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# Sitting Together

A FAMILY-CENTERED CURRICULUM ON MINDFULNESS,  
MEDITATION, AND BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

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PREVIEW



Sumi Loundon Kim



# Curriculum At-a-Glance

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## ADULT STUDY GUIDE

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## CHILDREN'S LESSON PLANS

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Welcoming Class

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2. Mindfulness of the Senses
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4. Walking Meditation
5. Mindfulness of Emotions
6. Mindfulness of Thoughts
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1. Breathing Meditation
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# Curriculum At-a-Glance

## ADULT STUDY GUIDE



## CHILDREN'S LESSON PLANS

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*from the*  
Adult Study Guide

# Introduction

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I once asked a university psychologist which undergraduates survived crisis better, be it the onset of debilitating depression, addiction, a car accident, or death in the family: those who'd grown up with a spiritual path, or those who didn't? Without hesitation he said that students with a spiritually grounded childhood, whether they continued with that or not as young adults, not only got through their crisis but also personally grew from it. He said that these students had a language to articulate what they were facing—a framework to create meaning from their experience.

When I picture dropping my children off at college some years from now, I reflect on this psychologist's observation. No longer in my direct care, my son and daughter will need to navigate choices and challenges on their own. What can I do for them *now* that increases the likelihood they will not only survive but also thrive? Perhaps one life skill, beyond teaching them how to drive, look after their health, or manage money, is the gift of spiritual fluency. Indeed, in groundbreaking research, Columbia University professor Lisa Miller confirms that a positive, active relationship to spirituality in childhood significantly reduces depression, substance abuse, and risky behavior in the teen years. Moreover, childhood spiritual development lays an essential foundation for resilience, character, identity formation, healthy relationships, and flourishing in adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

Many of us intuit that our children will get through life's difficulties—disappointment, illness, and loss—if we ensure that they have certain abilities. And we hope not only that they'll be resilient but also that over the years they will develop into mature, loving, and thoughtful people who give back to the world. However, these skills—such as self-reflection, finding meaning and purpose, clarifying values, and living from wisdom and compassion—aren't necessarily taught in school. Sometimes, in trying to instill these in our children, we discover that we ourselves could benefit from spiritual development. Or, we find that we no longer agree with our childhood tradition, but we have little with which to replace it.

The curriculum presented in this book provides a starting point for helping you and your children develop what we might broadly call a spiritual path. It brings together mindfulness,

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meditation, and Buddhist teachings to form a values-based program that emphasizes the psychological, philosophical, and relational dimensions of spiritual development.

Because mindfulness meditation is increasingly widespread, many of us have either had some exposure to meditation or are interested in learning more. As such, the curriculum begins with the familiar: meditation and mindfulness. Here, in Unit 1, you and your children can develop the essential skill of becoming more aware both of what's happening inside your heart and mind and of what's happening around you. In particular, you will become more in touch with your family's dynamics and more attuned as a parent. (My kids, however, have yet to become "attuned" to hearing me tell them to set the table—the system has its limits!)

When we become more mindful of our family life, then we may see many patterns of behavior, such as yelling, judging, blaming, shaming, harshness, withholding, denying, defensiveness, resentment—the list can be long—not just among family members but in our own minds. For this reason, the unit on mindfulness meditation is followed by kindness meditation in Unit 2, because kindness is at the heart of helping our family members develop more loving habits with each other.

After learning mindfulness and kindness practice, we might then ask, "Well, how should I behave? What's the right thing to do or to say?" This is where the curriculum turns to ethics in Unit 3, a sustained reflection on what values can guide us in the many decision points life throws at us. By putting meditation before ethics, however, we take an inside-out approach to ethics. When we're mindful of how terrible it feels inside our heart to say something mean to someone else, we learn right there that wise speech (outside) is guided by kindness (inside). Thus, instead of ethics being imposed from the outside as a commandment, you and your children develop a way of responding that comes from your own, observable experience of what leads to greater well-being.

Our ethical choices, over time, shape our character. If it is our habit to speak honestly, then we become honest in character. This character, in turn, informs and shapes our moment-to-moment ethical choices. Unit 4 teaches both the qualities of character that are part of the spiritual path as well as the practices that develop those characteristics. A wonderful, pithy saying (whose precise origin is unknown) shows how one follows from the other:

Watch your thoughts, for they become words;  
watch your words, for they become actions;  
watch your actions, for they become habits;  
watch your habits, for they become your character;  
watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

Unit 5, on service, picks up the last word, *destiny*, to think about the condition of our world and one's personal role in our collective destiny. This unit looks at how we can bring

meditation practice and our spiritual path into the world. The purpose is to help families expand their circle of concern, thereby actively engaging spiritual practice. This helps us move beyond our self-centeredness and contact our deep interconnection with all of life.

## A Parent's Path

Cultivating our children's spirituality begins with developing our own. We may have lost touch with this part of ourselves, particularly in the whirlwind that is our busy professional and householder schedule. Nonetheless, we are our children's first and primary teachers. How we are ourselves shapes them. For this reason, this curriculum is as much about a parent's own spiritual development as it is the children's. The *Adult Study Guide* lessons have sections on integrating meditation and teachings into parenting and family life throughout. The aim of these elements is to:

- cultivate self-awareness, insight, and understanding
- develop and maintain emotional balance
- manage and reduce stress, particularly as a parent
- help us become more attuned and responsive to our children and family members
- strengthen our skills as parents
- expand and deepen our own spiritual path
- provide us with some language and skills to help our children develop their spiritual selves

The adult curriculum provides several lessons dedicated specifically to integrating spiritual practice and parenting:

Mindful Parenting (Lesson 1.8)

Kind Parenting (Lesson 2.8)

Wise Parenting (Lesson 4.7)

Parenting and Partnership as Practice (Lesson 5.5)

The remaining thirty-two lessons include sections that relate the main topic to family life. In addition, each lesson ends with questions for reflection specifically about parenting.

The four full lessons on parenting, along with the smaller sections throughout and reflection questions, will give you an excellent orientation to developing your spiritual path as a parent. That said, book knowledge can point the way, but it cannot necessarily get you there. There are two other important considerations for meaningful spiritual growth.

The first is the importance of discovering things for yourself. Our personal insights into why things are the way they are have much more power for us when they are related to the particulars of our own life. We are significantly more invested and engaged when an

idea comes from within rather than from what was said by another. These moments of self-awareness, in which we see something about how we are in the world or finally understand a piece of our psychology, lead to finding new strategies from our own earnest desire to find what works *for us*.

For this reason, the lessons have relatively little parenting advice. Rather, most lessons have questions designed to help you reflect on your experience. Likewise, because personal insight is what leads to real growth, we increase the frequency and depth of insight by practicing meditation. Thus, this curriculum places a strong emphasis on developing a personal meditation practice. You will find your own unique ways of becoming a better parent as you understand yourself and your family dynamics more clearly.

The second consideration for meaningful spiritual growth is that of friendship and community. A great deal of human learning occurs through observing the behaviors of those around us. I remember, before I had my own children, watching a mother try to get her willful, tired toddler into a car seat. I could easily imagine an aggressive impulse to shove the child's hips into the seat, overcoming her with adult strength. The mother, however, pulled out a simple object from her bag and dangled it in front of the toddler. As the child reached for it, she became distracted and her body relaxed right into the car seat. At that point, the mother buckled her in. The moment was a revelation for me at several levels, particularly in understanding that parenting could be a skill that was learned. But more important, it was something I saw in real life from someone I knew. We are social animals and, as a result, much of our learning occurs not through reading but through relationships.

Therefore, as you undertake this program, consider finding or creating a community of caring, well-intentioned, thoughtful families in your area. The parent curriculum is designed to be undertaken with others, rather than alone. Exploring questions and issues will be far richer and deeper if done with others. Even if you believe you are isolated, you may be surprised to find there are more like-minded parents in your area than you thought.

All three taken together—this curriculum set, a regular meditation practice, and relationships with other parents—will do much to help you develop a spiritual basis for parenting and personal change. Your development, in turn, facilitates and nurtures the spiritual flourishing of your children.

 **An important note:**

While meditation and spiritual practices can support a broad range of difficulties, be aware that family services, therapy, medical intervention, recovery programs, and medication are essential for addressing many of the difficulties families face. If you or members of your family are facing significant medical, psychological, or situational challenges, please seek professional care. Likewise, you may want to advise a peer in your group to seek professional

help in these situations. Additionally, parenting classes provide excellent training and practical techniques for a range of issues.

## A Child's Path

It's hard to define exactly what spirituality is, but we might say it's a feeling of connectedness to that which is larger than oneself. What that "that" is varies from person to person and culture to culture, but what matters more is the quality and extensiveness of that connection. Two expressions of this larger connectedness are awe and wonder. Recall what it was like to lie on your back and look up into a clear night sky. If you let go of discursive thinking and let your awareness expand out into the vastness of the universe above you, there is a moment of wonder—"How is this all possible?"—and of awe—"It's amazing!" Many of us would say this moment feels *spiritual*.

Our children arrive into this world with an innate spirituality in which expansive connection, wonder, and awe come naturally. Yet, without care and tending, childhood spirituality can wither and even become dormant until decades later. This curriculum aims to draw and expand upon our children's spiritual capacities.

The purpose of the children's curriculum is to provide children with ways of beginning to find:

- meaning and purpose in life
- self-knowledge
- freedom from consumerist greed, ill will, hatred of the other, ignorance, and delusion
- a life directed toward wisdom and compassion
- authentic love for oneself and others
- values and priorities that lead to happiness, peace, and contentment

The children's program is based on the idea that children experience spirituality through their senses. Connection, mystery, awe, love, contentment, inner peace—these arise through hearing stories and singing together, smells of incense or the sidewalks after it rains, sharing food, visuals in art and candlelight, and in moving the body in ceremony or dance. For children, all of these aspects are magical and exciting. (As one Christian director put it, kids will be excited about any activity that involves food or fire.) Thus, all of the lesson plans center on activities that connect to the senses in multiple ways.

You might be surprised to see how little of the children's track includes formal, seated meditation. Instead, the program uses meditation exercises that are more engaging, putting abstract teachings into tangible activities. Certainly a child can do a few minutes of quiet breathing meditation, but in the experience of many teachers, long meditation sessions get associated with boredom or sleep. Besides, a lot of children have their own way of meditating



informally, so we do not need to be rigid about what meditation is or is not. One of the loveliest moments in the Buddha's story is when he asks himself, after years of frustration chasing after enlightenment through ascetic practices, "When did I experience peace?" He remembers a moment from his childhood in which he was resting under a rose apple tree and experienced a level of contentment and connection that no amount of hardcore meditation had brought before.

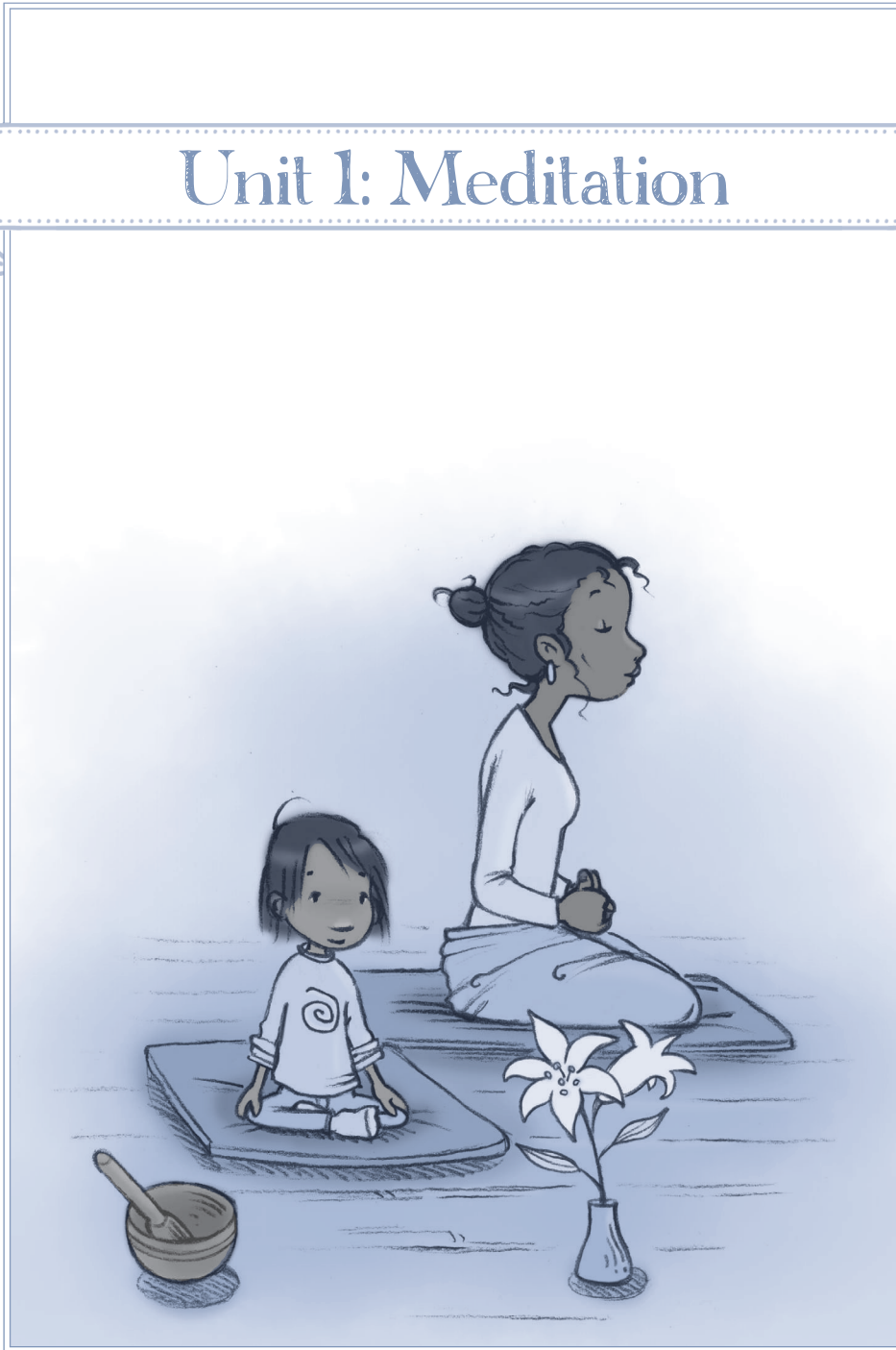
In many ways the meditation exercises, fun crafts, and engaging activities in these lesson plans are really a pretext for developing what is essential to spiritual cultivation: good friendships. Whether you are just one family practicing together, a community of families, or families in a multi-age Buddhist or meditation group, creating, nurturing, and sustaining long-term relationships is the breath of spiritual life. A lot of us have the image of spiritual pursuit as something we do solo. But not only did the Buddha teach that friendship is the whole of the holy life, but even in the most monastic of retreat environments, relationships are understood as what both tests and nurtures spiritual practice. Strong, healthy, and admirable companionship is especially important for children because more learning is happening at a relational, emotional, and psychological level than it is at an intellectual level. One of the reasons there are so many lesson plans is that we want the program to be long enough that enduring spiritual friendships can develop.

## How to Use This Curriculum Set at Home

- Read one lesson in the *Adult Study Guide*.
- Practice the meditation, do the homework, and reflect on the discussion questions for about a week, maybe longer. You don't have to do everything, read everything, or answer all the questions: you can select what speaks to you most directly.
- Then move on to the next lesson.
- Ideally, find at least one other person to go through the curriculum with together. Some conversation about the questions will help bring forth your own insights, as well as help you learn something new from one another. Perhaps that other person can be your spouse or other adult household member, if available.
- If you are implementing the children's curriculum with your own children, learn your lesson either a week in advance or at the same time as the same topic of your children's lesson plan. This way, you will have absorbed the topic at an adult level, which will enrich how you engage your children on it.
- At your own pace, add in an activity from the "Ten Practices for the Whole Family" section, slowly integrating the ones that work best for your family.
- Go to the [mindfulfamilies.org](http://mindfulfamilies.org) website to purchase and download the audio versions of the songs in the Songbook. Play the songs on car rides with your kids.

- For more on how to use the *Children's Lesson Plans*, please see the “Teacher’s Guide” in the opening pages of that volume. And for more on how to use this curriculum set in a group setting, please see “How to Use the Curriculum Set with Groups” on page 13.

# Unit 1: Meditation



*from the*  
Adult Study Guide

≡ 1.1 MEDITATION ≡  
Breathing Meditation

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### In This Lesson

- developing attention by following the breath
- distractions, letting go, and responding gently
- taking a deep breath
- stress as a result of multitasking
- mindful parenting: benefits of taking a deep breath; uni-tasking

### Learning

#### Attention Is the Foundation of Learning

Have you ever tutored a young child, perhaps your own or someone you babysat? If the child is continuously distracted, it's hard for him to get through even one sentence or math problem. "Oh, I have a hangnail; look, the cat just rolled over; I hear an airplane." In order for a child to learn, he needs to be able to pay attention to the material for a sustained period of time. The same is true for learning about ourselves, our mind, and our life: we need to be able to pay attention to what's happening. However, our minds are actually quite distractible, and our attention is further fractured by our technology use and online connectivity. It's as if our mind were a puppy, chasing after sticks, butterflies, and bones, unable to sit still in one spot. Meditation begins with training our puppy mind.

What spot can we have our puppy mind return to? Our own breathing is always with us and, though constant, moves continuously and changes. It is a source of life, the connection between the outside world and our bodies, and a bridge between our body and our mind. It is a beautiful object for concentration, and many meditative traditions, Buddhist and otherwise, begin with following the in- and out-breath.

Take a moment to meditate for five minutes, letting your attention settle on your breathing.

Allow the breathing to be natural rather than regulate or control it. Notice how many times you get distracted by sounds and thoughts.

After five minutes, come back to reading.

If you're like 99.99 percent of us, you probably didn't stay with the breath for more than a few cycles at most. Don't despair! This is a completely natural result. Here are further instructions for how to do this simple yet challenging practice.



## Meditation Instructions

- Sit in a comfortable, relaxed, but upright way so that your breath can move freely.
- Begin by taking several long, gentle, deep breaths. Start way down in the belly, filling the abdomen, up through the ribs to the top of the chest, and to the very top of the throat. Then slowly and gently exhale in reverse, letting your body relax.
- Allow your breathing to return to its natural rhythm. Sometimes the breath will be long, sometimes short, sometimes deep, and sometimes shallow. Let it be as it is.
- At first, feel how the breath moves throughout the body: the way the abdomen expands and contracts; how the ribs expand and contract; where the flow of air touches the back of the throat and nose; how the air moves at the rim of the nostrils and across the upper lip.
- As your attention settles and becomes more refined, bring awareness to the place in your body where the breath is most distinct, where you feel it the most clearly. That may be in the abdomen, in the chest, in the nose, or at the tip of the nose. Feel the physical sensations and movements.
- Use a quiet mental note to help connect with what's happening as well as to keep track of where your attention is. With the in-breath, note "in," and with the out-breath, note "out." If attending to the belly or the chest, use the notes "rising" or "falling."
- When you get lost in thought, simply let the thoughts go and, with a gentle and non-judgmental attitude, return to the breath. This may happen dozens or even hundreds of times throughout the meditation. If judgmental thoughts come up, just notice that there's judgment; let that go as well, and return to the breath.
- If there are sounds that call your attention, listen to them mindfully. Use the mental note "hearing, hearing" for the moments you are mindful of sounds. Notice any internal dialogue or judgment that comes with hearing sounds. When the sound is no longer drawing your attention away, then come back to the breath.
- When the bell rings, notice where your attention is at that particular moment. Lost in thought? On the in-breath? On the out-breath?

- To close the meditation, bring your palms together before your heart and bow slowly. Maintain mindfulness as you transition from the cushion to your next activity.

## Becoming Aware

Each time that you notice you are distracted is the key accomplishment of meditation. Following the breath continuously is not the goal; rather, noticing *that* you were distracted is. Instead of striving to get good at staying with the breath, aim for increasing the number of times you become aware of distraction.

## Letting Go

Once you become aware that you are distracted, let go of the distraction quickly. Don't linger. You might be remembering something pleasant when you notice that you're not watching the breath, and at that point be tempted to continue with the reminiscence. Instead, make the decision to let go of those thoughts and return to the breath.

## Responding Gently and Nonjudgmentally

Very typically, once people notice they are distracted and have yet again “failed” to follow their breath, strong judgments or other mental commentaries come up. We might think, “Aaargh!” or “I'm sure everyone else can do this except me.” These thoughts are actually quite important and we will get into them later. But for now, be aware of that judgment, let go of the judgment, and shift to a gentler, kinder, nonjudgmental response: “Oh, I'm distracted again; back to the breath.”

Do these skills—becoming aware, practicing letting go, and cultivating nonjudgment—seem like they could apply elsewhere in our lives? The answer is *yes*! Many of us could stand to have greater ability to notice when we are so lost in thought that we've lost touch with the situation around us, or to let go of being rigidly attached to our point of view, or to be less judgmental about our performance.

Meditation is to real life what basketball practice is to a basketball game. In order to play a game, we have to get out on the court and practice dribbling, passing, and shooting. We do it over and over again until these skills become automatic and natural. Then we play the game, which is fluid, dynamic, and more complex, using the basketball skills we've practiced. Likewise, our practice on the meditation cushion helps us play the game of life more skillfully and gracefully.

## Taking a Deep Breath

Although we primarily work with the natural, unregulated flow of our breath in meditation, an intentional, deep, and long breath can help calm us down. Such a breath taps into the parasympathetic nervous system, that part of the nervous system that manages “rest and digest” functions (versus the sympathetic nervous system, which deals with “fight, freeze, or flight”). In moments when you are overwhelmed, distressed, or confused, take a long and deep breath in and slowly exhale before you go on to do the next thing. You might even take three deep breaths, if time allows. You can also take a deep breath, long and slow, any time during a formal meditation to help reset your attention and bring greater ease and calm to the mind.

## Stress from Multitasking

Meditation can help us reduce and manage stress. One major generator of stress is multitasking. When we try to do several things at the same time, our stress levels go way up, and we quickly get drained of energy. This is because our brains are actually built to pay attention to one thing at a time. When we are multitasking, what’s really happening is that our attention is rapidly oscillating among things, and each time our attention has to shift from one thing to the next it uses a little bit of energy. Therefore, the more transitional the movement, the more energy is used. Studies have shown that people get more done by doing one thing at a time than by doing several things “simultaneously.”

One way that meditation, particularly learning how to pay attention to the breath, reduces stress is that in our practice we are retraining ourselves to *uni-task*. Though it’s difficult to keep our attention on the breath, doing so is restful for our poor, overworked brain. Simplifying our internal environment so that we are just paying attention to the breath can be carried over into daily life. If you like, while you are working, try doing just one thing at a time. See what that does for reducing the feeling of being too busy, overwhelmed, and therefore stressed.

Likewise, the relatively new media environment that we now live in is so mesmerizingly entertaining that many of us incorporate brief but unbelievably frequent excursions to social media, apps, news websites, blogs, and the like even as we are doing our work. These distractions set us up to multitask and are enervating even as they are stimulating. No wonder by the end of the day we are so exhausted! When we meditate, we help restore wholeness to our fractured attention. As we gather our attention inward, we find new energy and we return integrity to our mind. Throughout this week, see what it is like to set aside these distractions while going about your day. Turn off the radio while you are driving or cooking. Don’t constantly check your email if you are working on your company’s TPS report.



## Mindful Parenting

### A Deep Breath

Just as we ask children to take a deep breath in and let it out slowly when they are upset or angry, we adults certainly can do the same when we are about to lose our temper or are already upset. Taking a deep breath during stressful moments helps us to reset the nervous system, drawing on the “rest and digest” parasympathetic nervous system, as well as giving us a moment to think carefully about what’s truly best in a difficult moment. A deep breath is especially helpful right before we feel like we are going to yell.

### Multitasking

When I first became a mom, I wished I had more arms, maybe even another me. Running a household, working, and raising kids is a lot to handle, and sometimes it feels that everything won’t get done unless we do two, maybe even three, things at the same time. I’ve had moments when I have my mobile phone pinched between my ear and shoulder, I am chopping carrots, and I am silently mouthing and pointing to my child to “go away, go play, I’m on the phone, stop it now.” Just imagining that scene is stressful! As an experiment, you’re invited to observe whether your stress levels became lower by just doing one thing at a time with your full attention. While chopping carrots, just chop carrots; while bathing your child, just bathe your child. As mentioned above, include setting aside your digital device when performing a task, and avoid micro-tasking by checking messages or social media updates. When doing online work, only do that, as well. One thing at a time.



## Homework

### Formal Practice

- Any amount of time you find to sit quietly and practice meditation is beneficial. Two, five, or ten minutes each day—whatever you can manage.
- For more extended practice, sit three to five times a week for twenty minutes each session.

### Daily Life Practice

*Connect with the breath.* To begin integrating your formal, seated meditation practice with your daily life, start noticing your breath throughout the day. Some of the best times to connect with your breathing are when you are waiting. You might be waiting in line at the checkout, waiting for the gas tank to fill, waiting for your kids to put on their shoes, or waiting for a meeting to begin. Instead of distracting yourself from this seemingly dull moment by turning



on the radio or pulling out your mobile phone, take a moment to do a mini-meditation. You don't need to close your eyes or do anything different. Simply turn your attention inward and feel the movement of your breathing. It might be for just a few breaths. Notice as well what it is like to do this versus other habits of restlessness. Do you feel more connected, centered, or grounded?

Another way to build meditation into your day is to pick one routine activity and connect the breath to that. For example, before opening email, you might pause to follow three breaths.

Believe it or not, these mini-meditations begin to carry over into our formal sitting practice. You may find it's a little easier to settle into the meditation because you've been developing your concentration in smaller ways throughout the day.

## What the Buddha Said

### Mindfulness of Breathing

Having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, [one] sits down with one's legs crossed, keeps one's body erect and one's mindfulness alert.

Ever mindful one breathes in, mindful one breathes out. Breathing in a long breath, one knows, "I am breathing in a long breath"; breathing out a long breath, one knows, "I am breathing out a long breath"; breathing in a short breath, one knows, "I am breathing in a short breath"; breathing out a short breath, one knows, "I am breathing out a short breath."

"Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus one trains oneself. "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus one trains oneself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus one trains oneself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus one trains oneself.<sup>4</sup>

### ✓ Key Takeaway Points

- In order to learn about ourselves and our lives, we need the ability to pay attention.
- We can develop that ability through following the breath.
- Whenever we are distracted from following our breathing, we can become aware, let go of the thinking, and return back to the breath in a nonjudgmental way.
- Taking a deep, long breath taps into the "rest and digest" part of the nervous system, helping us to calm down.

- Multitasking is a contributor to stress. We can reduce stress by doing one thing at a time with our full attention.
- In mindful parenting, we can take a deep breath right before we feel like we are going to lose it.

## Discussion Questions

1. We learned about three skills that develop with breathing meditation: becoming aware, letting go, and responding gently. How can you see these skills extending into your work life or relationships?
2. We learned that multitasking gives rise to stress. When in your day do you commonly find yourself multitasking? Are there strategies to simplify those times?
3. To what extent is technology contributing to multitasking and distraction in your home?

## Family Life Questions

4. How could the three skills of becoming aware, letting go, and responding gently, as developed in meditation, play a role in your parenting?
5. The homework asks that we find moments throughout the day to reconnect with our breathing, either the natural breath as it is, or by taking a long, deep breath. What are some times in your family routine in which it would be the most helpful to incorporate touching into the breath or taking a deep breath?

*from the*  
Children's Lesson Plans

≡ 1.1 MEDITATION ≡  
Breathing Meditation

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*Note:* If this is your first time teaching one of these lesson plans, please review general instructions provided in the Teacher's Guide, pages 1–11.

### Lesson Highlights

- a deep breath helps calm us down when we are upset
- puppy mind, and how to train it by following our breath

### Class Agreement: Review

Briefly review the shared class agreement (Welcoming Class), particularly for those students who may have missed the previous class.

### Song: Breathing In, Breathing Out

See page 229 in the Songbook.

### Introduction to the Story

Do you remember what we learned in our last class?

We listened to the bell and followed our breath.

Today we are going to continue connecting with our breathing. Our breath can help us calm down when we are feeling upset, overwhelmed, or confused.

Let's read a story about a puppy who learns to meditate with his breath.

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 **Story: *Ziji*****Publisher's Description**

Ziji is a noisy, bouncy puppy who lives with the Anderson family—Mom, Dad, Jenny, and baby Jack. He loves to bark and play and—most of all—chase pigeons in the park. Then one day, Ziji sees a new boy from Jenny's school, Nico, sitting in the park. What is Nico doing? Why does he look so calm and happy? Ziji can't wait to find out.

**QUESTIONS**

1. How does Nico teach Ziji meditation? What do you do to meditate?
2. How do Ziji's reactions to the pigeons change? What does Ziji learn when a loud motorcycle passes by him?
3. How is our mind like a pond?

**Note:** An excellent guide for parents and teachers is found on pages 50–53 of *Ziji*.

**Discussion: Puppy Mind**

In order to meditate, we need to calm our minds down. Our mind is like a puppy. How many of you have had a puppy before? [Pause for replies.] Well, as you know, trying to get a puppy to stay in one spot is quite a challenge. You've got the puppy sitting there, panting, wagging its tail, and suddenly it sees a butterfly and it goes running off. You drag the puppy back and it sits again. But in half a second it sees a bone over in the grass and goes bouncing off again. You drag it back. The mind is like a puppy, because sights, sounds, and even thoughts are constantly distracting it. So, we can get our puppy mind to take a rest in one spot by bringing it back to our breath.

**Meditation: A Deep Breath**

Let's begin by noticing how we are feeling right at this moment. If there was one word to describe how you are right now, think of it and remember it. Now, take a deep breath in, beginning way down in the belly, and up, up, up through the ribs into the top of the throat. And a long, deep exhale, letting the air out in reverse from the throat, ribs, and now down into the belly. And again . . .

Now check in with yourself again. What two words would you use to describe how you felt before and how you felt after the deep breath?

[Allow students to share their words.]

When do you think taking a deep breath will be helpful to you in the future?



## Activity: Pinwheels

### What You'll Need

- pinwheel template from page 5 in the *Activity Book*
- scissors
- pencil with eraser
- pushpin
- crayons or markers (optional)

Provide each student with the pinwheel template from the *Activity Book*. Cut out the square on its outer border. Allow students to color and decorate one or both sides. Have students cut from the corners toward the center along the dotted line. (This should happen after the coloring and decorating.)

To make the pinwheel, have students take each corner point and to meet at the center. Remind them not to fold the paper, but just let it gently bend inward. Use the pushpin to fasten the four ends together, and then wiggle the pin to make the hole a little larger (this will help the wheel spin more easily). Then push the pin into the eraser on the pencil. Allow a small gap, again so that the pinwheel moves freely.

### Pinwheel Breaths

The pinwheels are a great way for students to see their breath. Have them take deep breaths in through their noses and then blow out through their mouths onto the pinwheel. They can observe how the length and strength of the breath changes the speed at which the pinwheel moves. After playing with these, gather in a circle, placing the pinwheels behind their backs on the floor. Invite the children to close their eyes, breathe in slowly and gently through the nose, and breathe out slowly and gently through the mouth, noticing the sensations of the breath. Follow with observations and discussion.<sup>3</sup>

 **Notes:** *Pre-K–Grade 1: Keep tacks away from kids.*

*Have the teacher insert thumbtacks into erasers.*

*Origami paper with color on both sides makes an attractive pinwheel, particularly if there isn't enough time to decorate.*

*Avoid glue, as it makes the paper heavy.*

## Game: Freeze Tag

Freeze Tag is the same game as regular tag except when a person is tagged by the “It” person, he or she must freeze in the position they’re in upon the touch. Another player may unfreeze the frozen person by either touching them or crawling under their legs (or some other agreed-upon signal). Once the last player is frozen, the It person wins and a new It person is chosen. Mindfulness can be added to this game by asking players to become mindful of their bodies upon freezing. They can also notice how their heartbeat and the urge to run continues on, despite the body being frozen.

## Activity Book

Available for in-class or take-home use: “Ziji” (*Activity Book* page 3) and “Pinwheel Template” (*Activity Book* page 5).

## Breathing In, Breathing Out\*

Lyrics by Thich Nhat Hanh; music © 1989 Betsy Rose.

**Online:** For the accompanying hand motions to this song, visit [mindfulfamilies.org](http://mindfulfamilies.org).

C  
Breathing in, breathing out

C  
Breathing in, breathing out

Dm G  
I am blooming as a flower.

Dm G C  
I am fresh as the dew.

Em Am  
I am solid as a mountain.

F C Dm  
I am firm as the Earth.

G C  
I am free. (3x)

C  
Breathing in, breathing out

C  
Breathing in, breathing out

Dm G  
I am water reflecting.

Dm G C  
what is real, what is true.

Em Am  
And I feel there is space.

F C Dm  
deep inside of me.

G C  
I am free. (3x)

\*Lyrics reprinted from *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children* (2011), by Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village Community, with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, California. [www.parallax.org](http://www.parallax.org)

Ziji

from the  
Activity Book



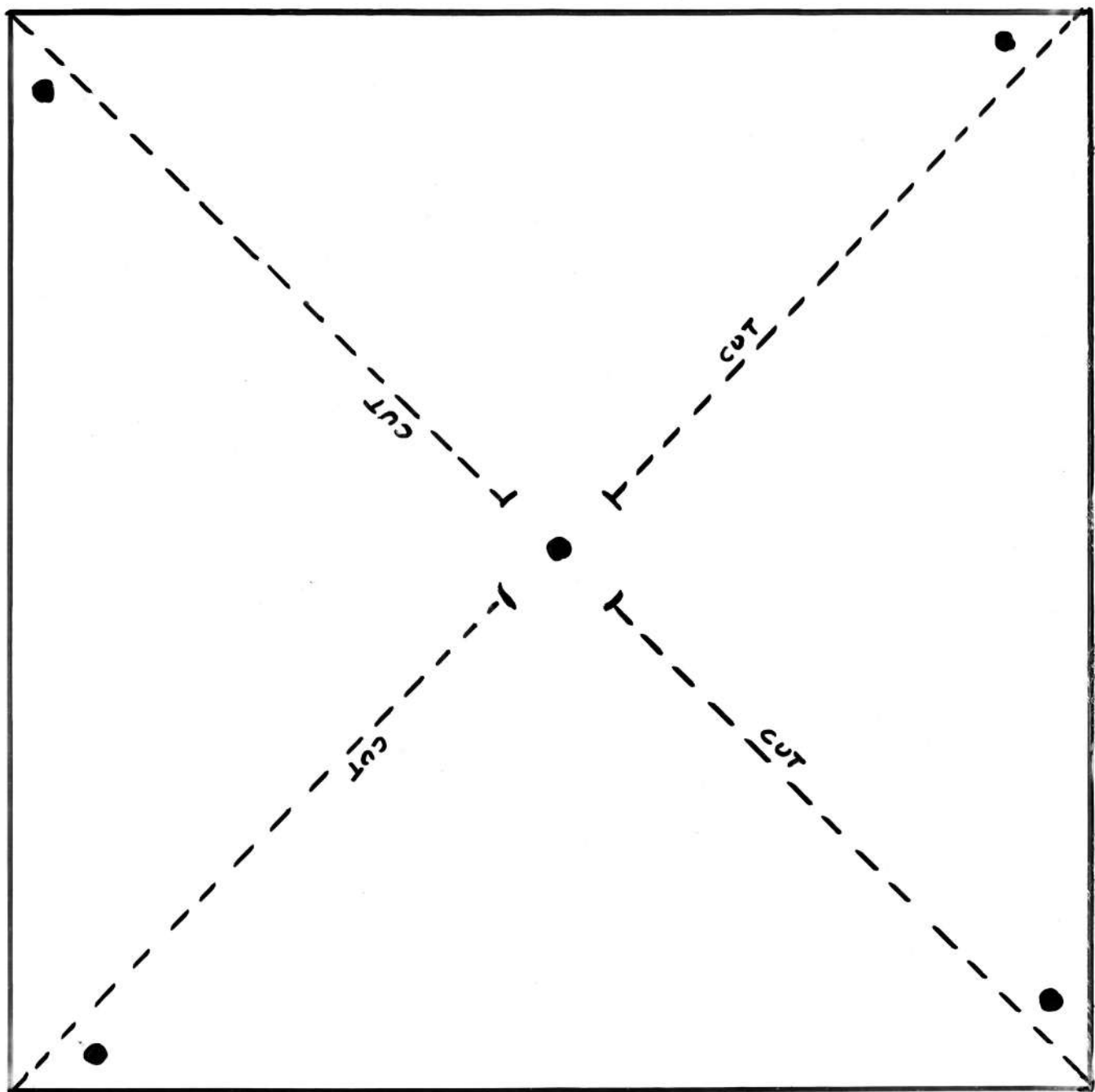
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For use with Lesson 1.1 Meditation: Breathing Meditation • *Line drawing by the author based on an illustration from Ziji: The Puppy Who Learned to Meditate, by Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and Torey Hayden.*

Not for Distribution. Wisdom Publications.



# Pinwheel Template



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For use with Lesson 1.1 Meditation: Breathing Meditation

## About the Author

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PHOTO BY KIM WINTON

**SUMI LOUNDON KIM** is the founder of and teacher for the Buddhist Families of Durham, and is the Buddhist chaplain at Duke University. Following a master's in Buddhist studies from Harvard Divinity School, she was the associate director for the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. She has published two books, *Blue Jean Buddha* (2001) and *The Buddha's Apprentices* (2005). Sumi and her husband, a native of South Korea and associate professor at Duke University, live in Durham, North Carolina, with their two children.

For more information, please see [wisdompubs.org/sitting-together](http://wisdompubs.org/sitting-together).