

# Kids Take a Time-Out... Through Meditation



by Jon D'Auria

The practice of manifesting stillness through meditation is creating a new generation of tranquil, grounded children.

**K**ids today have an almost infinite number of ways to keep themselves stimulated and amused: video games, iPods, cell phones, Internet, television and a slew of other handy diversions. It is a wonder that kids can even engage a curious parent for a brief conversation of “How was your day?” Children’s restlessness is growing as technology and society help them to avoid learning fundamental skills such as focus, patience and calmness. Many children diagnosed with ADD or other medical assessments rely on pills and prescriptions to see them through. Luckily, for those parents who prefer their kids unmedicated, there is a new wave of hope originating from an ancient practice that may help kids calm down: meditation.

Meditation has been on record since 1500 BCE, but introducing it to our western youth in the 21st century is something of a revolution. Meditation may look easy, like little more than sitting still in silence, but believe it or not,

even the most patient of adults at first has trouble keeping up with the discipline. Clearing our head of the million thoughts, memories, tasks, ideas and stresses that flash through our brain by the second is no mean feat. So, given that meditation is a difficult exercise even for adults, you might wonder how it is possible for us to instill it in our kids. The answer is simple: we make it fun and bring it to their level.

“I started teaching it to kindergarteners as a listening activity. Sometimes I would make it so they would have to listen and be quiet to answer questions after,” explains Judy Imamudeen, a certified teacher and member of The Center for Spiritual Living of Tucson. “There’s a lightness about the kids after they meditate. They’re more joyful and

you can really see that they have released stress. You can tell by their posture, demeanor and energy.”

Judy is one of many educators who meld the Eastern and Western traditions by implementing meditation classes for her American students. But the success of these classes is dependent on the teacher’s ability to tailor her practice for the different age groups. Judy explains that “Kids’ attention spans are vastly different, so obviously a five-year-old is not as patient as a twelve-year-old. I usually go by the scale of a minute per age. So, if I have a class of five-year-olds, I’m going to ask them to meditate for five minutes, eight-year-olds for eight minutes. Teenagers might know more about it and might have ideas about what meditation looks like—you sit like this, you act like this – but the smaller kids don’t even know it’s meditation, they just know it’s fun. It’s a break from the normal grind and very popular.”

The benefits of meditation, for a person of any age, are innumerable. The peace, self-awareness, stillness and calm that come with practice can surely enhance anyone’s life for the better. Children, however, are so very imaginative and non-judgmental that they respond quickly and easily to the concepts of meditation. Meditation creates a pathway that helps define their emotions and being, while enhancing their patience and focus; both children and parents can immediately observe these benefits. “Obvi-

ously, from an emotional maturity point of view, it really helps children to be aware of their emotions. Our emotions are not something that we're very open about here in the West. If someone asks use how we're feeling we'll just say, 'okay', not, 'I'm feeling sad,'" laughs Judy. "Meditation really makes you acknowledge how you feel. It creates a genuine emotional awareness and a deepening bond that grows inside children and can easily extend to the parent." From an educator's point of view, however, Judy explains that "It helps kids to focus and gives them the ability to concentrate better. These kids can dive more deeply into a topic because they know how to focus on things. Meditation retrains brains to pause, hold still and focus on a topic."

Meditation is an activity appropriate for kids of almost any age; cutting-edge schools, programs and day care centers start their students on it as early as the age of five. While the effects vary with each unique child, it appears even the youngest students of meditation find the experience pleasurable and rewarding. "I think what's really nice about it, besides the fact that they gain more emotional control, is that the little kids become more aware of what they say and do moment-to-moment," says Judy. "The young kids get just as much out of it, if not more, than the older kids. They are much calmer; which is why I like to do it during stressful times like testing weeks. I also must say that it helps their creativity a lot. With meditation, there is

just the process. There's no right or wrong way to meditate, so there's no fear of failure. It's just relaxed and creative. Images come to them and they want to draw them or talk about them after. It inspires them in ways they might not have experienced before."

Since implementing her practices of reflection, Judy has observed amazing results from kids of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs. She has found that even kids who are confused or skeptical at first eventually adapt and embrace a discipline that helps to clear their young minds. She hopes they will carry this practice with them into adulthood. "Like anything, the more you practice, the better you get at it. The longevity of it really depends on the kid, their appreciation of it, and what their experience with it is like. I hope that their practice with me will plant a seed that allows them to have this tool available for the rest of their lives. If we can encourage them with patience and stillness at a young age, there's no telling what they can achieve when they reach the point of full maturity."

*To learn more about children's meditation, contact The Center for Spiritual Living Tucson (tucsoncsl.org) at info@TucsonCSL.org.*

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