

Shining with ADHD by The Childhood Collective

Episode #185: An Occupational Therapist's Guide to Mindfulness and Movement for Kids with ADHD

Michelle: So, like right now, you know, I just came from work, I'm thinking, what am I going to eat? Scribble. That's a thought. I'm thinking about, what am I going to do after this? Oh, my to do list. You know, exaggerate it, make it especially for elementary age kids, you want to make it extremely fun and playful because if you try to go in and be like, we're gonna meditate, like they're not gonna want to do that.

Katie: Hi there. We are The Childhood Collective, and we have helped thousands of overwhelmed parents find joy and confidence in raising their child with ADHD. I'm Katie, a speech language pathologist.

Lori: And I'm Lori.

Mallory: And I'm Mallory. And we're both child psychologists.

Lori: As busy mamas ourselves, we are on a mission to support ADHD parents on this beautiful and chaotic parenting journey.

Mallory: If you are looking for honest ADHD parenting stories, a dose of empathy with a side of humor and practical tools, you are in the right place.

Katie: Let's help your family shine with ADHD. Today, Mal and I are thrilled to talk with Michelle Kiernozek, known as Mindful Miss K, to her online community. Michelle is a pediatric occupational therapist, ADHD provider, and a yoga and mindfulness teacher based in upstate New York.

Mallory: Outside of working as a full-time school-based OT, Michelle works privately with children with ADHD via virtual and in person private self-regulation and mindfulness in yoga classes. Her mission is to make mindfulness and movement accessible to all students, especially those with neurodivergent brains. Her goal is to demystify the idea that kids need to be still, to embrace mindfulness practices and find ways to make mindfulness tools practical for children and families.

Katie: Michelle, welcome. We're so excited to be chatting with you today.

Michelle: Thank you so much for having me. I'm very happy to be on your podcast and to share information with your audience.

Katie: Yes, you are our very first OT guest that we've had on the podcast and this is just an area that we really want to help our listeners understand, you know, a little bit more about. So, thanks again. We just, we love having you here.

Mallory: Yeah, we're really excited. And why don't we get started by having you tell us just a little bit about yourself. How did you get started in this field and kind of what is your connection to ADHD?

Michelle: Sure. So, I have been practicing as a pediatric occupational therapist for almost 13 years now. I started to research tools to help students with self-regulation, attention and focus back in graduate school because a lot of the students that I worked with during my field work placements and just case studies that we talked about couldn't access their academic learning or even their occupational therapy fine motor goals unless that attention and focus there. So, I found that to be the first step in working with children is getting to the bottom of what is motivating to them and how to get them to learn. So, in my research way back when, the one common thing that was coming up in the literature was that mindfulness and movement is one of the most research-based kind of intervention tools to help with children who have challenges with focus and attention and specifically children with ADHD. And then when I got to real life and started practicing, I worked in preschool settings, outpatient and school-based settings, I found that the majority of my caseload had the diagnosis of ADHD. So, before I could even build upon any of the academic skills that they needed to achieve for their school-based goals, I had to work on ways to get them to focus first and to get them to attend to whatever therapeutic task I had. So, that's what really brought me to research more about ADHD. I went on to get a certification to learn more about ways that are evidence-based to support them throughout their whole lives, because really, I think, I see mindfulness as a life skill. So, that's when I started to use mindfulness and mindful movement with students outside of my school-based job and I started to provide services to outside students through private practice and also with, through mindfulness in yoga classes.

Katie: I love that so much. So today you're going to be talking with us a little bit about mindfulness and mindful movement, right. Which is the movement piece, is probably very important for our ADHD families to hear because we say like sit still and they're like no way. So, let's just start with, can you define those for us? How would you describe what mindfulness and then mindful movement really are?

Michelle: Sure. So, mindfulness in very simply put is the act of paying attention on purpose and being in the present moment with a non-judgmental attitude. Think of mindfulness as that pause before a reaction. So, typically with children with ADHD and just a lot of children struggle with thinking before they speak or even adults, we struggle with making a mindful choice before we have a reaction. So, I like to think of mindfulness as that pause before reacting.

Katie: And then the mindful movement piece, how would you define that?

Michelle: So mindful movement can be anything where the child is completing a task or a movement-based activity while connecting with their breath. So, yoga is what most people think of when they think of mindful movement. Where you're in and out of postures but you're moving in a rhythmical way. So, like for example, if you're doing a sequence of movement patterns, you're taking a breath with each pattern. So, it's very rhythmical, like think of, I don't know if you're familiar with what like a yoga practice looks like, how you go in and out of postures. Maybe you start with your deep breath in, you bring your arms up, then you stretch down, bring your arms down, then you come back to the top, bring your arms up. So, it's like moving with your breath.

Mallory: I have to say, when I'm doing yoga or other exercise classes where the instructor is prompting you how to breathe, like when to breathe in, when to breathe out, I always appreciate that so much because when your breath is kind of in sync with what the rest of your body is doing, it just feels a lot better.

Michelle: Right. It's like, it's exactly that. It's just connecting a movement with like how you mentioned the prompts because for kids, you want to guide them through each piece of it. I think when we hear the word yoga, the first thing that parents think of and even adults, is being still. They think of stillness, they think of stretching, they think of just flexibility. And so yoga is a form of mindful movement, because you're moving, each movement has a

sequence to it and you're moving with your breath. So, you're connecting to what you're doing in the moment with your breath, if that makes sense.

Katie: Yeah, I love that. I recently joined an Orange Theory Fitness, which if you don't know, is a really intense workout. You do like 30 minutes on a treadmill and then 30 minutes of pretty intense weights. In my class that I was in, some are structured differently, but I remember when I first started, I would tell my husband, I feel amazing afterwards. And I think part of it is just the physical exertion, but also it was mindful in its own way because I'm a person where my brain just runs a million miles an hour all the time. Like as we sit here, I've got to do lists going, I've got things moving in the background. And it's hard for me sometimes to pull out one task and be like, this is what I'm gonna mindfully focus on or even one thought. And so when I did, you know, when I would go to an Orange Theory class, it was truly like I couldn't think about anything else because it was so hard to run or do those burpees or the whatever it was. And it's like, hey, my brain is actually giving 100% attention to this task, which is so rare for me as a person who is diagnosed with ADHD and I think that's really huge. We don't realize a lot of times the noise that our kids might be hearing in their minds or with their bodies. So, I really understand what you mean when you say just connecting to, like, one piece, the breath or the movement, how they go together.

Michelle: Yeah, that's exactly it. And you wouldn't necessarily call Orange Theory a mindfulness practice, but for you, that is your time when you're just thinking of one thing, right. So, you're focusing on purpose in the moment. And people don't think of that mindfulness can be really a part of any activity. Like, it doesn't have to be, which we can talk about the different forms of mindfulness, but I think that's the biggest misconception is that people think of mindfulness as a stillness. But really, I look at it as a state.

Katie: Okay, I love that shift. That's very helpful. So, as I am thinking about kids with ADHD, you know, there's kind of two parts to this equation. So first, we know that kids with ADHD really benefit from mindfulness, whether that's moving or sitting still, but they really benefit from that stillness. And at the same time, they generally do not want to use these types of tools, at least in my own experience and we hear this from parents a lot. So, parents might feel kind of frustrated, like, well, I told them to use breaths or whatever it is. So, we're definitely going to get into that because that's a really important part of this puzzle. I think

parents might listen and think, like, not my kid, right. But maybe we could just start with you letting us know, why is mindfulness so helpful for kids with ADHD in particular?

Michelle: Okay. So, to answer that question, I think it's important to look at the common symptoms of students with ADHD and how those symptoms can be disruptive to their everyday life and to their family's life. So, most of the things that I hear from working with students and children and parents of children with ADHD is that their kid can't focus, they are impulsive, they have trouble stopping, they do things without thinking, and then they're just very emotionally charged. So, if you think about those symptoms and you think about the emotional regulation challenges that a lot of parents' face, it just makes sense to teach them how to slow down. And that's exactly what mindfulness is, right. So, if we want them to slow down with their impulses, if we want them to be able to inhibit their responses, then we need to help them with a tool. And so, I see mindfulness as that aligning completely with the goals that I hear from most of the families that I work with, right. Because we are creating that space between the reaction and when we take that time to pause and we give children the tools to pause, then they're better equipped to deal with, to deal with emotions and results and better decision making. And it's a lifestyle tool, it's a life-long tool. You know, like even adults like think about how many times we've gotten mad and we just react. Like if we had that moment to pause and I know a lot of people use take a deep breath, right. That's a moment of mindfulness; it's a moment of pause and it helps us create space. And the more that we can practice this skill, the easier it will get. So, it's like if we teach this skill in childhood, it is going to equip them for so many other experiences in life where they have to stop. You know, they have to stop and think.

Mallory: I love that. And I think there's probably so many listeners who have gotten their own ADHD diagnosis in adulthood who are looking back and saying, gosh, I wish I had someone to teach me something like that when I was a kid and they're wanting to do better by their kids, right. They want to equip their children with ADHD with tools now that are going to benefit them for, like you said, their whole life. So, I'm wondering what could a daily mindfulness practice look like for a child with ADHD? And let's start maybe with an elementary age child. What would a daily mindfulness practice look like for them?

Michelle: So, the first thing that I would definitely recommend is for parents to do this with their child. So, whether you have a routine at home, whether it's on a visual schedule, I think

the best time to do it is right after school when, you know, you don't want to bombard them with any information, you want to give them kind of that pause, that just relaxation and downtime from a full day of school. So, I always tell parents to model, like just literally taking a pause, like, oh, you know, just and talk out loud like, you know, I had a long day, I had a stressful day. Without expecting them to talk back, right? Because we don't want to ask them how was your day? And bombard them with all this language and questioning them, but just showing them that, you know, I'm gonna take two minutes, like it could be that simple to just give my brain a break. I think the way you word it too can increase buy-in. Like if I tell students with ADHD that I've worked with, if I say, hey you, we're going to practice mindfulness, some of them laugh like naturally it's developmentally appropriate to just think it's like funny or a game or they'll, you know, kind of, they're not so sure. But if you just say like a brain break, that can just, the way we reframe how we're practicing the tools can make a big difference in terms of the buy-in. So going back to your question, just having that downtime and I would recommend using an anchor. So, what a mindfulness anchor is, is like a focal point that your child can focus on and my favorite one is sound. So, you're not asking them to be still with their thoughts because that's probably not going to work and that doesn't work for a lot of adults. So, a lot of kids when they're just introduced to this concept of pausing, they benefit, especially children with ADHD, something to focus on. So, there are, I use what's called tingsha bells and they're bells that you just, you just ring and the sound will slowly, slowly, slowly fade. And I find that to be really effective for children with ADHD because they have something to listen to and then it's almost like a game, like, oh wait, I want to wait until it stops ringing and then don't, I don't force them to close their eyes. It's always an option because we want to be trauma informed and for some kids that can be scary. You either close your eyes. I always tell my kids to make a turtle shell by just bringing their arms together and just putting their heads down so that they're blocking out in every other sensation and they're just focusing on the sound. And then pop your head up when the sound stops ringing. And that moment, typically I have not in my experience, knock on wood, seeing a kid that hasn't been able to at least try that. And that simplicity is mindfulness. And then, you know, once you build that in your routine, that could be something that's part of your everyday. Like, hey, before we go to dinner, let's take a mindful moment. And that's, I think how you present it will definitely impact the buy-in of the practice. And then you're building the momentum of the skill to apply it in bigger ways as they, you know, develop and become more aware of the benefits of mindfulness.

Mallory: So, one example of a way a child could take a mindful moment is like this example you've just given is focus on one sense. So, like focus on the sound piece. That's one way a child could take a mindful moment.

Michelle: Correct. And it could be an object too. I don't know if, I like to use those LED candles, the ones that flicker. So sometimes I just have students have that and that's called like your mindfulness anchor. So, it's something that's a focal point that they're just bringing their attention to. It could be that simple. And also even, you know, I have some kids that practice mindfulness brushing their teeth, they think it's funny. Like what do we feel, what do we smell, what do we hear? Like mindfulness can be, the simplicity is that it can be part of something you're already doing. It's not an additional thing that you have to add to your routine. And it doesn't require anything, it doesn't require materials or anything fancy. It doesn't require like any space. I mean if you have a space that's calming, that's wonderful. But it can be incorporated into your everyday life by just taking in what's happening right now. One of my favorite ways to also practice this is when I'm outside having kids name three things they see. I mean three at minimum, if they want to go up to five, that's fine, but three things they see, three things they hear, three things they smell. And it takes them from whatever they may have going on in their mind to the present moment and that's mindfulness. And then it's like a brain reset, you know. And I find in my experience it gives kids also that ability to, you know, it's like resetting them into transitioning them to whatever they have to do. And they usually have more attention to transition to the task after taking that just moment to kind of give your brain a little reset and focus on something else.

Mallory: I love that because on one hand it seems like so simple and obvious, but on the other hand you can understand how if you're not really intentional about taking those mindful moments and making it a practice, how you could go through your whole day without slowing your brain or your body. Especially for our, kids, right. So, it feels simple, but you're like, yeah, that could be powerful, because if you're not thinking about it, yeah, you go your whole day without doing something like that.

Katie: On that same note, I'm curious, do you call that out for kids like you said? You would call it like the bell, you would say this is our mindful moment. Or if you're on a walk and you're noticing the smells and the sounds and how do you explain that to them? Because I feel like so much of that is you know, starting out with every skill, it's child, it's parent

directed and then over time we want our kids to be more independent. So, what kind of verbiage do you use around that to help kids understand that this is helping them or what do you say?

Michelle: So, I like to use, when I'm first introducing the concept, I like to use a visual for them to understand how our brains work and how mindfulness is a tool for your brain. So, one very simple way, and anyone can do this because we all have cups, we all have water, you could do this at home. I don't know if you are familiar with sensory bottles, like the glitter bottles that you probably have seen at school. So, if you take water in a bottle and then add some glitter and then shake it all up, I like to explain that the bottle represents our brains and all the glitter in the bottle represents the thoughts that we have. You know, sometimes if kids are very curious, like when you give them statistics, facts, like they love to know, like numbers, like I have a lot of students that love to know like some science. So I'll tell them the average person has 62,000 or sorry 6,200 thoughts a day, which is what I learned, which is pretty crazy, right. That's 6.5 thoughts a minute.

Katie: Yeah, that tracks for me.

Michelle: This glitter represents all of your thoughts. And with kids with ADHD that could obviously even be, it could feel like a lot at all times with all the thoughts they have going on in their brain. And this glitter represents our thoughts. And when all these thoughts are in our brain, can we see through the bottle? And they'll look at the bottle. You getting them involved in doing experiential activities I think is the perfect way to get buy-in. Because they'll look at the bottle and they'll say, oh, no, I can't, it's cloudy, right. And then we take a minute and sometimes I'll breathe and I'll say, look what happens as we take a minute to be still and the bottle still, this glitter slowly, slowly starts to fall to the bottom and then now we can see. So do you notice that when we take those moments of stillness, it clears up space for our brain. Another way to do this too, introducing the concept of mindfulness is I give students, like I'll just make a circle and I'll say the circle represents our brain. What are we thinking about right now? Minecraft. What are we doing? Lunch. You know, usually they have don't have a shortage of things. You might have to prompt them a little bit. But they'll tell us everything, they'll tell you everything that's on the brain. And you just make like scribbles, right. And you exaggerate the scribbles. Okay, so you're thinking about this, you're thinking about that and then I'll say, oh my wait, so where's the space? Like our brain is filled

with all these thoughts. So, what is a tool that we can use? And I'll do this on a dry-erase board. Oh, if I use my breath to take to slow my body down, then I create some space and I'll start erasing all of the scribbles so they understand the concept of what a busy brain looks like and what a brain. And also normalizing that it's okay to have thoughts. Like we all have thoughts. Like the goal is not to not think, right. It's just to clear some space so that we're kind of, so we're decreasing the amount of thoughts so that we're trying to focus on just what's happening right now. But using that visual, I find that to, and having your kid be involved in that. Like I said, like scribble some thoughts and if they are having trouble thinking of what they're thinking about, then model it. So, like right now I just came from work, I'm thinking, what am I going to eat? Scribble. That's a thought. I'm thinking about, what am I going to do after this? Oh, my to do list. You know, exaggerate it. Make it especially for elementary age kids, you want to make it extremely fun and playful because if you try to go in and be like we're going to meditate, like they're not going to want to do that.

So, when you get them, to understand how it works and how it's a tool for your brain, that's where you get the buy-in. And then when you do implement the strategies, I would model it on myself. Like, okay, oh, I notice, wait a minute, is that a green bird? And then all of a sudden they're looking for birds. Oh, is that a tree? Okay, so those are three things I see. Okay, what else? What do I feel? And that one is always tricky. They find it to be, if you present it as like a challenge, I find them to have a lot more buy-in. Like, oh, okay. You know, they're more engaged and you want them to be an active participant because you want them to see the value in it and you don't want to impose like, practices that have no meaning to them.

Katie: I love that. I think that what you're describing to are ways to get your kids maybe interested or get them started. And I do think that as you do it, as you try it a lot of times, you really do experience a lot of benefits. And I think that then becomes a lot more rewarding. It's kind of getting over that hump in a sense, like, okay, let's try it, let's give it a whirl. And I can say for myself, just a random personal story is that I started out college as a business major, which is comical to anyone who knows me now, but my parents really wanted me to major in like some form of finance or accounting or something. And I was an oldest child and I was like, whatever you think, sure, let's do that. So, I went started off, you know, pre business, but I took a class, it was an elective and it was called the Psychology of Love and Spirituality, which just blew my mind. And I loved it. And the instructor was the most amazing person.

She was so great and she would start every class exactly like you said. She had this little gong and it was just so far from my business classes. Okay, like, I can't even explain to you the difference. And then she would turn off all the lights, she would play this little gong, and then she would walk us through a meditation. And I had never experienced meditation. I had never done anything whatsoever with quiet time or anything. And I will say at first I was like, this is so uncomfortable. I kind of just would like crawl out of my skin like, okay, like when are the lights coming back on? Like, but I would look around and see that everyone else is kind of doing it. Okay I like, okay, I can try. And what is interesting though is it was right in the middle of my day, I would stack classes, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I would go in there, kind of just hot, right. Like I'm running in and I've been thinking and studying and jamming everything into my brain. And then I would go in and I started to really look forward to that time. And I realized like, wow, this is actually so beneficial. And to make a really long story shorter, I totally ditched business and I became a psych major, which is also comical since I'm not actually a psychologist. I went into speech later down the road. But I think that it, I do realize that, that I never would have ever tried that had she not kind of in some ways like forced me to do it as part of the class. But I think when you, even for our kids, and again like I was a young adolescent with ADHD undiagnosed, it really helped me to use that. So, I was curious if you have older kids like those of our listeners that maybe have someone in like the 12 to 16, 18 range, is there anything different that you would do or any other ways that you would describe it or implement it with little older kids?

Michelle: Yeah. So, at like tweens, teenage years, I like to talk about the breathing pattern. So, I want to talk about the breath because breathing is definitely a hands down like my favorite mindfulness tool, but kids don't know how to breathe correctly. Meaning, what I see, especially kids with ADHD who are moving very fast is that they're keeping their mouths open when they're breathing, so I see a lot of mouth breathing. And this is something even adults struggle with. Like we have our breath pattern and actually backwards. So, it's really hard when they're young to teach that, which I still do, don't get me wrong. But when they get to the point where, you know, they're tweens and there is more of a buy-in and an awareness of, you know, of even learning like the science behind it, I find they really benefit from learning the science behind it. So, what I do is I get a slinky and I expand the slinky and I say okay, this is like when we take deep breaths, look at all of the space and you can do this with a Hoberman sphere as well, can even do it with a balloon. And then I teach them that if I have all the space for oxygen when I take a deep breath in, that's going to send a signal to my brain

that I'm safe, that I'm okay. And then I would obviously put this slinky back together, the Hoberman sphere would close it and then say that's what happens when we exhale. So, we create space as we inhale and then we exhale by letting it all out. So, teaching them the breath pattern through use of visual or even I've shown them diagrams of the diaphragm so that they understand that this is the muscle that helps you breathe is usually they really enjoy that science piece of it. And then I teach them to extend the exhalation. So having them breathe in for just as short as two and then breathing out for four and using their own fingers to do it. So, for younger kids, you want to be the one guiding that counting for them. But as they get older, I teach them to notice their breath, and that's a form of mindfulness in itself, but then also to breathe in a way where the exhalation that you're releasing is twice as long. So that is a tool that activates the, parasympathetic nervous system by breathing, extending the exhalation. So, I'll have them take their hand and just take a deep breath in for two and then as they breathe out, I'll have them use their fingers to count for four. So that gives them that, so that they're leading their own breath patterns, but also understanding it before teaching it has been very beneficial for them to actually use it. You know, they're not relying on anything external, and you have your hands with you wherever you go. So, whenever I teach mindfulness and breathing, I try to do it in a way that's simple, that you could do it anywhere. You know, it's accessible with you wherever you go.

Mallory: Yeah, I love that. Like, we need portable tools that we can use anywhere at any time that's, like, not obvious to other people that you're using the tools. I'm even taking deeper breaths right now as you're talking to me and, like, giving me the visual of the slinky expanding. I'm like, oh, yeah, that feels good, it feels calming.

Katie: I was curious about that. I was just going to ask if anybody else slowed their breathing down while you were talking, because I fully did. I was with you on the in for two, out for four. That was great.

Michelle: Another thing, too, I like to teach kids, you know, at the middle school age. I've had a lot of students with ADHD at middle school that are more socially aware of what they're doing, and they don't want to be different, but they need tools. So, I teach them, just to squeeze and release their hands, because you could do that under your desk, and no one will, I always say no one will even see. Just tensing and releasing. So just literally squeezing your hand, maybe you hold it for 10 and then release it shaking it out, and then putting their hands

on their thighs if they're sitting with their feet planted. You know, pressing down on your legs, it's kind of like, gives you some sensory feedback as well. But just tools that they can use with their own bodies that they're going to actually use. You know, it's not like I'm imposing them and giving them all these things that if they are aware of looking different, like they could do that anywhere. I mean adults have fidgets, right. Like I go to all these meetings and some of these administrators are using poppets and fidgets and we all have different tools that work for us and just normalizing it too. If you are going to teach these practices, I want to go back to just doing it with your child. And even if they are in their teenage years, still doing it with them and modeling it when you do it is super, super important. So using it as a coping strategy or a calm down tool in the moment and then not forcing them, but being that model where like I'm doing it and seeing if they join you, but giving it a lot of time too to see what they respond to is really important because I feel like I've heard a lot of parents that are like, oh, I put on a YouTube video and my kid either does or doesn't want to do it. But connecting and having a human, you know, body there doing it with them is far more important than just any sort of like, I mean don't get me wrong, I love YouTube videos, I love calm apps and all that, but the connection piece is super important to actually get the buy-in and for it to be part of the lifestyle, which I think really is the goal with mindfulness is to make it part of your lifestyle.

Mallory: I love it. So maybe to kind of sum up and give parents kind of this like actionable takeaway, what is something that parents can start doing now to help their child build mindfulness? Like what's your suggestion, like start here.

Michelle: So, I would start small and give yourself the expectation of doing it for as little as two minutes. I think if we try to do something formalized and we think about mindfulness as like this meditation or this yoga class, I think it's way harder to not only incorporate but to sustain. So having the expectation that this is going to be just as simple as two minutes a day, like that's it. I mean even as adults, that's where some people start. And then showing them, like I said before, that this is a brain break, this is a tool that I'm going to use that is going to help my body feel calm, that is going to get my brain ready and give my brain a little reset. Modeling that especially when they are when they are regulated, you know, you don't want to do these tools when they're feeling anxious or, I mean, it's good, that's the goal eventually. But starting it in moments when you are feeling calm and you are regulated and making that part of just your lifestyle and modeling, like, like I said, when you get home. Okay, let's take

a minute to take a deep breath, put your hands on your belly, breathe in to your belly and teaching them that breath pattern is super, super important. The one thing that I think is super important, too, to realize is that slowing down for some kids with ADHD is not the answer. If they need movement, then we need to do something. We can still raise their awareness and we could still work on breathing exercises, but we need to do something that's going to meet their needs. So, for me personally, in the morning time, like, I need energy, like, I need to do something really alerting to wake myself up. So slow breaths don't always work for me in the morning. They might work for me before bed. But what I like to do, especially with kids with ADHD who have a lot of energy, but we still want to introduce them to breathing, is I have them do something called karate chop breathing. So, I'll have them raise their arms up really high. You're getting that stretch. You're breathing in, you're moving with your body, you're connecting to your breath. And then as you exhale, I have them, like, chop as they bend down, almost like they're touching their toes. And then if you add like a little hiya, like, they love that. And then I'll have them raise her arms up again and we'll do that like 10 times.

Mallory: My boys would love that.

Michelle: Yeah. Or they call it elephant breathing. Like, you make, like, a big trunk with your arms together. Like, that's a breathing exercise. That's a form of mindfulness, but it's not your traditional, like, calm down. But that might be what your kid needs, right. So we're still breathing, we're still connecting, we're still in the moment, but it's not your traditional, you know, formal idea of mindfulness, but it's still a breath practice that you can do, to meet the needs of your child.

Mallory: I love that because that's meeting our kids where they are.

Michelle: Right.

Katie: Yeah, I loved what you said at the beginning when you said, you know, keep going until you figure out what works well for your child. Because I think that is sort of the, you might see something on social media or be like, oh, I'm gonna try, you know, we call it birthday cake breathing where you blow out the candles, you know. And for some kids, I know my niece absolutely loves birthday cake breathing. My sister thinks that Mallory is a genius because I think it was Mallory's post at one point on Instagram that told her to try that. And my sister's like, this is amazing. But you know, my own kids, you know, and all the love

to you, Mal, but my kids will not do birthday cake breathing. And so, if I just tried that once and said, you know what, they don't, they don't really do mindfulness. Nope, that's, that's the end of that, that's not gonna work, right. So, I love kind of the karate chops is a great example of changing it up and being flexible, you know, and letting, in therapy we would call it like letting go of our own best idea. Like I planned this all out and the kid is like not having it today. So, but I do think that that's a kind of freeing thing for parents to hear is that it doesn't have to look a certain way. And that's a lot of the ideas that you're describing, I think are out of the box from what a parent might anticipate you to say, which is really powerful.

Michelle: I also find that, going back to the idea of having an anchor, like having something to visually attend to, completely helps with that mindfulness and especially with breathing. So, a lot of my, families will use feathers. So, I'll have a parent and a child like literally get down on your belly because you know, we want, again, we want to be engaged, we want to connect, we want this to be a practice that is part of the household in a lifestyle. And then have them take a deep breath in and blow the feather back and forth. Kids love this. It keeps their attention. It helps them learn to extend the exhalation because usually they want to blow that feather like really hard. And that could be something that simple that you could do with your child as soon as you get home. You could use, bubbles, you could use cotton balls. I mean, I've seen it all and it's just giving them something to visually attend to. For kids with ADHD is super important in terms of the buy-in because you want them to be, you know, use their senses when they're completing these tasks and breathing exercises so that it's fun because it has to be motivating to them.

Katie: Yeah.

Mallory: I love that. That's so helpful. And I think you've really given parents some actionable takeaways and you've also highlighted that like this doesn't have to cost money, it doesn't have to take a lot of extra time. You can build it into your routines that already exist. And I think that is an important message for our ADHD families to hear who are feeling already overextended and overtaxed when it comes to all the things they need to do for their kids with ADHD. So, I really, I love that. It's been so helpful. We are going to link all of your resources in our show notes, but can you please just tell our listeners what the best way to kind of connect and keep in touch with you would be?

Michelle: Sure. So, I post mostly on my Instagram which is at @mindfulmissk. It's m-i-n-d-f-u-l-m-i-s-s-k.

Mallory: Awesome.

Katie: This has been so informative and we're just really excited to share this with our audience. So, thank you.

Michelle: Yeah, thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Mallory: Thank you, Michelle.

Katie: Thanks for listening to *Shining with ADHD* by your hosts, Lori, Katie, and Mallory of The Childhood Collective.

Mallory: If you enjoyed this episode, please leave us a review and hit subscribe so you can be the first to know when a new episode airs.

Lori: If you are looking for links and resources mentioned in this episode, you can always find those in the show notes. See you next time!