

Mindful Self-Compassion in Parenting

Meeting Timing

Highs & Lows: 30-60 minutes

Break: 15-20 minutes

Dev. Moment: 2-5 minutes

Topic Discussion: 30-60 minutes

Match with Topic:

- Self-Care



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“Mindful parenting ... means knowing ourselves inwardly, and working at the interface where our lives meet the lives of our children ... Ultimately, mindful parenting is about seeing our children clearly and listening to and trusting our own hearts”

- Jon Kabat Zinn, author, Mindful Parenting

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MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION IN PARENTING

Introduction

Practicing mindfulness can help you as new parents, tune into the present moment and notice the small joys that come during a very busy time in your lives. Self-compassion is an approach for you to recognize when you might be being self-critical or struggling with difficult challenges of raising children and counter any internal judgement with a kind response, similar to the same care we would use in responding to a loved one feeling down or self-critical.

Three Elements of Self-Compassion (from Dr. Kristin Neff):

Mindfulness: the ability to pause and notice thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the present moment without judgment or over-reactivity

Self-kindness: showing ourselves warmth and comfort, rather than responding with self-criticism in response to suffering

Common Humanity: recognizing that suffering, imperfection, and loss are all part of the human experience and, in that realization, strengthening our empathy and compassion for ourselves and others.

Mindful self-compassion begins with **internal awareness and self-care** and extends to building reflective capacity and compassion as we hold in mind our children's inner world, expectations and desires.

Mindfulness is about deepening our ability to be present in our daily lives and experiencing small moments more fully with all of our senses. This can be especially rewarding in our parenting experience where there is so much to observe, wonder, and enjoy in the ever-changing life with baby.

While mindfulness practice can sometimes have a bonus side effect of feeling relaxed, it is not the goal in itself. **Mindfulness is about cultivating a willingness to tune into your inner world**, regardless of the wide range of emotions you may be experiencing. By approaching that experience with a self-compassionate lens, this practice can help us be more open and less reactive to some of the difficult thoughts and feelings that are part of the human experience.

People often associate mindfulness with seated meditation practice and assume there is no time in their busy daily lives. The good news is that **mindfulness can take many forms and be implemented in small moments**, from traffic jams to tantrums, playtime to cuddles with baby.

Mindfulness examples:

- While standing at a changing table, use that moment to tune into your body, grounding your feet into the floor and adjusting any aches or tightness.
- While driving, use red lights as a reminder to take 3 deep breaths, calm your mind, drop into the present moment and give self-care, even if baby is fussing.
- During a toddler tantrum, label for them what you are seeing: "you are mad right now, your face is hot, and your hands are tight, you need a moment to be mad." Similarly, you can do an internal inventory of thoughts, sensations and emotions you may be experiencing in the same moment: "I'm stressed that they are melting down, my shoulders feel tense, I feel impatient, and I could use a moment to breathe and regroup."

Mindful Self-compassion:

- When bathing baby at end of the day, you could say kind words to yourself about anything that didn't go as planned: "I did my best, now wash away the rest."
- When snuggling with baby after a feeding, reflect on things you are grateful for, things you feel proud of in your parenting that day.

With practice, mindful self-compassion can be something you can pull out of your parenting toolbox to support the other ways you engage with and connect with your baby.

Notes for Group Leaders

Today's experience and discussion is **not meant to be a full training in mindfulness, but rather an introduction** to the experience for parents.

There are several links to research and information on this topic for both leaders and parents on the Leader Portal. These resources can be a helpful primer for parents, and we strongly suggest you preview them and send your group a link or two as a pre-read assignment, prior to discussing this topic.

MINDFUL SELF-COMPASSION IN PARENTING

Discussion Prompts

- Our minds naturally wander all the time. **What types of thoughts distract you from being present in the current moment?**
- What thoughts or emotions come up when you hear the word “mindfulness”? What about “self-compassion”?**
- Self-compassion includes treating ourselves as we would a dear friend.** Can you think of a message you could tell yourself in moments when you feel self-critical?
- For those of you who have practiced mindful self-compassion before, are there any tools or resources that you’d recommend?**

Little Peppers and Second Time Around:

- How does having more than one child impact your ability to tune into yourself/the present moment?**

* Group Activity

Invite the group to try out a mindfulness exercise. Play the 6-minute mindfulness meditation audio track from Listening Mothers and practice as a group. Audio file is located in Leader Resources under 'Mindfulness'.

LEADER – Be sure to review this audio track BEFORE you do this activity with your group.

After practice with audio track:

- What was that experience like for you?
- How do you think mindful self-compassion could support your connection to your baby?
- How do you think mindful self-compassion could support you in your role and identity as a parent?

Focus Points

- Research has shown that mindfulness practice can boost emotional well-being, confidence, self-esteem and satisfaction, **and decrease stress, anxiety and depression.**
- Self-compassion is not self-indulgence or self-pity, but rather a way **to see ourselves in the context of our common humanity, evaluate situations in a more balanced way, enhance motivation, and create space for positive emotions.**
- Mindfulness can **help parents be more attentive** to their babies and can have **positive impacts on how babies respond and connect.**
- It's perfectly normal for our minds to wander. **Mindfulness is a practice** that can feel easier to drop into over time.

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I feel like PEPS actually saved me - I was feeling so isolated and confused, and having support at that critical time was amazing for me, my child, and my marriage.

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* Parent Activities

Choose a part of your daily routine at home with baby to try tuning into the present. Ground yourself in a deep breath, begin to notice: what am I thinking/feeling just now? Are there words of loving kindness I can give to myself and baby in this moment (even if things are imperfect)?

Want to explore mindful self-compassion more deeply? Seattle has a local resource - Listening Mothers - who offers mindful self-compassion groups. You might choose to participate together as a group, or anytime in your parenting journey. More info can be found at: www.communityofmindfulparenting.com

Meeting Plan and Report Notes

Please send your notes, and any new resources and/or tips your group may have gathered to Cate Palmer at catep@peps.org.

WEEK # _____ **DATE** ____ / ____ / ____ **TOPIC** _____

WELCOME *(optional icebreaker as parents gather)* _____

NOTES ON HIGHS & LOWS _____

DEVELOPMENTAL MOMENT _____

TOPIC INTRODUCTION *(A sentence or two on how you would introduce the topic)* _____

DISCUSSION NOTES *(help summarize the topic discussion)* _____

NOTES FROM THE MEETING *(Resources parents share (gear, activities, tips, etc.). Include this in your follow-up email to the group and in your weekly report!)* _____

NOTES FOR YOU *(Things to follow up on, people to check in with later, reminders for next time, situations to manage, etc.)* _____

HOUSEKEEPING *(Reminders for the group, hosting schedule holes, announcements, etc.)* _____