUii> sketch to consider it a potential mindfulness practice. Think about it, after you've watched the sketch, of course. The more ridiculous your walk is, the more you have to focus on it to not fall over, and the more your self-consciousness and ego fall away the more you give yourself over to this totally goofy practice.

Kids can enjoy the video as inspiration, and often rather than going right into full on silliness, I'll suggest walking at first like yourself, then turning up the silliness to level one, then five, all the way up to ten, and then easing back down again.

This approach helps the more self-conscious among the kids (and us) ease into the activity, and practice transitioning between different mind and body states, often a challenge for kids and teens alike. Exploring the contrasts between silliness and seriousness helps kids strengthen our skills of self-regulation, body awareness and control.

c. Walk as If

It's not just walking in silence or silliness that can inspire greater awareness. As a teen and tween, theater games like walking as different characters or with different emotions brought me and my fellow theater nerds right into the moment with new awareness. Or, as one drama teacher at workshop I was leaded reminded me, what you learn in performance is *presence*, and that's pretty close to mindfulness. What's more, walking like other people or with other people inspire more empathy and compassion. You can call out the different characters below, or write these and more on popsicle sticks or cards and have kids pick them out and switch every so often.

A few suggestions:

- Walk like a sugar addled five year old for a minute... then
- Walk like a heartbroken teenager...
- Walk like you just won the lottery...
- Walk like your team just lost a big game...
- Walk like you are heading to see an old friend...
- Walk like you are in a big hurry...
- Walk like you are going into a math test you haven't studied for...
- Walk, as Thich Nhat Hanh suggests, "as if your feet are kissing the earth..."
- Walk like yourself...

I always love adding "walk like yourself" into this practice, because it again helps boost awareness of our body in different emotional states, including what our usual emotional state is on any given day. What's more, when we discuss what thoughts and feelings come up, kids often talk about noticing when they walked like they were sad they didn't see as much, or when they were in a hurry, they cared less about other people. These can be powerful insights and lead us to...

d. Appreciative Walking

Positive psychology helps us to remember to notice what's going well in the world, appreciate the beauty or "take in the good" as Rick Hanson likes to say. This simple practice just encourages us not to move in any particular way, but to notice the beauty in the world around us. We can try to notice the life growing in the midst of the city, or the beauty or changes in what we see on a daily walk.

e. Balancing Acts

Walking is fundamentally about listening to and balancing our bodies. Watch a baby learn to walk, and you can see how much deliberate attention goes to just standing up without toppling over. After we are a little older, balance is not such an issue, but we can add a balance challenge, and with it add more awareness. Think about just making a little competition or having fun with practices like:

- Walk a tightrope, or simply imagining that you are

- Imagine walking over thin ice
- Balance an egg on a spoon and walk
- Try to balance something on your head as you walk
- Walk with coins or action figures balanced on the toes of your shoes

Sounds countdown:

- Allow your eyes to close if it feels comfortable
- Now stretch your ears to hear the farthest away sound possible, using your superhero listening abilities, perhaps outside of the building
- And now coming a bit closer, sounds closer to the building, nearby the building, or inside the building at a distance... (footsteps, voices, other sounds)
- Closer still, you might bring awareness to sounds inside the room... (the fan, computer, other sounds)
- Now noticing sounds close by, (your neighbors breath or rustling clothing or creaking chair, or even your own)
- Now noticing sounds inside your body (heartbeat, breath, pulse, stomach growling)
- Can you notice the sounds of your own thoughts?
- Listening back outwards again, perhaps noticing sounds from the left....
- From the right, near and far...
- In front...
- Behind you...
- From above...
- From below...
- Sounds inside of sounds...
- Spaces between sounds...

- And even try covering one ear and the other, cupping your ears both forward and backwards...

Visualizations

Some imagery and metaphors:

Below is a brief list of metaphors I have compiled from other therapists and meditation teachers. You can try envisioning thoughts as:

- being carried gently downstream on leaves, some moving fast, some stuck swirling in place
- items being carried past on a conveyor belt
- words or pictures marked on parade floats, or signs carried by marchers in a parade
- autumn leaves falling from trees and landing softly on an empty, accepting blanket of consciousness
- being highlighted, one by one, as a karaoke video highlights lyrics
- bubbles floating past in the air
- clouds forming and unforming, passing by against the blue sky
- scenery passing by the windows of a train
- animals, such as happy and sad fish swimming through the water in an aquarium, or angry and peaceful birds flying by
- traffic seen from high above; some thoughts may be big buses that cannot stop, others may be motorcycles zipping from lane to lane, and still others may be stuck on the side of the road
- scenes and characters in a movie
- leaves blowing across your path
- raindrops hitting a windshield before being wiped away
- specks of dust floating in a ray of sunlight

Metaphors for remaining present and aware in the face of challenges

- You are watching the cars of a roller coaster or carnival ride go by, with ups and downs, twists and turns, but you're not climbing on board
- You are throwing a stone into pond and watching the ripples it makes, but not getting bounced around them
- You are a bee flitting from flower to flower, and you return back to the hive with sweet new insights from the world

Counting to 10 Breaths for Kids:

1. 🦄 Unicorn Breaths

Number one breath is for the unicorn,
Roll back your wings and extend your horn.

2. 🧑🧑 Double Breathing

I breath in as you breathe out,
Count to two as we breathe about!

3. Three Wishes Breath

Three wish each breath, the genie says to you,
Breathe a wish for you, for me, and the whole world too!

4. 🐱 Legged Friend Breath

Breathe in like a kitty with your soft fur,
A long exhale with a relaxing purr.

5. 🖐️ Five Finger Breath

Trace five fingers nice and slow,
Up and in, out and down as you go!

6. 🛑 Stop Sign Breath

Six is Stop sign breath when you've got too much speed,
Stop, Take a Breath, Observe and Proceed!

7. 🌊 Seven Seas Breath

Breathing like the waves of the seven seas,
Your breath out fills the sail with a cool ocean breeze.

8. Figure Eight Breaths

Imagine your breath now twirling on skates,
Breathe in and breathe out for lazy eights,

9. ☁ Cloud Breath

Breathe in floating up all the way to cloud nine,
Breathe out relax, goodnight sunshine!

10. 🐑 Counting Sheep

Into your bed count ten fluffy sheep,
A soft breath in, and baa for a breath out as you float off to sleep.