

Tips for Doing Lions Quest Mindfulness Exercises with Adolescents

At this stage of life, adolescents are becoming more self-directed and are able to think and reason abstractly. They are able to recognize, identify, observe, and label thoughts and feelings, and their developing language skills help them express and reflect on those thoughts and feelings. However, because adolescence is the most rapid period of growth and development, thoughts and feelings can become overwhelming and confusing. That is why mindfulness and other self-regulation practices help adolescents thrive, as well as manage stress, anxiety, depression, and addictive behaviors that can emerge during this time. In addition, adolescents need autonomy and freedom of choice to feel like they have some control over their experiences.

Mindfulness exercises may be beneficial to practice as a family as well as one-on-one with your adolescent.

Following are simple tips for engaging your adolescent with mindfulness exercises:

TRY OUT THE EXERCISES FOR YOURSELF. It's always best to do the exercises yourself before sharing them with your adolescent so that you are comfortable and familiar with them. By doing these exercises yourself, you may discover that that you are becoming a more patient and responsive parent. Notice how your calm behavior supports the social, emotional, and academic learning needs of your adolescent. Mindfulness is for adults, too!

INTRODUCE MINDFULNESS AS A FUN ACTIVITY. Tell your adolescent that you have some interesting exercises that the two of you can do together to help manage stress and have a good day. Make mindfulness part of having some quality time together.

PARTICIPATE WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT. Let your adolescent know that you will be participating in these exercises. Adolescents are much more likely to do these exercises if you share in the experience.

FIND A QUIET AND COMFORTABLE SPACE. Find a place with enough space and no distractions. A quiet space is ideal, as it supports turning the attention inside. Some people like to dim the lights. Turn off all media unless you choose to play soft instrumental music in the background.

GIVE YOUR ADOLESCENT AUTONOMY IN POSTURE AND REFLECTION. Get into a mindful posture, which is generally a comfortable seated position, either in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. You and your adolescent will sit up straight with hands on the thighs. Give freedom of choice about whether to close the eyes or gaze softly toward the floor as well as whether to sit, lie down, or stand. If you or your adolescent choose to lie down or stand, find a comfortable position that can be held for up to 10 minutes. At the end of the exercise, suggest a variety of ways to reflect together—writing, talking, drawing, etc.

CREATE A DAILY HABIT. Adolescents like to mix things up. Choose a couple of times in the course of the day where mindfulness could become a powerful daily habit. Sometimes you can do it after breakfast and sometimes before bed. If you get a schedule going, soon you will both become better at expressing feelings, maintaining self-control, listening, and having positive relationships.

