

The “What” and “How” Skills of Mindful Awareness in EcoPlay

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There are six skills of mindful awareness. They are divided up into “what” skills and “how” skills. The “what” skills are what you do to be mindful, and the “how” skills are how you do what you do to be mindful.

The “What” Skills

Observing

When we are preoccupied with thoughts of the past or the future, we are in *Thinking Mode*. Thinking Mode takes us away from experiencing the world directly with our senses; or *Sensing Mode*. *Mindful Awareness* teaches us to focus on the world experienced directly by our senses: touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight. Experiencing life in sensing mode introduces us to a richer world. It’s impossible to be bored or apathetic if you treat each experience as if it is happening to you for the first time, through your senses. EcoPlay helps you and your children to have sensory experiences in the present, in nature. The experiential activities of EcoPlay help your children get out of their heads and into their hearts, in the moment.

Describing

This skill of Mindful Awareness involves observing the smallest details of an object, event or activity. *Describing* means approaching each daily activity as if you are experiencing it for the first time. Explore as many dimensions of it as you can. When we gain experience with this technique, we can apply it to other areas of our lives as well. For example, by looking at your negative thought processes, and identifying and labeling them as such, you are better able to recognize them simply as processes, and not as part of who you are as a person. EcoPlay teaches you and your children to describe experiences without judging them or labeling them as “good” or “bad.”

Participating

Mindful Awareness allows you to experience every aspect of an activity. We have a tendency, when in thinking mode, to see things and activities as either “all bad” or “all good.” This is not necessarily an accurate depiction of reality. Most activities aren’t inherently good or bad. We’ve taught ourselves to think of them in such terms, but we can also teach ourselves a different way. Think about an unpleasant activity that you have to engage in on a regular basis, such as washing the dishes or taking out the trash. Can you think of any pleasant aspects of these activities? There are enjoyable aspects to every experience, if we train ourselves to look for them. Even if we find ourselves caught in an activity in which we can find no pleasure at all, at least we have the pleasure of thinking about how good we’ll feel when the activity is over! As you engage in EcoPlay activities with your child, focus on the pleasurable aspects of your relationship with your child, enjoying your time together in nature. You and your child are making memories together that you will both cherish for the rest of your lives!

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The “How” Skills

Non-judgmental

Mindful Awareness teaches us the art of acceptance. Emotional reactions to our circumstances are natural, but that doesn't mean that we have to respond to these emotions. The mindful skill of being non-judgmental teaches us that we can experience these emotions without engaging in cycles of behavior that lead us to negative consequences. We can choose which thoughts and emotions we wish to respond to, and which just to sit quietly with, in Being Mode.

If we should engage in thoughts and behaviors that lead to negative consequences, this does not mean that we have become *bad* persons. This simply means that we are human beings, and as humans we are entitled to make mistakes. Each mistake is an opportunity for growth and learning. Being non-judgmental means seeing the world as it is, without judgments or assumptions. When we can do so, we have achieved “Beginner’s Mind” or “Child’s Mind,” which is the art of experiencing everything as if seeing it for the first time. Being *non-judgmental* in Ecoplay means not labeling your child’s behavior as “good” or “bad,” but instead linking choices to consequences in a positive, intentional way.

One-mindful

There have been times when I have been engaged in other activities while eating chocolate kisses, my favorite candy. On those occasions, I’ve eaten the last kiss without realizing that it was the last one. Whenever this has happened, I’ve gotten a little upset that I didn’t realize that I had eaten the last one, thinking, *“If I had known that I was eating the last one, I would have enjoyed it more.”* What is it about knowing that I’m on the last kiss that makes eating it more enjoyable? That particular kiss isn’t any different from the rest of the ones in the bag. What makes the experience of the last kiss different that I have focused all of my attention on enjoying it, *because* it is the last one. What if we could learn to make every kiss the “last” one?

When engaging in Ecoplay with your child, be in the moment, and teach your child to do the same. Being *one-mindful* in Ecoplay means realizing that you have nowhere to go and nothing to do but to enjoy this special time in nature with your child, making every moment “the last kiss.”

Effective

We can talk about problems all day, but until we start talking about solutions, nothing will ever get solved. The way to solve a problem is to take positive, intentional steps towards finding a solution.

All of the skills of mindfulness come together in the power of intention. A mindful life is a life lived deliberately. Such a consciously lived life is not driven about on the winds of whim and fortune. It is a purposeful life. The power of intention helps us to solve problems in a purposeful manner. It is possible to live a life of purpose through tapping into this power. The way to use the power of intention is to begin by asking two questions:

1. What am I trying to accomplish here?
2. Are my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors going to help me to achieve this goal?

When we live in mindful awareness, our thoughts, behaviors, and actions always support our intention. When you intentionally enjoy nature with your child, you are engaging in a solution-focused, effective way to strengthen your bonds. You are also modeling for your child an intentional mode of living and being in the world.