

4 Weeks of Mindfulness



**An Eco-Schools Seven Step Guide
For Early Years**

**'It was good to get out of the classroom and enjoy nature.
It made me feel refreshed.'**

Thank you for choosing to participate in Mindfulness Minutes, an eco-project that can be used as evidence for the Healthy Living and Schools Grounds topics when working towards your Eco-Schools Green Flag.

Mindfulness Minutes is a four week long project designed to get children and nursery staff thinking and talking about their mental health and well-being.

A quick message from Eco-Schools England:

'Between our team we have nearly 25 years teaching experience; we have sat, laughed, cried and celebrated with our pupils and colleagues over examination results, we have skipped lunch breaks to run school clubs and we have given up our Sundays and summer holidays to plan and prepare. Therefore the ideas and actions for our Mindfulness Minutes national call to action have not been rigorously assessed by a team of academics, but instead have been tried and tested with our own primary, GCSE and A 'Level students in a 'real' school. Some of our ideas may not work for all your children but we hope that Mindfulness Minutes encourages you, hardworking Eco-Coordinator and your children to STOP for a just minute and chillax - or smell the roses, whatever works best for you!'

Lee Wray-Davies (Eco-Schools Manager)

Thank You

The team at Eco-Schools England would like to thank all the young people and staff who piloted the project from: Bayton Primary, Christ the King, Cradle Hill, Market Drayton Infants, New Silkworth Academy, Penhurst Hessel Academy, St Olaves, Torkington School & Woodstone Community Primary School. Thank you for providing us with the wonderful quotes and feedback that have helped us develop the Mindfulness Minutes eco-project. Thank you for also for showing us just how important and beneficial taking a minute to be mindful is for all ages!

Introduction

Many of us live our lives rushing through the day, blink and it's the end of term. Life is happening, but we may not notice due to everything else that is going on in our surroundings, both classrooms and at home. Mindfulness has many definitions, but simply it means being more aware of what is going on around us and learning from what we find. To do this we need to pay full attention to all our senses, rather than getting swept up in life and our nursery/school routine.

**Quick Task: Stop reading now. Close your eyes and count 5 deep breaths.
Well done that was first hand experience of mindfulness, easy!**



Like all Eco-Schools projects the Mindfulness Minutes campaign has been designed to be a manageable, multiple topic action that helps your nursery work towards our international Green Flag, whilst following the Eco-Schools Seven Step framework.

Mindfulness Minutes is a flexible 4 week-long project that can be undertaken at any time during the academic year. Your chosen four weeks can run concurrently or you could choose to carry out one week every month, what ever works best for you and your children. **Most importantly please remember to keep a record of the total number of mindfulness minutes achieved at the end of your chosen four weeks in order to set targets to try and achieve even more minutes of mindfulness next academic year!**

‘I think it’s really calming.’



Seven Step Overview

1. **Mindfulness Committee:** Recruit staff members who will help you deliver the four weeks of Mindfulness Minutes throughout your nursery with the children.
2. **Mindfulness Review:** Complete a survey designed to get other staff members thinking about mental well-being before and after your four weeks of action.
3. **Mindfulness Plan:** Decide when and how you will carry out your four weeks of Mindfulness Minutes, which ages will participate and the mindfulness activities that will be most appropriate for them.
4. **Mindfulness in the Curriculum:** Incorporate mindfulness in your pastoral and academic curriculum.
5. **Mindfulness Message:** Spread the mindfulness message to your whole nursery and its wider community.
6. **Mindfulness Monitoring:** Collate your total number of mindfulness minutes and try to increase this total year on year as you involve more people from your wider nursery community.
7. **Mindfulness Code:** Incorporate mental health and well-being into your nursery's Eco-Code.



Step 1 Mindfulness Committee



To begin, you will need to recruit other staff members for your Mindfulness Committee. These staff members will help you to plan and lead the four week long project in your school. Try to include a staff member from each room or age group to ensure that the majority of the children in your nursery can benefit from the project. These staff members will also help you to make your Mindfulness Minutes project a success by providing feedback and helping with Step 6: Mindfulness Monitoring.



‘It is so important to be mindful as it helps my mind do something that it needs, to switch off and appreciate all the lovely things around me.’



Step 2

Mindfulness Review



In the Additional Materials section at the back of this handout, you will find a Mindfulness Review that can be used to determine whether mindfulness is a focus throughout your nursery.

Review

When you have a Mindfulness Committee with staff members representing the majority of your school or nursery, it is time to review how your institution promotes mental well-being. You should aim to get a variety of staff members to complete the simple survey (found at the back of this pack), using their knowledge of the children they teach and care for and their own personal experiences of being at work.

As well as carrying out our Mindfulness Review, try to find if there are any activities your school or nursery already carries out to promote mental health and well-being (e.g. breathing exercises, yoga etc) that can be incorporated into your four weeks of action.

Read

When your Mindfulness Reviews have been completed by staff members, analyse the results. Do the results indicate that your school or nursery is focusing enough on mental well-being or is there room for improvement? If there is room for improvement, Mindfulness Minutes is the perfect catalyst to begin long-term change!

Repeat

After your four weeks of mindfulness, we strongly recommend repeating the Mindfulness Reviews with the same individuals who initially completed it – this will help you identify whether your Mindfulness Minutes project had an impact and decide whether any of the actions completed can be incorporated into your curriculum on a more permanent basis. We will not ask you to submit the results of your Mindfulness Review at the end of the project only the total number of mindfulness minutes achieved.

‘Although it can be hard to sometimes switch off, if you are alone or just silent for a minute, you can hear all the nice sounds like the birds tweeting and it really helps you use all your senses.’



Step 3 Mindfulness Plan



When you and your staff volunteers are planning your Mindfulness Minutes project you will need to consider:

- When will you carry out your four weeks of Mindfulness Minutes and how many minutes will you aim for each week? When during the working day is the best time to complete your mindfulness minutes?
- Where will you complete your Mindfulness Minutes?
- What activities will you do with children during your Mindfulness Minutes?

When

You and your volunteers should consider the best four weeks to carry out your mindfulness minutes, we would suggest during the period when children transition from one room or class to the next, as this can be a stressful time for children. You should also consider when during the day Mindfulness Minutes should be carried out. Many nurseries who have completed this eco-project recommend completing Mindfulness Minutes after break and lunch times to help children relax and focus on their learning.

Where

The great thing about Mindfulness Minutes activities is that they can be carried out anywhere; a great excuse to get outside and appreciate nature at the same time! You might decide to watch the birds outside, focus on your breathing in class close your eyes and fully appreciate the taste of your afternoon snack.

What

This is the fun part– what activities are you going to do during your Mindfulness Minutes project? If this topic is new to you then mental health and well-being exercises can seem difficult and intimidating, but they don't have to be—it can be as easy just stopping what you are doing. You might simply decide to close your eyes for a minute and think about the different sounds you can hear or you may decide to look outside the window and notice what is happening around you and how this makes you feel. At first both the adults and children in your school or nursery may find it difficult to relax their minds and stop thinking for a minute, but don't worry it gets easier with practice. If this is proving an issue a good exercise is to focus your attention on one item—you might ask the children to look down at a crayon in their hand: How does it feel? What does it look like? How does it smell? After your minute of focus, you may choose to ask the children to draw with the crayon.

Hopefully this reassures you that incorporating mindfulness into young children's lives doesn't mean they (and their teachers) have to sit in the lotus position (but you can if you want), it is simply acknowledging what is happening right now and learning from it—perfect for early years children! There are thousands of mindfulness activities that can be found through a simple internet search of Mindfulness + Early Years.

Below are a few of our favourite 'beginner' activities :

- Ask children to sit quietly for one minute and think about something that has made them happy during your school day, after you have completed your minute ask them to tell others what they thought about.
- Outside, look up at the clouds (of course, explaining to the children not to look directly at the sun). Ask the children to look at the clouds for a minute then discuss what shapes they saw and how the clouds moved across the sky.
- Put a piece of fruit in a bag, ask the children to take turns putting their hands into the bag and describing what they feel without looking into the bag.

- Guide the children's breathing for a minute, ask them to put their hands on their tummy as they take deep breaths in, hold their breath and then exhale, you may even want to count their breathing in and out. Please note there are many other simple breathing exercises available online.
- Give each child a small piece of fruit or vegetable ask the children to eat it in a mindful way taking small bites, whilst asking them to think about what they are eating. Is it sweet or savoury? Does it feel nice on your tongue? Does it crunch between your teeth or is it soft?
- If safe to do so, walk around the classroom barefoot asking them to think about how they are walking. What does the ground feel like? Is it warm or cold? Which part of their foot touches the ground first? If safe, you could even go into your playground to feel what concrete or grass feels like.



... and one for the Staff Room:

Have a tea/ coffee tasting session - try a few different brands, how do they taste?
Rank the brands and maybe even who makes the best cuppa!

How Many Minutes?

The total amount of Mindfulness Minutes each child member of staff carries out for every action can be suggested by your Mindfulness Committee—they should aim to do enough to help create a more mindful setting to benefit their learning environment. At the back of this pack you will find a Mindfulness Minutes Tally Template, which you can use to record the total number of minutes completed by each class group or room.

For example if a class of 20 carry out just 2 minutes of mindfulness every day during week one that's 200 minutes. Over the four weeks that 800 minutes!!



Step 4 Mindfulness in the Curriculum



Mindfulness has very obvious links to the personal, social and emotional area of learning and development and further strong (although less obvious) links to the communication and language, physical and understanding the world areas of development.

Personal, Social and Emotional Learning and Development

Mindfulness Minutes can help children understand their emotions and learn to regulate and express them.

Communication and Language Development

Many Mindfulness activities ask children to focus on their five senses, after the activity children should be given the opportunity to describe what they noticed helping them to express themselves and develop their vocabulary.

Physical Development

Introducing Mindfulness at a young age will help children to understand that mental as well as physical health is important and the link between the two. Many Mindfulness activities (e.g. yoga, mindful breathing) will also help children with their co-ordination.

Understanding the World

Mindful activities focusing on observation allow children to focus on their immediate environment and how it varies locally—they will also begin to make observations about the natural world and how it changes daily.



‘It made us calm.’



Step 5

Mindfulness Message



Eventually, your Mindfulness Minutes project should involve your whole nursery, but this might be difficult at first. For your first week, try targeting those classes or rooms that you and your staff volunteer recruits work in. When your project proves successful, you will get more staff members and children willing to become involved as the weeks progress.

Informing

It might be difficult to explain to young children exactly what mindfulness is (being present in the moment), so you may want to explain to them that over several weeks they will be doing some new exercises and demonstrate these exercises to them. Other staff members may want to sit in on these demonstrations, so they can learn how to conduct Mindfulness Minutes in their own class or room. You should also try to let your wider community know about the project, benefits of mindfulness and what you hope to achieve using your Eco-Board and school/nursery website, social media and e-newsletters (if you have these). One of the best things about working for Eco-Schools is hearing positive stories from schools and nurseries across England, so make sure you share your #MindfulnessMinutes with us on our [website](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) or [Facebook](#).

Involving

Eventually, you should hope to expand your Mindfulness Minutes project so that every child in your school or nursery can benefit from it (if they aren't already). If other staff members are a little nervous about introducing it to their rooms, allow them to sit in on your Mindfulness Minutes to show that it is easier than they think. You may want to involve the parents or guardians of the children you teach, you could invite them to sit in on mindfulness demonstrations, or even produce a little guide to host on your website or send home as a flyer so they can practice mindfulness at home. If families do take part don't forget to include their mindfulness minutes in your nursery total... every minute counts!

"I had loads of things on my mind and I just lay there and let them go."



Step 6

Mindfulness Monitoring



Amazingly in 2021 between January and July 30,566 young people and 2453 school staff took part in the project, collectively achieving 1,000,696 minutes of mindfulness!

To showcase the impact of your nursery's Mindfulness Minutes we recommend you record the following sets of data:

The number of minutes of mindfulness carried out in total across your nursery during weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4. This is the number of mindfulness minutes multiplied by the number of participants (staff and children) for all mindfulness actions that you carried out during these weeks.

How many children from your nursery were involved in your Mindfulness Minutes actions during weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4. If you did more than one action each week, indicate the average number of children involved.

How many staff from your nursery were involved in your Mindfulness Minutes action during weeks 1, 2, 3 and 4. If you did more than one action each week, please indicate the average number of staff involved.

Please do not worry if you are not able to carry out the Mindfulness Minutes project for the full four weeks, you should still keep a record of your results for however many weeks of mindfulness action your nursery was able to take part in. This helps set a benchmark and new target to aim for (and break) next time your nursery takes part in Mindfulness Minutes!



Step 7

Mindfulness Code



‘The class has been so wonderfully calm and peaceful during our daily breathing exercises.’

By now your Mindfulness Minutes project should be close to completion, we hope you have enjoyed it and it has benefitted all the children and staff involved. The final step in the Eco-Schools framework is Step 7: Eco-Code, this should be a mantra for your school or nursery reflecting all of the topic work you have completed as part of the Eco-Schools programme. Your Eco-Code should be simple and valued, the children you teach should be able to understand and engage with it and the wider community should be aware of it. It should be a selling point for your institution demonstrating that you take a holistic approach to teaching. Your Eco-Code can take any form it likes (as long as the children you teach can engage with it), in Early Years settings we love seeing posters, rhymes, songs, dances or simple poems. Below are some of the Eco-Schools' teams suggestions for incorporating the Mindfulness Minutes project into an existing Eco-Code, but these are just suggestions and you will know better than us how to incorporate the project into your Eco-Code so your children can engage with it.

- In our school we like to stop and think.
- In our nursery we look, listen, smell, touch and taste everyday.
- Everyday we look after ourselves and our friends.
- We are friends with ourselves.
- We care for plants, animals and ourselves.

‘Children developed the ability to focus on one thing and notice the small things/changes around them.’



Step 2

Mindfulness Review



Question	Never	Sometimes	Everyday
Children are taught to deal with their emotions.			
Children take time, as a group, to stop and think.			
Children are encouraged to smell different scents			
I am happy to just sit down and relax without a mobile phone or any form of electronics and watch the clouds drift by.			
I think about the nice things that have happened in school when I get home.			
I listen to what I can hear when in the school grounds at break time and lunch.			
I try not to worry too much about things that I can't control.			
When I travel to school I look around me and notice even the smallest changes on my journey.			
When my friend or teacher talks to me I think about nothing else and concentrate on them.			
After I fall out with friends, I find it easy to put the argument behind me and be friends again.			
I am patient with my friends, family and teachers.			
If I make a mistake in class I learn from it and move on quickly.			
I often take a few minutes to just stop and think.			
I regularly take the time to stop and think about how amazing nature is.			
I think about each of my five senses everyday.			



Mindfulness Review Scores



Give one point for every yes ticked

Score 0-5 Mindfulness Beginner: You are probably not thinking about what is going on around you and could be missing out on lots of exciting things - don't worry Mindfulness Minutes will help you with this.

Score 6-12 Mindfulness Mostly: You do have some moments of mindfulness during your school day, great! You're well on your way to becoming a Mindfulness Jedi.

Score 12-13 Mindfulness Jedi: Wow, you are taking the time to appreciate everything going on around you, spread the word and help others become as mindfully magnificent as you.





Step 6

Mindfulness Monitoring



Class/Room Name:

Number of children participating:

Number of staff participating:

Week 1	Number of Mindfulness Minutes
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Week 1 Total	



Step 6

Mindfulness Monitoring



Class/Room Name:

Number of children participating:

Number of staff participating:

Week 2	Number of Mindfulness Minutes
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Week 2 Total	



Step 6

Mindfulness Monitoring



Class/Room Name:

Number of children participating:

Number of staff participating:

Week 3	Number of Mindfulness Minutes
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Week 3 Total	



Step 6

Mindfulness Monitoring



Class/Room Name:

Number of children participating:

Number of staff participating:

Week 4	Number of Mindfulness Minutes
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Week 4 Total	