

How to meditate with a million kids

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For a long time, I pictured meditation as an image of serenity—a wide open Zen-like room, a vision of a person clad in a muted purple flowing robe, sitting cross-legged on a mat, eyes closed and mind relaxed. Meditation, to me, conjured feelings of peacefulness, calmness, quietness, and above all else, stillness.

Which is why the image of meditating amidst the chaos of having young children at home seemed so improbable to me. But having kids at home *is* my reality, so it's time to set the record straight: meditating doesn't always have to be pretty to get the job done.

I have to be honest with you: I'm not the type of parent who came equipped naturally oozing with buckets of patience. I'm the type of parent who needs time—quiet time, sleep time, alone time, time to have one complete thought in my head time—to feel my best.

But of course, that necessary time can be hard to find during the busy days of raising a family, especially when the kids are young (and loud, so very loud.) In the days of parenting “in the trenches,” I was longingly reading self-care articles that tout the benefits of quieting your mind through meditation, or hearing from professionals like Arianna Huffington, who [starts her day with a morning of meditation](#), and I couldn't help but feel defeated. I was lucky if I was able to use the bathroom in the morning before my kids woke up, despite my best efforts. (Children have a built-in sensor when their parents plan to get up early to be productive, this I have learned.)

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But the truth is every minute of every day can feel unpredictable in this stage of life, so instead of feeling overwhelmed by everything I was *not* able to do as a parent of young kids, I instead started to focus on incorporating small moments of meditation and mindfulness throughout my day. These are a few of the techniques that have helped me the most while searching for the mindfulness all busy parents inevitably need.

I acknowledge what I'm feeling without judgment. So much of my frustration as a mother stems from how we think we “should” feel while fighting against how we really feel. For example, a “good” parent wouldn't be so annoyed with their kid for asking the same question 10,000 times. A “good” parent wouldn't loathe bath time with every fiber of her stretch-marked soul. She also probably wouldn't sigh loudly when she's interrupted doing nothing particularly important, except *trying to eat her breakfast*. But the truth is, fighting against those feelings never actually helps, does it? Instead of berating myself for feeling a certain

way, I'm instead teaching myself to simply be mindful and acknowledge that feeling—the irritation, the annoyance, the exhaustion, whatever it may be—for what it is without judgment. I just note the feeling and move on.

I use Headspace. Full disclosure: I use to scoff at guided meditation aides, feeling a bit silly while doing them, and fighting against using technology for something that's supposed to make me feel unplugged. But technology can be used for more than just filtering your face with a flower crown. Case in point, I've found that one of my biggest stress triggers in my day-to-day is the time between dinner and bedtime. I have four kids, ranging from age two to eight; the chaos of cleaning up after dinner, getting everyone ready for bed and picking up the disaster they wreaked on the house all day, coupled with my mounting fatigue and dwindling patience equaled a potential meltdown.

The Headspace app reminds me that instilling a habit like meditation is more effective when you do it at the same time every day, so I decided to use it during this post-dinner chaos. Simply pressing “play” while I do the dishes helps me focus on getting through each task more calmly.

When in doubt, I focus on my breath. Despite my best intentions, I'm not always able to finish my meditation sessions in the midst of parenting. So when in doubt, I forget everything else and simply focus on my breath to help keep me calm. It might sound silly to focus on something we do unconsciously all day every day, and you may be thinking, “Tell me how breathing is going to help when the baby has pooped, the phone is ringing, the toddler is trying to run away, and the older kids are whining for lunch?” But I promise it can help. A lot. Simply by focusing on deep, steady breathing while you're changing the sheets or making lunch, you can counteract the harmful short and long-term effects that the stress response will have on your body. And just like anything else in life, those small actions add up. Your body sees stress as stress—it can't tell the difference between a mental stressor or getting chased by a lion. But deep breathing helps to circumvent that stress circuit.

I embrace the small moments. Raise your hand if you spend a lot of time in the car. Am I seeing a lot of hands raised? I thought so. My dirty little secret for bringing more calm into my life is that I use the car as my recharging station. I may purposely load the kids up 10 minutes early, for example, and drive around for a bit, just to listen to the Headspace commuting single session. I'm hoping that by the time my children are old enough to realize it does not actually take 30 minutes to get to the grocery, they won't mind because they too will want to listen to these sessions.

If you ask me, no one needs meditation and mindfulness in their day more than parents to young kids. Yet we can often feel incapable of fitting the practice into our days. What makes fitting that practice in a little easier is knowing you don't need that Zen-like, open-air studio and silky robe to get a little peace—you can actually find it just while scrubbing last night's dirty pan while the kids try to avoid the bath ... which is essentially the same thing, right?

Learn more about Headspace for Kids:

The author of this post is an editorial contributor to Headspace. These are their views, experiences and results and theirs alone. This contributor was paid for their writing.