

Calm Bodies, Calm Minds: Helping Children to Be Happy

By Rebecca Bowen, M.Ed.

As parents, we want our children to have a happy childhood, but life these days is fast paced, family schedules are packed, and it seems that life is just too busy. When we do find down time, our children (and most of us, if we are honest) seem to migrate to our digital screens. There is a growing body of research suggesting too much time on electronic devices impacts our children socially and interferes with their abilities to regulate emotions, focus attention, and get to sleep at night.

How do we support our children growing up in this busy, plugged-in world? Join Elementary School Counselors, Derek Tulluck and Rebecca Bowen at 10:30 a.m. on January 6th at the Enumclaw Library for a free event sponsored by SoHaPP to learn how our schools are helping children lead happier lives through developing mindfulness and emotional regulation skills.

Mindfulness is a practice of focusing attention on the present rather than worrying about the future or dwelling on negative past experiences. It involves relaxing with slow deep breaths to calm the body as well as intentional focus on calm thoughts or, simply letting thoughts go. Emotional regulation is the ability to effectively manage and respond to emotional experiences. In short, mindfulness and emotional regulation help a child to experience calm and be happy.

Ten Strategies to Help Your Child Be Calm

1. Raise your child's awareness of her body's signals about feelings. Just like learning what it feels like to be hungry and thirsty, children can learn to be mindful of emotions and what they feel like in their bodies.
2. Teach your child to take slow deep breaths to signal his brain to calm down.
3. Provide practice being still and relaxed. Incorporate into the family schedule quiet times which are free of electronics.
4. Help children develop positive self-talk, to think about happy events, and to create happy mind pictures as a way to manage negativity and anxious thoughts.
5. Create a calm down spot in your home where your child can safely regulate without an audience or distractions.
6. Foster creative activities such as reading, drawing, or playing with building toys to stimulate the "thinking brain" and allow the "feeling brain" to calm down.
7. Encourage your child to walk, run, or engage in large movement activities to jump start a calming response in her brain.
8. Gather a supply of self-soothing items so your child can hug a stuffed animal, squeeze a "stress" ball, or wrap themselves in a heavy blanket when they are upset.
9. Provide opportunities for your child to talk about and name feelings he is experiencing.
10. Spend family time together in nature.

Interested in learning more strategies that promote happiness? SoHaPP is hosting a Book Group event at the Enumclaw Library from 7:00-8:30 pm on January 17th to discuss ***Wherever You Go, There You Are***, by Jon Kabat-Zinn and explore ways to incorporate mindfulness and meditation into everyday life. SoHaPP is a community initiative that encourages healthy habits, supporting mental wellness and increasing happiness. See www.SoHaPP.org

Rebecca Bowen, M.Ed., is an Elementary School Counselor in the Enumclaw School District and author of [***My Incredible Talking Body: Learning to Be Calm***](#), a children's picture book with a learning guide to support the development of emotional wellness in children. To learn more visit: www.EmotionalWellnessProject.com.