

Mindfulness Jars

Have you ever been so frustrated that you just didn't know what to do with yourself? Mindfulness is something we can practise every day; however, it can also be a tool we can use 'in the moment' when we're worried, angry or overwhelmed.

Imagine your brain is like the jar. Sometimes we feel like our emotions are filling our brain, like the jar is almost full of water. As these emotions begin to rise up in us, chemicals are released in our brain – just like we put glitter in the jar. Our thoughts whirl around and our feelings rise. However, if we take some deep breaths, we can allow these chemicals to fade away, just like the glitter starts to slow down after you shake the jar. Your thoughts and feelings will calm down just like the glitter settles at the bottom of the jar. Once this happens, your brain can work properly again and you can make good decisions, just like you can see through the jar once the glitter has settled.

Here are some instructions on how to make your own mindfulness jar.

Ingredients

- Jar
- Warm water from the tap
- Elmer's Clear School Glue
- 1 tbsp glitter (fine glitter works well)
- 1-2 drops of food colouring (optional)
- Scrap paper (optional)



Method

1. Fill your bottle 1/8 to 1/3 with glue. The more glue you add, the longer it will take for the glitter to settle down after you shake the jar.
2. Carefully add your glitter. You could make a little paper funnel to help you pour it in.
3. Fill the rest of the jar with warm water, leaving a 1cm gap at the top of the jar.
4. Put the lid on and shake the jar. See if you want to add any more glitter, glue or water.
5. Once you're happy with the ingredients in your jar, ask an adult to put the lid on your jar tightly.

Top Tips! You can use your mindfulness jar to:

Calm down – shake it when you're frustrated or angry; take slow, deep breaths until the glitter settles.

Relax – shake the jar and watch the glitter swirl.

INFORMATION FOR THE GROWN UPS

When we experience a stressful event, the amygdala, an area of the brain involved in processing emotions, sends a distress signal to the hypothalamus. This area of the brain is like a command centre, communicating with the rest of the body through the nervous system so that the person has the energy to fight or flee.

We often notice our body's physical reaction to this 'fight-or-flight' response in terms of our heart beating faster, our senses being heightened, taking in more oxygen and feeling the rush of adrenaline. A hormone called cortisol is then released, helping to restore the energy we lost during the response. When the stressful event is over, our cortisol levels fall and our body returns to stasis.

Stress itself is not inherently problematic. In moderation, cortisol is a normal and helpful hormone that helps regulate our blood sugar and aids our memory. However, experiencing lots of stressful events can lead to a build-up of cortisol in the brain which can have long-term effects including health problems. The good news is that stress-related damage is more reversible for our young people. Little ones can build new neural pathways in their brains more easily, therefore they can recover from any negative effects more readily.

Mindfulness practices can aid our responsiveness to stressors. Research shows that mindfulness is linked to a number of social, emotional, cognitive and behavioural wellbeing indicators in children and young people including increased levels of self-control and emotional regulation, promotion of pro-social behaviour, and lowered stress levels.

If you or your child would like to try some other mindfulness practices, visit the Institute of Positive Education's YouTube channel for a range of guided practices.