

## Summer Mindfulness

Ahhhh, summer. So many wonderful things that we look forward to all year. The kids are out of school and there's more time for the unstructured and fun.

But sometimes a house full of people with unstructured time can also mean more noise and stress. When we start feeling stressed, there's a quick, simple mindfulness practice that may help. This is a mental exercise to decrease the reactivity we have throughout the day. This one can even be humorous, if you'd like.

What we're going to do is label things with neutral statements. This is something that you can go ahead and practice now, while you are hopefully feeling calm. The more you practice, the more you will be able to bring this in when you are reactive, in an effective way. So right now, I want you to look around the room, or other place that you are in, and describe things in the most neutral way possible. Neutral meaning there is no emotional content. So, for example, "the couch is green", "the lamp is on", "the window is open", etc. If you notice any emotional reaction- like "who the heck left the lamp on or the window open"- don't engage with it, just go on to another object and try to make more statement that feel neutral.

Sometimes it is helpful to go even more general when what you are noticing starts to bother you- so instead of noticing objects in the room you would state- "I am in a room". "The room has 4 walls", "the room has a ceiling". "The room has a floor". "You could go all the way out to I am on planet earth". "I am in the milky way". So long as what you are saying is true and you don't have an emotional reaction, you are calming your nervous system. You are activating part of the frontal lobe in a way that takes energy away from the reactive part of the brain and you don't have room for reactive thoughts when you are making these neutral statements. So try this for a few moments now.

This can be a great exercise to use when you notice yourself getting reactive to circumstances. Let's say your kids are arguing and it's causing you to feel stress. You can make neutral statements about them such as "She has brown hair". "He is wearing black shoes". This is where it can make it even better by making it a bit absurd- "there are sounds coming from the hole in his face", "that one is breathing in and out". Sure these sound a bit ridiculous but if it can make you laugh, it can be even more helpful in decreasing that reactivity. Even if, at some point, you have to jump in and do something about the argument, taking a couple of minutes to make these neutral statement in your mind can help you do so from a centered place. And if it's too hard to feel neutral about the situation in front of you, it's fine to step back and make it more general. For example, thinking "we are in a room". "There are lights in this room". "This building has electricity", etc.

Practice these now and when things aren't so rough so you can really get a feel for the effects. It may seem too simple but it really can work. You could try to spend a minute or 2 on each of these, 5 times today. You could set an alarm or plan times to do them. After you've practiced, you'll be able to bring them in as desired or needed, to handle the stress and be able to enjoy summer from a more relaxed state.