

KID CONNECTS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER: MINDFULNESS, WEARING MASKS AND PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Issue 3: May 11th, 2020

FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT:

Contact our warm line at, (303) 245-4418, to talk directly to an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant.



Kid Connects has been offering a weekly e-newsletter. Our previous newsletters have had a thematic focus such as self-care or tips for parents in supporting their child transition back to childcare. This issue is more eclectic. We veered away from a theme to address specific questions from childcare providers. In this newsletter we have focused on ideas to practice mindfulness, tips to help children adjust to seeing/wearing a mask, and strategies for effective communication with parents. **If you have a question, or have a request for a newsletter topic, or wish to unsubscribe please reach out to our warm line 303-245-4418 or email the Kid Connects' supervisor, Beth Garrett-Myers, at bgarrett@mhpcolorado.org**

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is awareness, “cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally.”¹ Many have mistaken mindfulness for meditation. While meditation is a form of mindfulness, it is not the only way to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness can be practiced at anytime, anywhere, while doing anything. It is intentionally paying attention to the present moment without judgement. The benefits of mindfulness have been widely researched. Studies have shown that mindfulness can reduce stress, increase memory and focus, decrease emotional reactivity and decrease worry/rumination.² Taking care of young children can be stressful. This stress is intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the change and uncertainty it brings. We hope that you can take a few moments for yourself each day to be present. We are confident that through a small mindfulness practice you will feel more calm, focused and compassionate towards yourself and those around you. We have included ideas for how to begin your mindfulness practice.



¹ Kabat-Zinn, J. (2012) Mindfulness for Beginners Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life. Sound Tree Inc.

² Davis, D.M. and Hayes, J.A. (2012). What are the benefits of mindfulness? American Psychological Association.

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/07-08/ce-corner>

8 mindfulness activities: Mindfulness can also be extended to daily routines, creative outlets and chores

- 1. Mindful Eating and/or Drinking:** Try this while you eat dinner or when enjoying your favorite cup of tea or piece of chocolate. As you take a bite/ sip notice the texture; is it smooth, crunchy, creamy? Notice the taste; is it tangy, salty, sweet? Notice the temperature. Even notice the sound of your teeth/ mouth chewing/ drinking.
- 2. Mindful in Nature:** This can be done while sitting, walking, running, etc. Bring awareness to your surroundings and the sensations you feel. Notice the air on your skin, the colors around you, the noises you hear, the way your feet feel on the surface beneath them.
- 3. One Minute Vacation:** Take one minute (or longer) and envision a place that brings you a sense of joy, beauty and/ or safety. It can be real or imaginary, a place you have or have not been to. Paint the picture of this place in detail. What surrounds you? Are the colors vibrant, muted? What is the weather like; is there sun, a breeze? What do you smell, salty sea air, fields of flowers? What are the sounds you hear, lapping water, salsa music?
- 4. Guided Meditation:** There are many guided meditation apps and websites including Headspace, Omvana and Meditation Oasis.
- 5. Body Scan:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Bring awareness to your breath. Spend a few moments intentionally noticing each region of your body including your feet, legs, hips, torso, stomach, arms, hands, neck, face (including pressure points), and scalp. As you go through each region notice what sensations you feel.
- 6. Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Bring awareness to your breath. Using the muscle regions listed above you will tense then relax each muscle group. Start with your feet. Tense them. Squeeze harder, without straining. Then release the tension, let that muscle region go limp. Repeat with each muscle region, ending with tensing and releasing your whole body. Try this with kids by adding helpful analogies for each muscle region e.g. pretend you are squeezing lemons, pull your shoulders up high and go into your turtle shell, become a wet noodle...

Mindfulness Activities with young children



- 7. Bumble Bee Breathing:** With the children, find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Guide them in breathing in through their nose while covering their ears. Then have everyone breath out through their mouth saying “buzzzzz” for as long as possible. Repeat. You can try different sounds such as “hummmmm” or “ohhhhh.” For other breathing breaks go to:

<https://www.yourtherapysource.com/product/breathing-breaks-deep-breathing-exercises/>.

- 8. Wishing Well:** Have each child think of three people that are very special to them. Sit comfortably together and guide the children in envisioning each of their three people surrounded by the child’s favorite color while they silently wish them love and happiness.

Why are people wearing masks?

Children will have many different feelings about seeing adults in their lives wearing masks or having to wear one themselves. They may feel curious, confused, anxious or scared. It is important to allow for any reaction a child may have and respond to it. Here are a few ideas of how to help children adjust to seeing/wearing a mask:

- Answer questions in simple language they can understand. “Sometimes people wear masks when they are sick or to keep them and others healthy.”³
- Give reassurance if they are worried about their own safety. “Everyone is working hard to keep people safe and healthy. Some people will get sick and most will feel better”
- The most important factor is their relationships with nurturing adults (parents, teacher, etc.). What they need most is you! A safe, secure relationship where they can express their feelings and ask questions.



Important considerations:

- Keep daily routines as consistent as possible.
- Limit their exposure to media reports about COVID-19 as they are also absorbing the tension you are feeling as you watch the news.
- Discuss your own questions/worries about COVID-19 when children are out of earshot.

Helping children read emotions behind faces masks and develop comfort in masks

Babies and young children are right brain dominate, meaning they rely on nonverbal communication. With masks, half of our face is covered limiting our facial expressions. Without smiling or frowning, children are left questioning are you happy or sad? This may cause unease and strain our communication with young children. In addition, they look to adults to help them understand their world. “As more and more people are covering their faces in public, it becomes difficult to read facial expressions and see people smile (or frown). While this may not pose challenges for adults, young children look for emotional cues from caregivers to interpret novel or potentially threatening situations. That is, children rely on their caregiver’s facial expressions and tone of voice to regulate their response toward people and new situations. The development of this emotional communication is referred to as social referencing and occurs between infancy and the early preschool years.”

Even if your mask is covering your mouth and nose which is challenging, you still have your eyes, eyebrows, tone of voice and body language to express yourself to the young children in your lives. **Here are some more ideas of how to help children adjust to seeing you wear a mask:**

- Pretend play wearing a mask. Pretend play is one-way children can make sense of their world. Encourage parents to pretend play with masks at home or have a spare mask in child’s play area at

³ Zero to Three. (2020). Why are people wearing masks? Why are people covering their faces? Retrieved from: <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/3211-why-are-people-wearing-masks-why-are-people-covering-their-faces>

home. At school, teachers can encourage imaginary mask play to ensure germs are not being spread from using real items.

- Play peek-a-boo: cover your mouth and then take away the mask to reveal a smile. Do this several times. Explain to children that you will be smiling even though your face is not visible.
- Play “guess my expression”: Ask children to watch your eyes and eyebrows. Try to make them as expressive as your mouth (“smiling eyes”). Ask them to guess how you are feeling from the expression of your eyes and eyebrows. You can also reveal how the expression in the eyes matches your mouth by taking off your mask.
- Practicing talking to children through your mask. The mask will muffle your voice so it is helpful to find a speaking volume that they can hear.
- Consider displaying two pictures of you, one with a mask and one without.⁴
- Narrate what you are experiencing. Don’t leave children guessing how you feel, tell them. Narrate your feelings. “You cannot see my mouth, but I am smiling! I am so happy that you showed me the picture you drew.”

Partnering with Families to Support Children

There are many ways that teachers and parents can come together to help children transition back to childcare. Here are some key aspects of creating a positive partnership that keeps children’s wellbeing at the center of our work.

Come up with a plan for communication

It might not be possible to communicate face to face, so coming up with set communication such as email, texts, a back and forth notebook, or phone calls is crucial.

Check in with the family

What has it been like for your family during quarantine?

What has time at home looked like for the family and child?

Are there any stressors that the center should be aware of, such as, a sick family member or a job loss?

How has the child responded to this stressor?

What does the child understand about this change?

Ask questions and elicit the expertise of the family

How can we work together to help your child?

What do you need from me?

How does your child manage change?

What do you feel like your child needs to be successful in this transition?

What has been successful in the past?

Assess current functioning/level of distress of the child

What is the child’s overall mood and presentation?

Has the family noticed any changes in the child’s behavior?

Have there been changes in the child’s eating, toileting, or sleeping patterns?

Have there been periods of more intense dysregulation? What did that look like? How did the family respond?



⁴ Katz, Rachael. Hadani, Helen. (2020). Brookings, Education plus development. Are you happy or Sad? How wearing face masks can impact children’s ability to read emotions. Retrieved from: <<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/04/21/are-you-happy-or-sad-how-wearing-face-masks-can-impact-childrens-ability-to-read-emotions/>>

Validate the family's experience

This is an opportunity to offer support and align with the family. Statements such as, “that sounds hard” or “despite all these challenges, you really showed up for your child,” will help the family feel seen and understood, making it easier partner with the family.

Provide education to the family

Children thrive when there is consistency and predictability. Consistency and predictability create safety for children that allows them to anticipate what will happen next, reducing anxiety and fear. Teachers and family can mitigate the impact of change by creating a plan that incorporates the needs of the child and helps him/her develop an understanding for what will happen next.

