



MINDFULNESS

for Early Childhood Professionals

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ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Stressed? Bring Mindfulness to Work.

Caring for young children can be stressful.

You nurture, teach, prepare meals, change diapers, play, resolve conflicts, and provide the structure that helps children feel safe and secure. But -the pay isn't great. The hours are long. And early childhood professionals have to be the world's best multitaskers, juggling everything from diaper changes to school readiness, from parent meetings to lullabies.

How to manage the day-to-day stress that's part of early childhood work?

You may already know some ways to relieve stress: exercising, hanging out with friends and family, talking to a trusted coworker. **Mindfulness** is another strategy that may help.

Mindfulness is a process of intentionally bringing our attention to what's happening in the present moment with acceptance and openness. It means being curious and not judging our feelings or experiences.

Mindfulness can help reduce stress.

Regular mindfulness practice has been shown to reduce both emotional and physical distress (anxiety, depression, pain) and to decrease the effects of traumatic events (such as family violence or childhood abuse).

Mindfulness training may also protect against burn-out and compassion fatigue for professionals in social service work.

Mindfulness is called a "practice" because it takes time and repetition until this approach feels natural and comfortable.

While it's helpful to have support in practicing mindfulness, there are also some mindfulness strategies you can try on your own. Here's one to try:

The STOP strategy

It's 8:30 in the morning, and most of the toddlers in your care are settled in. Breakfast is over, and you're getting ready to clean up and transition to the morning story. Suddenly, a parent bursts through the door with her son in tow. He's crying and clinging to her for dear life. This family is frequently late and their arrival is always a distraction.

- **Stop.** Pause and focus.
- **Take** a deep breath in and out. Notice how it feels to breathe.
- **Observe.** Acknowledge what is happening, positive or negative, inside you or outside. Let go of judgment and simply note your feelings and responses.

The mom at your door is rushing and stressed. Her child is crying. You note that you're annoyed at this latest interruption. You feel the tension in your neck and shoulders.

In this moment, you recognize your frustration and then let it go. You remind yourself that children often cry at drop-off and that this mom is doing her best. You recognize that your own frustration is momentary and manageable.

- **Proceed.** You've given yourself the space to think about the way you want to respond. By avoiding a cycle of anger and blame, you allow yourself to be present in the moment, and walk to the door with a smile—offering this child and parent a calm, nurturing transition.

ZERO TO THREE's work on the role of mindfulness in early childhood education is just beginning. You can watch for updates [here](#).

For more resources, check out the [Center of Mindful Awareness](#) at the University of Wisconsin and [Greater Good Magazine](#).

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