



mindful games

ACTIVITY
CARDS

55 Fun Ways to Share Mindfulness
with Kids and Teens

Susan Kaiser Greenland

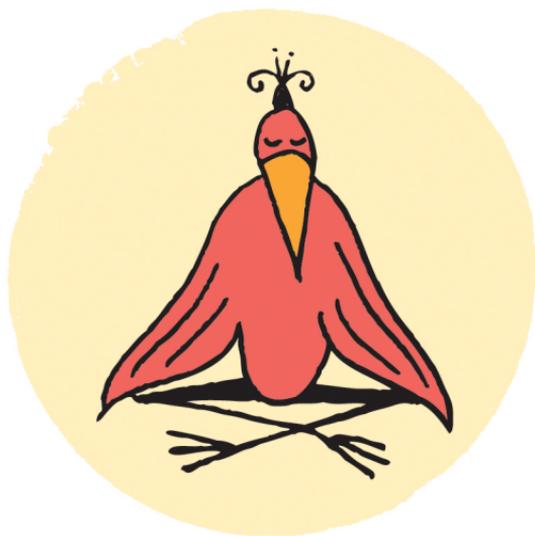
with Annaka Harris



SHAMBHALA
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2017

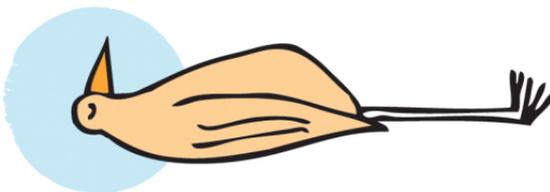
The Mindful Games Activity Cards are written for kids, but don't let that fool you. These games can be just as much fun and transformative for parents or anyone else who has a meaningful relationship with a child or teenager. Teachers, therapists, grandparents, aunts, uncles, troop leaders, and camp counselors—these games are for you, too!

Ready to give one a try?



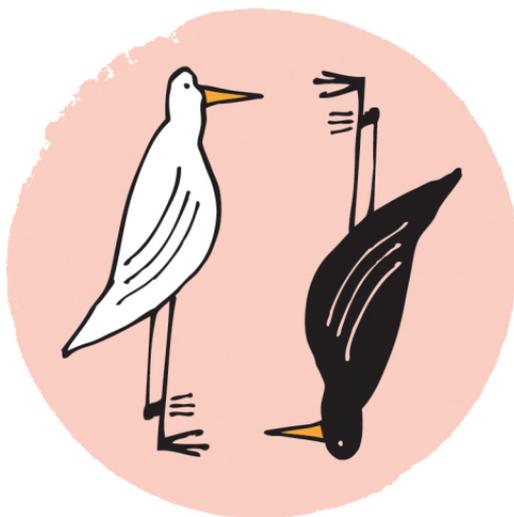
TIPS

1. Before leading a game, get a feel for it by first reading through the card on your own.
2. Before playing Mindful Games, find a relatively quiet place where you can sit or lie down comfortably, without being disturbed.



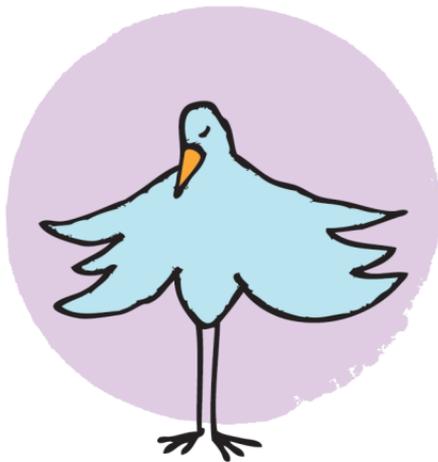
3. Some kids are not comfortable closing their eyes, especially in a room full of people. When you ask children to close their eyes for a Mindful Game, we suggest that you tell them that you'll keep your eyes open and watch the room to keep them safe. Never have them close their eyes unless/until they're comfortable.
4. When leading Mindful Games, it's important to use your regular speaking voice and your own words to guide the children.
5. Children are sometimes so determined to concentrate that they tense their muscles. Regularly remind them to relax their bodies while keeping their backs straight.
6. The talking points listed in some of the games are suggestions for ways to lead a short conversation with the children.

7. Remind children that there is no right or wrong way to feel when they play Mindful Games. Although practicing mindfulness and meditation often helps them feel calm (and we often want children to calm down), it's important to remember that the goal is for them to be aware of whatever they are feeling in the present moment without judging it.
8. We want to help children develop a kind inner voice that sounds something like this: *It's really hard to sit still right now, and that's okay. Everyone feels this way sometimes. I can sit here, feeling my body and all the energy I have—my breath moving fast, my heart beating quickly—I can take a breath, listen to sounds, become aware of how I feel, and be okay.*



Mindfulness and meditation help develop a set of life skills that allow children, teens, and parents to relate to what's happening within and around them with more wisdom and compassion. *Mindful Games* teach six of these life skills: focusing, quieting, seeing, reframing, caring, and connecting.

The life skills in the figure on the opposite page are presented in a circle with focusing at the center because steady, flexible attention supports the other five skills.



To learn more about life skills and the full Inner Kids curriculum visit:
www.susankaisergreenland.com

LIFE SKILLS



Susan Kaiser Greenland developed the Inner Kids mindful awareness program and teaches secular practices to children, parents, and professionals around the world. She is also a corporate attorney and represented the ABC and CBS networks for many years. While working as a lawyer, she volunteered in schools teaching mindfulness to children, and she eventually left her law practice to teach mindfulness to kids and families full-time. In 2000, she established the Inner Kids Foundation with her husband, the author Seth Greenland, bringing mindful awareness to underserved schools and neighborhoods in Los Angeles. She is the author of *The Mindful Child* and *Mindful Games*.

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The mindful games presented on these cards are educational tools, and are not intended to be used as clinical treatment.



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mindful breathing

We pay close attention to the feeling of breathing to help us relax and rest in the moment.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 1 to 15 minutes

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

1. Lie on your back with your legs flat on the floor and your arms by your sides. If you like, you can close your eyes. Feel the back of your head touching the floor. Now feel your shoulders, your upper back, your arms, your hands, your lower back, your legs, and your feet touching the floor.
2. Notice what it feels like to breathe in and out. There's no right or wrong way to breathe. It doesn't matter if your breathing is fast or slow, deep or shallow.
3. Pay close attention to your in-breath. Can you notice when you first start to breathe in and then follow the feeling of your in-breath all the way to the very first moment of your out-breath? If it's hard to keep your mind on your in-breath, silently say the word *in* every time you breathe in.

Let the children practice this for a minute or two.

4. Can you notice when you first begin to breathe out and then follow the feeling of your out-breath all the way to the very first moment of your in-breath? If it's hard to keep your mind on your out-breath, silently say the word *out* every time you breathe out.
Let the children practice this for a few breaths.
5. Let's put it together and pay attention to an entire breath, carefully following every moment. If it's hard to keep your mind on your breathing, silently say the word *in* every time you breathe in and the word *out* every time you breathe out.
Let the children practice this for a few breaths.
6. When you're ready, open your eyes and sit up slowly. Take a breath and notice how you feel.

TIPS

1. Lying down is often children's favorite meditation posture, but *Mindful Breathing* can also be practiced sitting or standing.
2. If it's difficult for the children to stay still when they practice *Mindful Breathing* while sitting or standing, they can sway from side to side slowly and with control.
3. Give children and teens an opportunity to talk about their feelings and experiences after *Mindful Breathing*. Check-ins can range from a few words to a full discussion.
4. Start with a few minutes and extend the length of time as the children become more comfortable with the activity.
5. From time to time, have the children check to see if their bodies are tense and remind them to relax.

three good things

When faced with a disappointment, we acknowledge our feelings and then we think of three good things in our lives too.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 5 minutes or more

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

1. Do you ever feel disappointed?

Listen to the children's answers.

2. How did that make you feel?

Acknowledge the children's feelings and, if appropriate, talk about them.

3. I bet even when you're disappointed, there are good things in your life too. Can you name three good things?

Share an example of a time when you felt disappointed, and then name three good things in your life.

TIPS

1. The point of this game is not for children to sweep their feelings under the rug; it's to remember that they can feel two things at once: sad, hurt, or disappointed by challenges while still being grateful for the good things.

2. If the children have trouble identifying good things on their own, you can help them brainstorm.
3. The phrase *three good things* can become a playful and humorous response to the minor upsets that show up in family life. For instance, if a young child spills a glass of apple juice and looks like he's going to cry, you can respond with something like, *Ah, that can be frustrating. Can you name three good things while I wipe the counter?*
4. To develop a habit of thankfulness, play *Three Good Things* around the dinner table, before bedtime, or at other times when the family is together.



slow and silent walking

We walk slowly and purposefully. Every time we step, we feel the sensations in our feet and legs.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 3 to 15 minutes

SUPPLIES Optional: bell or tone bar, masking tape

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

Prepare by marking two lines on the floor, about 6 feet apart, with tape or objects.

1. We're going to begin at one line and walk very slowly to the other line, feeling our feet touching the floor as we step. Let's get ready by standing on one line with our backs straight, knees soft, and muscles relaxed. When I ring the bell, we'll start walking very slowly, keeping our gaze downward to make it easier to concentrate.

Ring the bell.

2. Notice the feeling in each foot as you step. Do you feel the heel of your foot, the ball of your foot, and your toes?
3. When we get to the other line, we'll turn around and wait for the bell. That's the signal to start walking again. We'll focus on our breathing while we wait.

Ring the bell again, and continue for as long as children remain engaged.

TIPS

1. After some practice, have the children pay attention to two parts of walking: putting the foot down and lifting the foot up.
2. Later, have the children pay attention to three parts of walking: putting the foot down, lifting the foot up, and moving the leg forward.
3. Once they understand the game, the children won't need the lines on the floor, and they'll be ready to walk longer distances—in the hallway, across the room, or outside in nature.

VARIATIONS

1. Walk to the Beat

Have the children walk to the beat of a drum.

2. I'm an Airplane!

Have the children walk with their arms out to their sides and pretend to be an airplane while they pay attention to the sensations in their arms.

three gates

We ask ourselves three questions to determine whether something we are about to say is helpful and kind: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 5 to 10 minutes

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

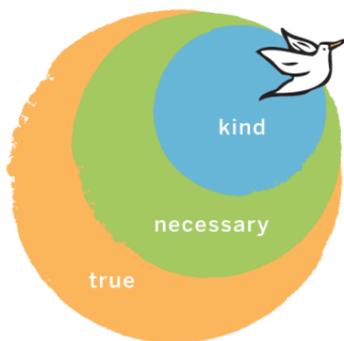
1. Talking points: *Sometimes we can hurt someone's feelings even if we don't mean to. How can we know if something we're about to say is respectful? What can we do if we accidentally hurt someone's feelings?*
2. One way to avoid hurting someone's feelings is by asking these three questions before we say something: *Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?* It's like passing through three gates: if it's *true*, you pass through the first gate. If it's *necessary*, you pass through the second. And if it's *kind*, you pass through the third. *Give examples of things you might say and ask the children to help you figure out whether they are kind and respectful by asking the three questions together.*
3. Talking points: *When should we ask these questions? Do you ever get a feeling that what you're about to say might not be respectful?*

Share your personal experiences and ask the children to share theirs.

4. Try asking yourself the three questions next time you get that feeling and tell me what happens.

TIPS

1. Have older children ask a fourth question: *Is it the right time?*
2. Remind the children that they don't need to ask these questions every time they speak, only if they catch themselves feeling that what they're about to say may not be kind or respectful.
3. Use *Three Gates* to talk about how words affect other people, and use *Is It Helpful?* to talk about actions.



appreciation chain

We write notes of appreciation to remind ourselves of what we have and to see the positive effect of a simple act of kindness.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 5 to 20 minutes

SUPPLIES Construction paper, scissors, glue stick, decorating materials such as markers and glitter

AGE Young children (with a modification for older children and teens)

LEADING THE GAME

To prepare, cut strips of construction paper and place them in a basket, along with decorating materials.

1. Talking points: *What are some ways people have helped you? What is appreciation? What is gratitude?*
2. Let's make an appreciation chain together. First we'll write down things we're grateful for on these strips of paper. Then we can decorate them.
Help the children decorate the paper and create a chain.
3. Talking points: *How do you feel when you appreciate something or someone? What are some of the ways that we're all connected? What is a community?*
When the chain is ready, help children hang it in a meaningful place or give it away as a gift.

VARIATIONS

1. Appreciation Flags

Children can make appreciation flags, with expressions of positive values or friendly wishes. When they hang the flags outside, the children can imagine that each breeze carries their appreciation and friendly wishes from their home to people and places all over the world.



2. Appreciation Journal

Children can also keep appreciation journals, reflecting on simple things they're grateful for every day (friendship, books, family, fun activities, and so on).

MODIFICATION

Writing gratitude lists or journals and sending thank-you notes are ways to adapt *Appreciation Chain* for older children and teens.

awareness meter

We use an awareness meter* to help us notice how we're feeling and communicate it to others.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 5 minutes

SUPPLIES Awareness meters (included in this deck)

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

1. Talking points: *We can feel a lot of different ways—sometimes we feel happy, sometimes sad, sometimes tired, sometimes excited—and these are all natural feelings. There's no right or wrong way to feel, and our feelings change. We probably feel different now than we did this morning, and we'll feel different later in the day than we do now. Sometimes we feel the same as each other, sometimes we feel different, and that's okay too.*
2. Let's take a breath together and notice how we're feeling right now.
3. I'm going to ask you a question about how you're feeling, and you'll answer by pointing to a color on the awareness meter.
Hand an awareness meter from the box to the child.
4. Is it easy to sit still right now, or is it hard?* If it's easy, point to blue; if it's hard, point to red; and if it's in between, point to yellow.

5. Keep your finger on the color, so we can all see how everyone is feeling. Remember there are no right or wrong answers when we're using the awareness meters.

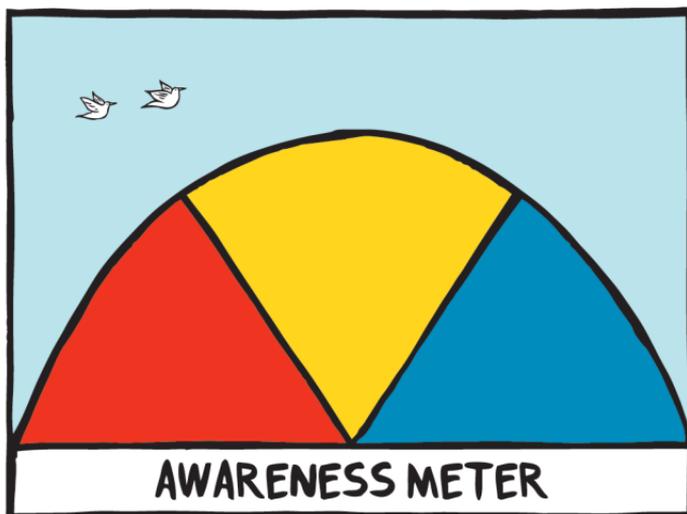
Continue asking questions as long as children seem comfortable and engaged.

TIPS

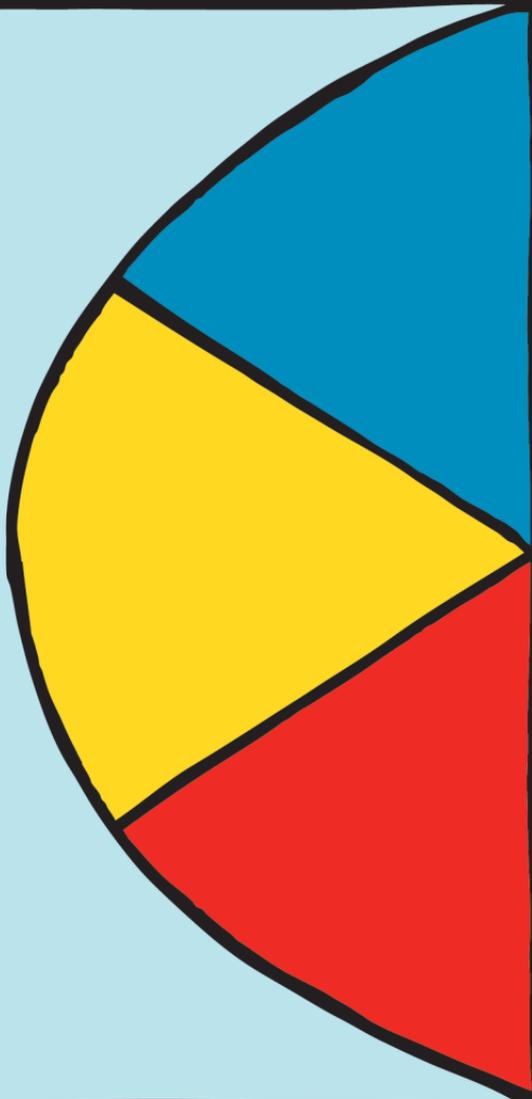
1. If playing with more than two children, photocopy the awareness meter so that you have one for every child.
2. For each question, you may assign any answer to any color on the meter. The awareness meter is deliberately neutral in design to help children notice their feelings without judging them.

**Download an awareness meter at susankaisergreenland.com/downloads.*

**See Pinky Pointing for more examples of questions.*



AWARENESS METER



what did I hear?

We listen carefully to different sounds, and guess what's making them, to become more aware of our experience in the moment.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 3 to 10 minutes

SUPPLIES Instruments and/or objects that make interesting sounds

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

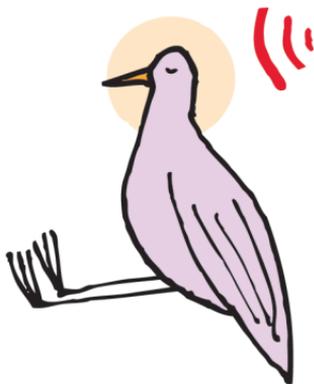
1. Sit with your back straight and your body relaxed, resting your hands gently on your knees, and close your eyes. Notice what it feels like to breathe in and out right now.
2. I'm going to make some sounds with different instruments for you to listen to. You don't have to make any extra effort to hear them; just relax and listen.

Make different sounds using instruments or interesting objects—a shaker, a string instrument, tapping rocks together, shaking coins, for example.

3. Listen closely and see if you can guess what's making the sounds. Just relax and wait for the sounds to appear like little surprises. Try to remember what you heard so you can tell me your guesses at the end.

Continue making sounds for about a minute.

4. Talking points: *Were you able to guess what was making any of the sounds? Were you surprised by what you heard? What was it like to hear different sounds with your eyes closed?*



TIPS

1. Try transitioning straight from *What Did I Hear?* to *Fading Tone* if the children are familiar with it.
2. If the children are uncomfortable closing their eyes, have them focus their gaze on an object, and play the instruments out of sight.

three things in common

When we have a disagreement or misunderstanding with someone (or if they simply get on our nerves), we acknowledge our feelings and think of three things we have in common with that person.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 1 to 5 minutes

AGE All ages

LEADING THE GAME

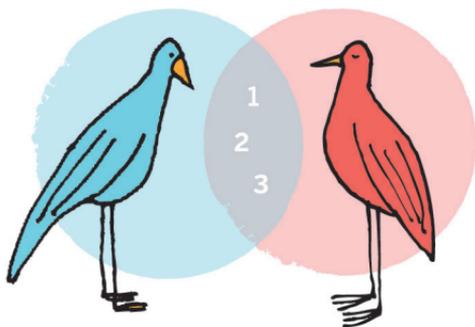
1. Think of someone whom you've had a disagreement with or who gets on your nerves.
2. How do you feel about him or her? How do you think he or she feels about you?
3. I bet you both have something in common. Quickly name three things you have in common.

TIPS

1. Remind the children that the people we love most might also be the ones who annoy us the most. This can be a remarkably helpful shift in perspective for children who have siblings that get on their nerves.
2. *Friendly Wishes for Difficult People* is a useful companion game to *Three Things in Common*. Remember, the goal of both games

is to help the children broaden their perspectives, not to change the way they feel about a person they find difficult.

3. *Three Things in Common* can easily morph into conversations that explore interdependence and how everything changes. Viewing actions through these two themes is a powerful reminder to older children that whatever is happening—good, bad, or neutral—is not entirely about them and will change.



finger trap

When we pull on a finger trap, our fingers gets stuck, but when we relax and stop pulling, our fingers are set free.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 5 minutes

SUPPLIES Small, woven finger-trap toy(s)

AGE Older children, teens

LEADING THE GAME

To prepare, hand out a finger trap to each player.

1. Place your pinky fingers in the two ends of the cylinder, like this.
2. Pull your fingers away from each other and try to pull your fingers out of the trap.

The cylinder will narrow and the children's fingers will get trapped.

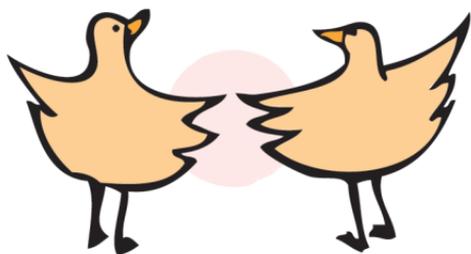
3. Now stop pulling, relax, and breathe. Move your fingers back toward each other.

The tension will ease and the cylinder will get wider, allowing children to take their fingers out of the trap.

4. Talking points: *What's the best way to release your fingers from the trap? How is getting your fingers stuck in the trap similar to getting caught up in thoughts, emotions, and stress?*

TIP

If playing in pairs, ask each child to put a finger in one end of the trap and have the children pull together.



shake it up

We shake our bodies to the sound of a drum to release energy and to help us focus.

LIFE SKILLS



DURATION 5 minutes

SUPPLIES Drum

AGE Young children, older children

LEADING THE GAME

1. Let's pretend to put magic glue on the bottoms of our feet and glue them to the floor.

Mime putting glue on the bottom of one foot and stomping it on the floor; then continue with the other foot. Children will follow your lead.

2. Can you wiggle your knees and keep the bottoms of your feet flat on the floor?

Demonstrate moving your knees while keeping the bottoms of your feet flat on the floor as if they're stuck.

3. Let's move our bodies to the sound of the drum, keeping our feet glued to the floor. Make big movements when you hear loud drumming.

Drum loudly.

4. Make small movements when you hear quiet drumming.

Drum quietly.

5. What do you do if you hear fast drumming?

Drum quickly, and the children will say, move fast.

6. And if you hear slow drumming?

Drum slowly, and the children will say, move slowly.

7. That's it. See if you can follow these sounds, and when the drumming stops, freeze.

Alternate between fast, slow, loud, and quiet drumming. The children will freeze when the drumming stops.

8. Let's relax and feel our breathing for a few moments, and then we'll play again.

Run through the sequence again after the children have had time to settle.



TIPS

1. *Shake It Up* can also be played while sitting down.
2. Use *Shake It Up* to break up a long period of sitting still.
3. Let the children take a turn leading.
4. If you don't have a drum, you can slap your thighs to make a drumming sound.

VARIATION

March in place to the beat of the drum.