

The Mindful Child, How to Help Your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder, and More Compassionate

Susan Kaiser Greenland, 2010

Maria's Book Notes:

Overview

In the early 2000's, Susan Kaiser Greenland gave up her career as a lawyer to teach mindfulness to children in an after school program at the Santa Monica Boy's and Girl's Club. In developing her own lessons, Kaiser Greenland built upon Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based stress reduction program (MBSR) for adults. The general concept being that one can reduce stress and see situations more clearly by waiting until they are ready before reacting emotionally or even analyzing an experience. This produces more calm, thoughtful responses. She is the founder of a program affiliated with the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA and is a nationally recognized teacher of mindful awareness.

For people who have a background in mindfulness, this book reinforces the importance of the practice through evidence-based theory and incorporates the science to back it up. For those unfamiliar with mindfulness, it serves as a well-written introduction and guide to the benefits and practical techniques for using mindfulness with kids. Although parts of it are geared toward helping parents develop their own mindfulness practice and incorporate this into their children's lives, much of the book reads more like a manual for teaching mindfulness to a class.

The main message is that children of all ages can regulate the, "new ABC's" (Attention, Balance, and Compassion) through a mindfulness practice of breath awareness. The process is most effective when it's presented in a fun way and can support kids in navigating challenging life-situations. Mindfulness helps young people change a negative conceptual framework and react more positively with a reflective, calm quality (the first step is recognizing your conceptual framework). This is reminiscent of the Mindset philosophy in which one strives to shift from a fixed, set-in-stone mindset to a growth mindset. Mindfulness develops a world view that teaches the interconnectedness of all things and allows kids to see how their words and actions impact others. It invokes a sense of kindness, compassion and gratitude for those around them.

Highlights (teachings, activities and quotes)

- ❖ Don't force, allow. Reflecting deeply may be difficult for some kids because of depression, anxiety and self-consciousness. It can bring up strong or painful emotions and should be presented in a calm and playful way that plants the seeds. Let kids take their practice where they feel comfortable (25).
- ❖ The four insights (28-36 from ancient teachings that all aspects of life somehow fit within the framework of four basic truths and provide guidelines for teaching mindfulness to children). 1) Life Has Its Ups and Downs-acknowledging that all kids suffer from stressful situations and that mindfulness can help them put those into perspective by better understanding what's going on in their inner and outer worlds. 2) Delusion Makes Life Harder Than It Needs To Be- Parent's process of recognizing that there are problems their kids face (real or perceived). Seeing them clearly and discovering the cause can be healing and stress-relieving. Seeing experiences clearly

and without blame, bias or reactivity brings peace of mind to stressed-out kids. 3) Happiness Is in Reach-it just takes a shift in perspective. We can choose to be happy in the midst of our struggles. Sometimes parents are too attached to ideas about what's best for their kids and this clouds their ability to see their kid's strengths and honor who they truly are. 4) The Key to Happiness-beware of *desire*, *aversion* (of bad stuff), and *indifference* (ignoring neutral experiences) because reacting rather than responding thoughtfully can lead to jumping to conclusions and failing to see the big picture with compassion.

- ❖ Sending friendly wishes. Cultivating good will and thinking of others. "In your mind, send a friendly wish to yourself, then to someone in the room, then a family member or friend who's not present and may need support right now, then to someone you are having a difficult time with or who annoys you, then to someone you don't know or haven't met yet, then to your entire community and then the people of the world."
- ❖ The Three Gates. Teaching mindful speech. "Ask yourself these three questions before you say something: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?" (of course, there are times when spontaneity is ok too). Holding off before immediately reacting emotionally is an important life skill and allows children to do the right thing.
- ❖ Sound awareness practice. "Listen to the sound of a tone as it fades into the distance. When you no longer hear the sound, raise your hand." This is a great way to begin a mindfulness practice because it creates a calm, unified and focused environment.
- ❖ Eating a Raisin. Classic mindful-eating practice, introduced by Jack Kornfield and made famous by Jon Kabat-Zinn. "Start by looking at, feeling and pondering the raisin's life-cycle including the people who planted, harvested and processed it and it's journey to your hand. Shake it in your hands and listen to the sound it makes as it bounces around. Smell the raisin (are you salivating?). Put it in your mouth, but don't bite into it yet. Feel the texture with your tongue, suck on it and then bite into it. Throughout this practice check in with your mind and body and notice your reactions." This practice let's kids be in the present moment by solely paying attention and focussing on the act of eating without distractions.
- ❖ Thank-you notes, Secret Santa and Community Action are all mindfulness activities mentioned in this book and practiced at the Sage School and provide first-hand lessons in compassion, gratitude, happiness and well-being of others that no textbook or lecture could ever approach.

The big take away for me as a parent and teacher is that we must put forth the conscious effort to develop attention, kindness, compassion and self-knowledge in ourselves before we can encourage the young people in our lives to do the same. This comes from our own mindful awareness practice.

Susan Kaiser Greenland offers this simple meditation technique:

*"Keep your mind on the feeling of your breath as it moves from the tip of your nostrils into your chest and back out again. If your mind wanders, which it usually does, that's okay. When you see that it's wandered, bring it back to the feeling of the movement of your breath. Breathe in, breathe out. Let everything else drop away for the length of one breath and feel what it's like to be alive right now, in the present moment."*