

PARENTING AS PRACTICE

“The easiest way to relax is to stop trying to make things different. Struggle comes from not accepting what is present.”

It can be difficult if you have young children to find the time to do your practice. Try as often as you can to carry out the home practice, but if you are struggling why not explore ways to carry out your practice at the same as you are doing your daily parenting?

“You could look at each baby as a little Buddha, or Zen master, your own private mindfulness teacher, parachuted into your life, whose presence and actions were guaranteed to push every button and challenge every belief and limit you had, giving you continual opportunities to see where you were attached to something and to let go of it.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn *Wherever You Go There You Are*

- Babies and children require your full presence as a being in order to grow and thrive. They need to be held, walked with, sung to, rocked, played with, comforted, sometimes late at night or early in the morning when you are feeling exhausted and only want to sleep. The deep and constantly changing needs of your child is the perfect opportunity for you as a parent to be fully present rather than operate on automatic pilot, to relate consciously rather than mechanically, to sense the being in each child and let his or her own vibrancy, and purity call forth your own. (Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go There You Are*)

Here are some ideas:

- Sit your child in your lap or lying close to you and follow not just your breath, but both your breath
- Do your yoga with them, letting them climb on to you; playing around on the floor with them.
- Walk with your child, holding them against your shoulder, feeling the warmth of their body on yours, the sound of their breath in your ear, your breath and theirs – together, feel the heaviness of their body on your shoulder... FEEL your child in your arms as you walk up and down
- Observe your child in silence sometimes. Listen more carefully to them. Read their body language. Assess their self-esteem by watching how they carry themselves, what they draw, what they see, how they behave.
- What are their needs in this moment? At this time of day? At this stage in their life?
- Ask yourself: ‘How can I help them, right now?’ Then follow what your heart tells you. Just being centred yourself, fully present, open and available, is a great gift for them.

“Parenting and family life can be a perfect field for mindfulness practice, but it’s not for the weak-hearted, the selfish or lazy, or the hopelessly romantic. Parenting is a mirror that forces you to look at yourself. If you can learn from what you observe, you just may have a chance to keep growing yourself.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn *Wherever You Go There You Are*

You may be interested in:

‘*Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting*’ by Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn