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## Silence for Children in a Fast-Paced, Nature-Deprived, and Digital World

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Silence for Children in a Fast-Paced, Nature-Deprived, and Digital World

Erin Sheehan

December 2017

Melissa Jean/Nancy Waring

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December 2017

### **Acknowledgements**

I feel immense gratitude to have been a part of this Mindfulness Studies program at Lesley University for the past three years. Specifically, I am grateful for the genuine and ongoing guidance and support from Nancy Waring. Her knowledge of this emerging field, both personal and professional, along with her generous spirit to the students in the program, will undoubtedly contribute to the success of the program.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all of the professors who shared their own knowledge, passion, vision, expertise, and support over the years. My journey in mindfulness is colored and influenced by the beautiful minds of Mariana Funes, Chip Hartranft, Kim Nolan, Wendy Hasenkamp, and Melissa Jean. I am forever indebted for the wisdom shared.

When I began this online program I was not prepared for the very personal and enduring friendships that would be forged with my fellow classmates. Their humor, insights, and support carried me through and enlightened my path. In particular, thank you to Sherri Henderson for hearing and knowing me right away, and always sharing so much kindness and understanding in this friendship. Thank you to all of the generous spirits that have shared so much with me through the years: Lauren, Allison, Cynthia, Charity, Andrew, Betsy, Jen, Gina, Marjatta, Joanne, Kathleen, Yasemin, Ashely, Stephanie, Nia-Sue, Julie, and Carla.

I would also like to acknowledge that obtaining this masters degree would never have been possible without the immense and daily love and support of my own family. My husband and four growing children have supported my journey in mindfulness and these years of learning with their own awareness and practice. Their love was boundless. I would also like to acknowledge the immense support that my parents, brothers and sisters have always been in my life, and in these years as a student again. It has been a sincere privilege to earn this degree.

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the potential benefits of integrating mindfulness practice into family life based on the idea of the changing nature of modern childhood. This changing nature increases the need for mindfulness interventions and will be discussed based on three main themes: the increase in speed of life and subsequent stress, decrease in free-play and time spent in nature, and the inundation of digital influence and distraction. There will be a focus on the notion of silence as an important element of mindfulness practice. This paper will offer an initial understanding of these topics based on a broad generalization of “family” as children being raised in a home with any variation of parent relationship. The purpose of this discussion and project is to provide parents with an understanding of mindfulness practice for the whole family. Based on the research and publications utilized in this study, mindfulness would be an effective practice for parents and children to utilize to combat some of negative affects seen in today’s youth population. Further research on measuring outcomes and benefits would be a worthwhile area of study.

*Keywords:* modern childhood, digital mindfulness, digital distraction, nature, silence

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## Silence for Children in a Fast-Paced, Nature-Deprived, and Digital World

With each new generation there are important conversations about the unique factors that play a role in influencing this group towards adulthood. As advances are made in technology and culture at great speed, no childhood is essentially the same as it was generations ago. Today's youth are facing their own inimitable childhood complete with ever-changing technological advancements and factors that will inevitably affect the adulthood that they journey towards. Parents have new considerations as they work to make skillful decisions in guiding their youth toward physical and emotional health and well being.

The following discussion will explore three main topics for today's parents and caretakers: the changing nature of childhood, the growing mindfulness momentum for adults and children, and silence in mindfulness practice. These topics are meant to assist in pointing parents towards bringing mindfulness into their lives as well as the lives of their children. Four digital booklets, referred to as field guides, were created as an addendum to this paper to provide parents with instruction and inspiration in this journey of mindfulness for the family.

### **The Changing Nature of Childhood**

In my personal and direct experience as a parent, I have been aware of the changing nature of modern childhood as I work to navigate raising well-adjusted and emotionally balanced children. Watching this arena speed up with increased pressure in activities and achievement started when my first child was still an infant. I noticed that screens became omnipresent in the hands of toddlers as onlookers questioned why my little one wasn't engaging in the educational games that iPads had to offer. I also noticed that time spent outdoors, just exploring was limited, even for my own children.

At the same time, I was aware at how engaging nature was for the little eyes and hands of growing children, and how their behavior and moods were affected negatively when they had enjoyed too much screen time. As I made efforts for my children to get outside more, turn the television off, say no to childhood digital devices, I also became aware of my own reactions to these quieter and slower modes of being. When I began to commit seriously to a daily meditation practice, it became clear that mindfulness belonged in childhood, especially to combat some of the negative effects of these main themes.

### **Age of Speed and Stress**

The most recent “Stress in America” survey from American Psychological Association shows that stress factors increasingly affect American’s well-being. This stress comes from many factors and takes on many forms, and is often propelled by our culture that supports speed as a valuable attribute and schedules that are full. As compared to previous generations, we are a highly connected society who enjoy and rely on instant access to a deluge of information, news, and entertainment. There is a link between the stress that we experience and our overall physical and emotional health. Our doctor’s offices are filled with people suffering from conditions brought on by stress that include insomnia, migraines, hypertension, asthma and gastrointestinal trouble.

Where childhood was once seen as a time of freedom and play, it is now usually much more scheduled with young people being overbooked and stressed (Willard & Saltzman, 2010). As our culture speeds up, the effects of a fast-paced and stressed out culture can be seen in childhood as well. Childhood schedules are packed and pressure filled, mirroring the adults in their lives. This leaves little time for important and slower acts like unsupervised time with friends or even just daydreaming (Honore, 2005).

The increased speed and pressure affects children's health as stress increases conditions like upset stomach, headache, insomnia, depression, and eating disorders (Honore, 2005). These affects follow youth into their teenage years. According to a 2014 survey from the APA, teens carry stress levels that rival adults and make them less likely to sleep well, exercise or eat healthy foods (2014).

Trends show a growing number of children, adolescents, and teens being diagnosed and treated for emotional and behavioral disorders. Depression and anxiety continue to be on the rise for youth and many of them are often treated with medication. Even more troubling, are the rising rates of youth suicide. According to a recent New York Times article, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that as of 2014, middle school students are just as likely to die from suicide as a traffic accident (Tavernise, 2016).

Dr. Marsha Levy-Warren, a clinical psychologist in New York who works with adolescents, elaborates her experience in this same article "It's clear to me that the question of suicidal thoughts and behavior in this age group has certainly come up far more frequently in the last decade than it had in the previous decade. Cultural norms have changed tremendously from 20 years ago" (Tavernise, 2016). A few trends that contribute to the speed and stress apparent in childhood are the tendency to keep children overscheduled, pressure of highly-competitive sports, and digital interactions.

**Overscheduled.** With many extra-curricular activities, children are not left with the time to do nothing, a time for them to just be. Psychiatrists and educators conclude that enrolling children in too many activities is a problem in the United States. The ubiquitous terminology of "keeping up with the Joneses" no longer just relates to what each family has to show for themselves as far as cars and fancy homes. The new keeping up relates to the number of teams or



activities children are committed to and how many accolades they have acquired. In addition, a lot of this scheduled time is adult-led which decreases the important time of time free play. Free play time allows children to practice having control and asserting themselves when adults are not present. Because children are often scheduled for events with teachers and coaches for a good portion of their day, they are not afforded this essential time.

Previous generations spent more time in outdoor sports and activities without adult supervision. Children were able to make their own decisions and solve problems and learn how to get along with their peers (Lahey, 2014). This is seen as incredible valuable for children in their healthy development that works to strengthen social bonds and build emotional maturity. In fact, studies have shown that the more “structured” time kids spend, the less self control they exhibited (Lahey, 2014).

**Youth sports and pressure in childhood.** The pressures that children face can sometimes come from the sports activities that they take part in. Youth sports in the United States have changed in the recent decade to include more competition at travel league levels, and also off-season options. Where previous generations might have played one sport a season and changed the sport throughout the year, today’s children sometimes play on more than one team in a season. Sports schedules increase pressure on children by requiring more time and commitment.

There are of course many benefits to playing youth sports including exercise, team building, and time management skills, but there is a trend for this time to be out of balance and leading to more stress for children. In addition, the growing competitiveness in youth sports is sometimes linked to achievement that might assist with college acceptance and scholarships. This also increases the pressure on children, where sports might feel fun and playful for some,

others might be pressured to achieve for the adults in a child's life including parents, coaches, potential coaches in higher learning and others. In his book, *Free to Learn*, developmental psychologists Peter Gray explains that one reason for the rise in structured activities is "the ever-increasing focus on children's performance, which can be measured, and decreasing concern for true learning, which is difficult of impossible to measure" (2013, p.9). Although his conversation revolves around education and schooling, the idea of measuring performance can be seen in sports and other extra-curricular activities.

**Digital culture.** Children growing up in America today are very used to the digital world that surrounds them and that they interact with. Early learning games and instruction are provided by digital applications that can be used on kid-friendly devices like iPads, handheld smartphones, laptops, and watches. Popular culture supports integrating daily activities with digital devices starting as toddlers. These toddlers grow into children who quickly connect with social media application and platforms where their development in interacting with others is based on screens and digital technology. These digital technologies have changed much in the landscape of childhood that are being researched and addressed by doctors, psychologies, educators, parents and other professionals.

### **Children in a Nature-Deprived Childhood**

With the increase in supervised and competitive activities, some important elements of childhood, like unstructured time and time spent in nature, have decreased dramatically. Children spend less time playing and interacting with their natural world "A kid today can likely tell you about the Amazon rainforest – but not about the last time he or she explored the woods in solitude, or lay in a field listening to the wind and watching the clouds move" (Louv, p. 1-2, 2008). As children connect more with images and activity on screens, they are more

disconnected from their natural surroundings. A growing group of researchers believe that this disconnection has massive implications for human health and child development including and increase in mental afflictions, obesity, and sleep deprivation (Pang, 2013).

Dr. Richard Louv has written on this subject with research and passion, authoring nine books, including *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* and *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual Age*. He is also co-founder and chairman emeritus of the Children & Nature Network, an organization helping build the movement to connect today's children and future generations to the natural world. Louv coined the term Nature-Deficit Disorder® which has become the defining phrase of this important issue.

Louv shares research that when children spend less time in the natural world this impacts the broadness of their human experience as their senses narrow and natural becomes an abstraction (2008). Essential to this look at the changing nature of childhood is how the remarkable research that shows the link between time spent in nature and health of mind body and spirit (Louv, 2008). So as our children spend less time in nature, their overall physical and emotional health is in decline.

In 2013 a three-year research project by the RSPB, showed that according to the conservation group's scoring system, four out of five children in the UK are not adequately "connected to nature"(Vaughn, 2013). The results of the study also suggest that girls have a better connection with nature than boys. (Vaughn, 2013). The study is considered groundbreaking in that there had been little robust scientific attempt to measure and track children's connection to nature and that now the problem might receive the attention it deserves (Vaughn, 2013).

Additionally, filmmaker David Bond produced a film called, “Project Wild Thing” exploring why children spend less time playing outdoors and interacting with nature. His research in London schools showed children spoke of having "other priorities" than the outdoors” (Vaughn, 2013). He thinks this study is important because children’s interaction with nature is finally being measured and according to this measurement system there is a problem and that it will probably get worse. He also shared the culprits of decreased nature time as increased screentime, misplaced fears over "stranger danger,” but also the more fundamental commercialization of childhood (Vaughn, 2013).

### **Digital Culture and Distraction**

One immense factor in the changing landscape of childhood is the rise in technology and digital devices that are used by all different age levels in American households. The constant stream of information and communication channels that are readily available throughout the day on a variety of devices are having an effect on the way in which we interact with others, our world, and ourselves. This technology at our constant reach, often leaves us in a constant state of distraction. Much research is being done on how this distraction is effecting the health of adults and children.

**Digital distraction.** Modern society is inundated with screens that do everything from connect us in text chatter across the globe, provide us with data and imagery of virtually anything we can imagine, and help us control our other household devices. With the touch of our finger, these small, medium, and large screens in our lives deliver information and entertainment in seconds. We therefore have the easy ability to distract us away from our inner worlds of thoughts and emotions. Digital distraction also points to the realization that we literally screen

off our actual world, with all its ruggedness and rawness, and fit whatever is happening into a virtual world of sound, pictures, and videos we carry in our pockets (Lief, 2014).

This digital distraction can include how we gain knowledge about world events, and also how we communicate interpersonally with friends and family in our lives. Even with activities that seem to be beneficial like chatting with a friend who lives far away, the issue with distraction comes from the way in which most people lack the balance of interacting with their devices. Most adults are attached to their devices, and constantly checking their emails, social media accounts, and text for updates. This now extends to adolescents and children.

Given the recent domination of handheld technology included in childhood and adolescence, it has become important for parents, professionals, and educators to consider the possible connection between being “plugged-in” and mental and physical health. “Nielsen and the Pew Research Center have found that American’s spend an average of 60 hours a month online, or 720 hours a year” (Pang, 2013, 10). Children’s usage continues to increase as well. Recent research into how the brain is effected by our digital distraction is beginning to shed light on important considerations.

All of this research is informing important dialogue about how to combat some of the negative effects. At the same time, brain research into the effects of mindfulness practice, including meditation, is also growing and showing results that support the notion that it can provide needed health benefits for the distracted modern person.

### **The Mindfulness Momentum for Adults and Children**

This paper has explored some relevant themes into the changing nature of modern childhood including speed and stress, lack of time spent playing nature, and digital technologies.

Part of that discussion included the ways in which these trends are having negative affects on the overall well being of today's youth. At the same time, there is a growing mindfulness momentum happening as well. Mindfulness has been enjoying a surge in mainstream attention in Western culture including the United States. As culture, news, and technology continue to move at break neck speeds, people seem to be looking for authentic connections with others and themselves. Societies across the globe suffer with injustice, violence, bigotry, and fear. Mindfulness is being used to cultivate compassion and equanimity. As rates of disease continue to climb including symptoms of depression and anxiety, individuals and organizations that crave balance and sustainable methods of well being are turning towards the ancient practice of mindfulness.

There are some individuals who have imported mindfulness into the United States from their original countries and culture, like the revered Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. His many books discuss bringing mindfulness, peace, and awareness into the present moment, into our work, our relationships, and our communications. Thich Nhat Hanh defines mindfulness as “our ability to be aware of what is going on both inside us and around us. It is the continuous awareness of our bodies, emotions, and thoughts” (2008, p. 6). His direct and simple way of informing the lay reader includes bringing mindfulness to conversations on work, love, peace, and also childhood.

There were others who traveled to India to learn about mindfulness under teachers and spiritual leaders there and then brought their experiences back to the US. Three such individuals - Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, and Jack Kornfield – returned from India and started the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts in 1976. The center continues today to spread instruction on insight meditation available for all people.

Another incredibly influential importer of secular mindfulness in American culture is Jon Kabat-Zinn. His own journey in mindfulness began as an undergraduate student at MIT where he learned under his first Zen teacher. Although he was trained as a molecular biologist at MIT, Kabat-Zinn was inspired to use mindfulness in clinical settings by creating the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts in 1979 that became his renowned Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. He defines mindfulness as “awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally,” (2005, p. 11). Mindfulness in these terms usually means the combination of a formal practice, like sitting meditation, with informal practice that allows for certain traits to be cultivated and displayed throughout our activities in daily life.

### **Mindfulness for Adults**

As mindfulness practice becomes more commonplace in many areas of Western society, interventions are emerging in fields including education, health services, personal wellness, law enforcement, restorative justice, and psychology. Mindfulness practice is being discussed in journals like TIME Magazine, New York Times Magazine, and The Wall Street Journal. A growing body of research, training courses, and evaluation tools exists on how mindfulness practices can affect different physical and emotional health issues. This research shows potential for physical and mental health.

**Potential benefits of mindfulness practice.** In recent years there has been an upsurge in mindfulness research. According to the American Mindfulness Research Association, in 2014, 535 research papers were published on the topic of mindfulness meditation as compared to three in 1980 (Schlanger, 2015). Dr. Richard Davidson and Dr. Daniel Goleman used very rigorous scientific standards to sift through meditation research and found that in the solid studies, there

was revealed four real benefits from mindfulness: stronger focus, staying calmer under stress, better memory, and good corporate citizenship” (Goleman, 2017).

**The neuroscience behind meditation.** Research on the brain, and how meditation might effect its functioning and health, shows some exciting potential for neuroplasticity. Dr. Richard Davidson is the founder and director of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and engages in research connected with contemplative practice. He shares that most of the time, the forces around us are constantly shaping our brains and that meditation intentionally guides that practice by influencing functional and structural changes in our brain (Schlanger, 2015).

Specifically, studies show that meditators showed benefits for healthy brains as they age as compared to their non-meditating counterparts. These studies show benefits that include less loss of gray matter over time and reduced brain aging (Lunders, Kurth, & Cherbuin 2015, and Kurth, Cherbuin, & Luders 2017). What this research is pointing to, in simpler terms, is that engaging in a regular meditation practice might help you grow more brain (Schlanger, 2015).

### **Mindfulness for Children**

Mindfulness for youth maintains much of the same themes and concepts used with adults, but with some age-appropriate modifications. Dr. Christopher Willard and Dr. Amy Saltzman have been working professionally with children, integrating mindfulness strategies and practices for many years and share this differentiated kid-friendly definition of mindfulness for children “Mindfulness is paying attention, here and now, with kindness and curiosity, so that we can choose our behavior” (2015, p. 5). In addition, essential in mindfulness practice for both adult and children, is to use this sort of awareness towards our experience while also being non-judgmental, curious, and kind.



Teaching mindfulness to children is different than teaching to adults, but certain core elements are consistent that include paying attention to the present moment, anchoring in the breath, focusing on sensations of the physical body, and formal and informal mindfulness practices (Weare, 2012). In addition, it becomes important, just as with adults, to keep a daily practice going. Important to looking at mindfulness for children is reviewing the current research that is available pointing towards potential benefits and also seeing where it can already be found in society.

**Potential benefits of mindfulness for children.** There are researchers who have been able to start pointing toward the potential benefits of meditation for youth. This existing research usually agrees that some benefits for children and adolescents includes an increase in memory, concentration, and self-confidence and a decrease in stress, aggressiveness, and anxiety. Some other documented benefits for children include: increased social skills, increased ability to orient attention, increased working memory and planning and organization, increased self esteem, increased sense of calmness, relaxation, and self acceptance, increased quality of sleep, decreased test anxiety, decreased ADHD behaviors- specifically hyperactivity and impulsivity, decreased negative affect/ emotions, decreased anxiety, decreased depression, and fewer conduct and anger management problems (Research on mindfulness).

In addition, research shows that mindfulness for children supports the development of self-regulation:

Mindfulness training—using age-appropriate activities to exercise children’s reflection on their moment- to-moment experiences—may support the development of self-regulation by targeting top-down processes while lessening bottom-up influences (such as

anxiety, stress, curiosity) to create conditions conducive to reflection, both during problem solving and in more playful, exploratory ways. (Zelazo & Lyons, 2012, p. 154). Mindfulness can also offer children the ability to learn to be alone in strong and important ways, and forge healthy relationships with themselves and others. Current culture usually shows children ways to stay busy and distracted when they feel negative emotions and social media allows them to continue checking with the outside world. Mindfulness instruction and practice offers them a way to connect instead to their internal experience, “become curious about it, tolerate it, maybe even learn from it and have fun in the process. In this way we raise happier, healthier children, teens, and young adults, and change the world for the better” (Willard, Saltzman, & Greenland, 2015, p. 3).

**Mindfulness for children in society.** Mindfulness practice for children is an emerging field with various and strong integrations in educational and clinical settings.

Katherine Weare is a professor at the University of Exeter and Southampton where she develops and evaluates mindfulness in schools programs, She states that some programs are designed specifically to address anxiety surrounding academic achievement in school setting or on children with special needs (Weare, 2012). Other programs in the United States including, MindUP, Mindful Schools, Calmer Choice, and The Quiet Time Program, have a wider scope and are intended to serve the entire population of a school including faculty and staff in some cases. Another area of life where mindfulness practice is being used with children in the United States is in clinical settings.

It is reasonable, refreshing, and encouraging to consider that mindfulness integrations with children provide a natural tool for all of the external influences and stimuli that school, peers, and social media provide.

**Potential benefits of mindfulness practice.** The field of research on mindfulness with children and adolescents is growing and results are promising in areas such as treating childhood anxiety and dealing with certain behavioral. Mindfulness interventions have also been shown to decrease stress and increase resilience (Bluth, & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017). Dr. Randye Semple has brought Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy for Children to her patients. The research that she has conducted with her colleagues has shown that mindfulness can be taught to children and holds promise as an intervention for anxiety symptoms (2005) and MBCT-C is a promising intervention for attention and behavior problems, and may reduce childhood anxiety symptoms (2010) and (2005). Children in an outpatient psychiatric facility who received MBSR showed reduction in anxiety, depression, and somatic distress, and an increase in self-esteem and sleep quality (Biegel, G. M., Brown, K. W., Shapiro, S. L., & Schubert, C. M., 2009).

Mindfulness practice is also being used with children with behavioral issues, children with ADHD, and adolescents with substance abuse and sleep problems with conclusions that “Mindfulness fits well with the general emphasis in education, health and social policy across the globe on evidence-based practice” (Weare, 2013, p. 148). Importantly, certain research shows that the immediate results of mindfulness interventions on children’s well being were still apparent for years to follow and that the time spent learning mindfulness does not have to be great for benefits to be apparent (Weare, 2013). Additionally, Current research on using MBSR (mindfulness-based stress reduction) and MBCT (mindfulness-based cognitive therapy) with children and adolescents show that interventions were accepted and well-tolerated by the participants (Burke, 136).

An adapted MBSR program put in place in a low-income public school showed results that students had improved psychological functioning and negative effects of trauma-associated

stress was reduced (Sibinga, Webb, Ghazarian, & Ellen, 2015). Children in various income levels can experience more stress by ingesting their parents stress but also feel their own pressure to perform on tests and sports. This is where mindfulness practice becomes a useful tool in their ability to reduce stress.

### **Digital Mindfulness**

Digital mindfulness is a new field of inquiry and practice that integrates important components of mindful behavior with our digital devices and communications. Living in a strongly established and integrated digital society has powerful impacts on human development, interactions, and individual well-being for adults and the children they are raising. Promoting mindful behavior with digital devices in childhood can have positive affects on various social and health concerns, as well as cultural patterns. Parents are currently in a precarious position as these digital devices and online worlds are new to their experience, and navigating skillful habits and behaviors is a new undertaking. It would stand to reason that many parents would therefore be willing to integrate mindfulness strategies into the digital habits of their family. This “digital mindfulness” could include unplugging, setting intentions, and other exercise that provide awareness into the positive and negative affects of using certain types of devices and applications.

**Parenting in a Smartphone world.** Parents seem to be feeling the pressure when it comes to balancing their children’s technology use when it comes to familial interactions. mindfulness can become an important tool in this ongoing struggle. Surveys show parents feel in constant battle with their child about managing the devices, that the child is attached to device, and that this makes them feel disconnected from their youth (Bethune & Lewan, 2017). Children

of younger and younger ages are growing up faster as they, “organize their social lives with cellphones, and teenagers launch businesses from their bedrooms.” (Honore, 2004, p. 248).

Parenting books, experts, and discussions are starting to address the concerns that arise from integrating digital devices and particularly social media into a healthy childhood. It has become important to consider the possibility that digital technologies might be contributing to the upsurge in childhood depression and anxiety disorders. Many professionals and researchers suggest that too much screen time has negative effects on children’s overall mental well-being, “almost every child or teen I encounter is too wired from anxiety, screen stimulation, or both to sleep well enough to function inside or outside the classroom” (Willard, Saltzman, & Greenland, 2015, p. 2). This is becoming a strong and common concern for parents, as they learn to help navigate their children through life with digital tools.

There are some ways in which parents can practice digital mindfulness with their children including bringing awareness and intention to their own habits, understanding the difference between inner and outer worlds, practicing contemplative computing and engaging in digital detox.

**Awareness.** In any discussion regarding mindfulness for the family and digital distraction what becomes immediately relevant is the awareness that parents should bring to their own digital habits. In understanding their own attachment to their devices, parents can set good examples of establishing health and balanced habits when using media, and also in choosing time to unplug. As these forms of communication and information browsing take more of our time and attention, mindfulness becomes increasingly more necessary to act as balance between our inner and outer worlds (Kabat-Zinn, 2005).

**Inner and outer worlds.** Mindfulness practice brings us in contact to our inner world, bridging the gap from our ruminating minds to the present moment. This can be a key understanding when we spend much of our day with activities like email, text, or viewing others social media posts that keeps our focus on the outer world. This does not give us space to notice what is happening in our mind and body (Levy, 2016). David M. Levy has been in the professional and high-speed tech world and also the contemplative world of slower living. His book, *Mindful Tech* offers effective exercise to bring mindfulness to our digital culture to make meaningful and powerful changes. He points to the fact that when we are more attentive, relaxed, and stable, our online life can be healthier and more beneficial (2016).

Levy describes improving our digital craft by using our devices with greater skill, including intention, care, skill, and learning (p. 7, 2016). In bringing this kind of awareness and work to this portion of our life that takes up a great deal of our time, we can avoid what we do that might be mindless or cause parents stress online. Families are made up of separate individuals, and imagining these kids choosing how to interact with their devices, and how to intentionally spend their time would have a great impact on the individual's feelings and thoughts, but also on the unit as a whole.

Levy includes a section in his book "Beyond Individual Change" where he emphasizes the idea that when you affect an individual, this individual goes off into society with the lesson or learning. Therefore, teaching parents how to practice silence in the home, and extend that silent and mindful practice into their technology use, could have substantial impacts on many relationships even extending beyond that family (2016, p. 12). Offering parents a guide to mindfulness, ways in which to bring it to their children, fitting it into a family structure, and utilizing it in our daily digital interactions and behaviors would be a valuable tool.

**Contemplative computing.** Technology guru, Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, talks about digital mindfulness by using the term contemplative computing. He shares this idea in his book, *Distraction Addiction* and shares that contemplative computing shows you how to use your mind and body to interact with computers and how your attention and creativity are influenced by technology (2013). This contemplative computing requires the understanding of four main principles:

The first is our relationships with information technologies are incredibly deep and express unique human capacities. The second big idea is the world has become a more distracting place – and there are solutions for bringing the extended mind back under control. The third big idea is that it’s necessary to be contemplative about technology.

And the fourth big idea is you can redesign your extended mind (Pang, 2013, p.14-15).

Pang expands upon these principles by including eight additional principles for contemplative computing that integrate the first four:

When you learn to be aware of how devices and media affect your breathing and mood; when you replace switch-tasking with real multi-tasking; when you adopt tools and practices designed to protect your attention; when you tweet mindfully; when you employ restorative spaces and digital Sabbaths to recharge your mind (2013, p. 216).

The eight principles are “be human, be calm, be mindful, make conscious choices, extend your abilities, seek flow, use technologies in ways that engage you with the world, and use or abstain from technologies in ways that are restorative, that renew your capacity for attention” (Pang, 2013).

**Digital detox.** Many parents address the concerns they have with their children’s technology habits by negotiating time for the family to “unplug” during each day. Mindfulness

brings the idea of awareness with it, and keeping track of specific time where digital distraction are not allowed, provides good and intentional silence from the barrage of information and communication. Bringing the simple idea of cultivating good and intentional moments and spaces of silence in the family structure can allow for a more positive approach to unplugged time. If it becomes about adding something – like mindful practice or intentional silence – then the digital devices do not maintain their function of being the only “positive” element.

This idea, often referred to as “digital detox” is gaining attention in many spheres of society where it is practiced in different ways and over different periods of time. According to a 2017 survey by the American Psychological Association regarding American’s checking their digital devices, a large number of Americans agree that periodically “unplugging” or taking a “digital detox” is important for their mental health. (2017). And, according to a 2015 research report from Pew, about a third of parents whose children have daily screen time worry that their children spend too much time on these devices (2015).

It can be helpful for parents to encourage their children to keep a tech diary, as suggested by Alex Soojung-Kim Pang in *Distraction Addiction*. This tech diary would keep track of every single digital interaction the youth has in the course of one day, mark down how the rest of the time is spent and then crunch the numbers seeing how much total times does to these devices. The individual can then evaluate the day by considering when they needed a digital device for the task or it was just a preference, the emotional response involved in different activities, being aware of multitasking habits, and reflecting on the overall positive and negative feelings associated with the different activities (2013, p. 232). It would be valuable for the parents to engage in keeping a tech diary of their own for the same purpose.

### **Mindfulness for the Family**



As interest in establishing appropriate, safe, and natural implementations of mindfulness for children and adolescents continues to grow in educational and clinical settings, where it might also evolve and grow is in family settings. The American family provides a unique and appropriate group where mindfulness practice can be used to help alleviate some negative trends in healthy development. As we connect the dots between the rising rates of teenage emotional disorders with their increased use of always-on digital devices, researchers are looking at natural and safe mindfulness interventions for children and adolescents to develop a strong mental health before their teenage years. A few important components of bringing mindfulness to the family include recent neuroscience research on brain development, how mindful parenting can influence the parent-child relationship, and the rise of peer influence.

**Brainstorm.** One example of recent brain development research has to do with adolescents in particular. Although this paper does not delve into this important childhood stage in detail, the considerations regarding the brain brought forth by Dr. Daniel Siegel are compelling for parents to consider. Siegel has provided parents with information on the adolescent brain and ways in which mindfulness might be a good fit for their child's emotional and mental health. His recent book, *Brainstorm*, provides important information on the, "changes in the fundamental circuits of the brain that make the adolescent period different from childhood." (2015, p. 7).

Siegel intends to dispel the myth surrounding adolescence regarding hormones, "hormones do increase during this period, but it is not the hormones that determine what goes on in adolescence. We now know that what adolescents experience is primarily the result of changes in the development of the brain" (2013, p. 2). This can be an extremely important distinction for

parents and the child, as there might not be any direct, effective, sustainable, and natural way to balance our hormones during this time.

In one example specifically, Dr. Siegel explains that during adolescence there is an increase in the activity of the area of the brain utilizing dopamine, which creates the drive for reward. This causes adolescents to gravitate toward thrilling experiences and exhilarating sensations, which can manifest in the youth's increased impulsiveness. But, mindfulness practice, which he refers to as *mindsight*, helps the brains of create a mental space between impulse and action, otherwise known as cognitive control. This is just one example of how the changing development of children can be assisted with mindfulness practice.

**Mindful parenting.** There is also a growing body of research looking at the interpersonal domain of parent-child relationships and how they are affected by mindful parenting, with some results showing that mindful parenting is a valid parenting construct (Duncan, 2007). In addition, the practice of mindfulness by couples can affect their interpersonal functioning by increasing their empathy (Block-Lerner, J., Adair, C., Plumb, J. C., Rhatigan, D. L. and Orsillo, S. M. (2007). This can be an important element that positively affects the entire family unit.

Jon Kabat-Zinn and his wife Myla Kabat-Zinn brought their practice, education, learning, and parenting together to write *Everyday Blessings: The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting* first published in 1997. The book brings mindfulness into parenting children of all ages and is steeped in the idea that the mind body connection can have relevant and important implications for the family. It confirms the well-held belief that the most important aspect of instructing in mindfulness is to maintain your own practice. Their meaning is to intentionally remember to be fully present with you child in all experiences is key.

They remind the parents to bring a spirit of non-judgment to their activities and expectations and how essential this can be for parenting. This does not mean not seeing what is important, but rather seeing what is actual past surface appearances or the filters we impose based on our limited opinions (Kabat-Zinn, J. & Kabat-Zinn, M., 1997).

The Kabat-Zinn's inspire parents to seek out time for their own formal silent practice, even when found in small doses. They point to this quiet time and space as deep substance for human beings, time that feeds the body and soul, restorative and liberating (1997). Their work includes discussion into family life for those in the different stages of pregnancy, birth, young family life, and beyond.

As Kabat-Zinn's points out, when we live in the same space, we have a huge effect on each other, and mindfulness can have a positive influence on communication and relationships "Our lives orbit within each other's force fields, physically, emotionally, and psychically, and we are continually interacting and influencing each other in subtle and not-so-subtle ways" (Kabat-Zinn, J. & Kabat-Zinn, M., 1997, p. 181). As children grow and develop through many different stages these force fields undoubtedly differ and need new awareness and unique attention. What our three-year old needs from us is not the same as what an adolescent needs.

One additional direction that Jon and Myla Kabat-Zinn remind parents of is the simple but elusive *presence* that our children crave and necessitate, and that we might find harder and harder to offer in our age of distraction. This does not mean that a parent must always be in the presence of their child and constantly be in a state of paying attention to them. What it means is to be genuine and aware and remind ourselves to continuously come back to the present moment when we often find our mind wandering (Kabat-Zinn, J. & Kabat-Zinn, M., 1997). Establishing

the value and influence of mindfulness in the family structure provides a practical and natural way to bring about this authentic presence.

**The rise of peer influence.** A highly relevant aspect of bringing good and intentional silence into family life is establishing natural and healthy boundaries for peer relationships, so that they do not supersede parental authority. According to the authors of *Hold on to Your Kids*, Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate there is a modern preoccupation with parenting as a set of skills to be followed as recommend by experts. This preoccupation is driven by the fact that parents have lost their intuitions and security. However, “when our parenthood is secure, natural instincts are activated that dictate far more astutely than any expert how to nurture and teach the young ones under our care (2004, p. x). When parents are able to access their natural instincts, their parenting style and choices rely more on their own heart, soul, mind, and experience which in turn becomes a more useful and helpful structure for growing children.

Neufeld and Mate clarify the importance of the relationship between parent and child in establishing healthy development of, “independent, self-motivated, and mature beings valuing their own self-worth and mindful of the feelings, rights, and human dignity of others. (2004, p. x). According to their work and research, modern parents have allowed peer relationships to replace their authority and children are less likely to take their cues from adults. Parents seem to have lost a confidence that was once a guidance in rearing their children. The detrimental occurrence here is a change in natural attachment patterns that should exist between parent and child for healthy development, “parenting is not in what a parent *does* but rather who the parent *is* to a child. When a child seeks contact and closeness with us, we become empowered as a nurturer, a comforter, a guide, a model, a teacher, or a coach” (2004, p. 6). It is this

empowerment that leads to the useful parent child attachment that benefits the healthy development of children.

One reason for the current change in our culture is that the child's attachment to his parents no longer gets the support required by culture and society. This lack of appreciation or reinforcement leads to an erosion of that attachment bond. When the bonds with friends gain more attention and support, parents lose the proper context for parenting (Neufeld & Mate, 2004, p. 7). Neufeld and Mate theorize that this becomes a disorder that affects a lot of children as they head toward adulthood. It is because the natural order of parental nurture and instruction has been lost and replaced with something not as effective because it is led by peers that have not yet matured themselves. They provide the term *peer orientation* to describe this phenomenon. (Neufeld & Mate, 2004). They also suggest that this is one factor that causes some of the poor results seen in the development of self-sufficient, independent, and well-balanced young adults.

Neufeld and Mate cite a large and international study that was headed by British child psychiatrist Sir Michael Rutter and criminologist David Smith. The study included leading scholars from sixteen countries and linked the escalation of antisocial behavior to the breakdown of vertical transmission of mainstream culture. As a separate children's culture became distinct, the research showed a rise in youth crime, violence, bullying and delinquency (Neufeld & Mate, p. 10). The vertical transmission refers to the passing down of instruction, guidance, ideals, values, and norms from one familial generation to the next. With this idea of *peer orientation* it becomes a horizontal transmission. This is highly relevant in the current discussion of children and adolescents today engaging in always-on communications with their friends via digital devices and using social media and texting platforms. This might be an area of future study where close consideration can be put on what results were shown in the past when this idea of

*vertical transmission* versus *horizontal transmission* came to light in child and adolescent development.

What is striking to consider when comparing peers influence versus parents is the omission of the unique aspects of a healthy parent relationship including unconditional love and acceptance, the desire to nurture, and willingness to sacrifice for the child (Neufeld & Mate, 2004). What is also important and alarming about too much peer influence and orientation is that it parallels the dramatic increase in suicide rate among children which grew in the United States 120% from 1980 to 1992 (Neufeld & Mate, 2004), doubled for children age 10 to 14 from 2007 to 2014 (CDC, 2016), and reached a 40-year-high for teenage girls in 2015 (CDC, 2017).

The findings of Neufeld and Gabor's surprised them; they had not anticipated that suicides are more likely to be triggered by peer rejection, not parental "the more peers matter, the more children are devastated by the insensitive relating of their peers, by failing to fit in, by perceived rejection or ostracization" (Neufeld & Mate, p. 11). Of course it is important to keep in mind that peer relationships are important; they just shouldn't overwhelm the important parent-child dynamic. While one of the important goals of parenting is to help our children be independent one day, that day does not need to come earlier than is healthy for the child.

The solution to this trend toward too much peer influence of peer orientation and how it negatively affects our children, is to return to a healthy relationship in parenting, which includes using intuition, understanding, patience, and compassion. These capacities can be strengthened when parents find the time and space for their own silent meditation practice. This mindfulness practice opens up space between reactivity, allowing for more time to consider appropriate responses. Silent practice also allows for parents and children to value the idea of just being, being with oneself during practice, and also being with others without activity or goal.

**Mindfulness family programs.** There are many different avenues that parents could take to find ways of bringing mindfulness to their family. Clinical professionals now offer parents mindfulness instruction as part of their practice for their patients. There are various online options including Deepak Chopra's, which is an online program, "Mindfulness for Kids: A Free, 8-Week Program to Build a More Compassionate and Conscious Family" (The Chopra Center, 2017). There are also retreats available for teenagers provided by Inward Bound Mindfulness Education, founded by Jessica Morey. This provides parents with a supportive way to include their older children in a family mindfulness practice. These older children will be further inspired to practice mindfulness when they learn from other adults and in community with their peers. They are a nonprofit that offers mindfulness programming for youth and the parents and professionals who support them. Their website states, "The programming guides teens and young adults in developing self-awareness, compassion, and ethical decision making, and empowers them to apply these skills in improving their lives and communities." As mindfulness continues to grow across various populations in the United States, and research continues to show the positive affects, we might look forward to new program models that will serve parents and their children.

One example of a mindfulness program model that serves parents and children was created by Dr. Amy Saltzman. Her program is an eight-week mindfulness based Still Quiet Place curriculum, using her knowledge and practice of the adult-focused MBSR program. Her experience working with parents and children suggests that one highly important aspect for parents to consider before embarking on a mindfulness endeavor with their children, is considering their own attachment to outcomes. She considers doing so to be one of the most challenging aspects of her work as most parents enroll their child in mindfulness classes to

achieve some measurable outcome such as a change in behavior, mood, or stress levels. While these goals are understandable, the parents may become too attached to the outcome which can limit the experience and practice for their child (2014).

### **Silence in Mindfulness**

While the breath might be considered the most simple and direct pathway to mindfulness, silence is equally as basic and inherent. Silence, like the breath, is free, natural, and something we can all have access to. Whether we are sitting in formal meditation practice or taking a walk in nature, we can choose to eliminate not only the distractions of external noise – phones, talking, television – but also that of our internal worlds – worries, desires, and ruminations to name a few. We can silence our verbal interactions with other, silence our digital devices, and silence our quick habit of judging ourselves and others. Tuning into our silence connects us to a more mindful presence of being, not doing. With intentional silence, we can connection back into our present moment.

One of the basic components of a mindfulness practice is this creation of space for silence. Meditation practice is sitting in silence, spending time focusing on the breath, and allowing our thoughts to stream along without our constant interaction, interpretation, and judgment. Silence is an important aspect that allows an individual to find time to pause. The pause is there between the in and out breath of silent meditation, the pause is there when we choose to respond to situations and not just react, and the pause is there when we acknowledge that our society moves at an extreme pace and we can choose a slower, more intentional version.

Mindfulness is a contemplative endeavor, and silence has often be the topic of contemplative discussions including current mindfulness programs. The silence found in



contemplation, prayer, and meditation is included in many pathways of religion and spirituality regardless of dogma or affiliation. From the book *The Mind's Own Physician: A Scientific Dialogue with the Dalai Lama on the Healing Power of Meditation*, Matthieu Ricard speaks of the power of silence in meditation:

Silencing this rumination and mental construction can be a meditative state. Somehow we find an enhanced awareness of clarity and stability behind the stream or veil of thoughts and their content. This is by no means silence in the sense of dullness, drowsiness, darkness or obscurity. It's a very vivid, aware state of mind. You could call it silence of the mental constructions, but it is in no way a silence of awareness" (2013, p. 60).

Catholic priest Father Keating also added to the discourse with his perspectives on silence and Christian meditation, which he says is also referred to as contemplation:

We emphasize the intentionality of silence. That is to say, silence as an intention has a significant effect on the process of meditation, whether you're experience thoughts, feelings, external sounds, or whatever. Getting used to disregarding the flow of thought leads into deeper levels of interior silence and peace (2013, p.63).

Here the idea of using silence in an intentional way sheds light on how it can be part of a mindfulness practice. He goes to further illuminate his feelings that at the silence at the heart of Christian meditation is not emptiness, but a listening at a deeper level to that energy out of which everything emerges, which is both energy and no energy (2013, p. 198).

Jon Kabat-Zinn adds that in his MBSR program the orientation is that silence is awareness itself and is available in every moment and shares that "even the briefest moment of silence is both a way of coming into the present and way of moving on" (2005, p.575). He even suggests "silence is the ultimate prayer" (2005, p.574). Thich Nhat Hanh has written on the topic

often, including his 2016 book titled, *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise*.

Hanh shares “What you need, what we all need, is silence. Stop the noise in your mind in order for the wondrous sounds of life to be heard. Then you can begin to live your life authentically and deeply” (2016, p. \_\_\_\_). In this book he suggests that silence has the ability to learn more about ourselves, assist in our practice of mindfulness, help us listen to others with compassion, manifest our true nature, address our suffering instead of hide from it, and offer us healing (2016).

### **Silence for Children**

When we begin looking at adding mindfulness practice to childhood in today’s culture, an important aspect of mindfulness seems to become simple and important – the silence that it allows. Good and intentional silence, cultivated in the home space, can provide a natural antidote to the speed and stress of life. It can be practiced by spending more time in nature, where the silence allows for a deeper connection with the natural world. And silence can also provided soothing relief to the distractions of always-on digital devices.

Silence might be a missing component of modern childhood that would provide youth the space to meet their inner experience in a very natural way. Mindfulness is the practice of being and not doing, of sitting in the present moment, in silence. This can be hard won in our “media-drenched, data-rich, channel-surfing, computer-gaming age,” where we, “have lost the art of doing nothing, shutting out the background noise and distractions, of slowing down and simply being alone with our thoughts” (Honore, 2004, p. 11). Introducing children to the idea of silence as a good thing to be added to the day, can balance out some of the noise of life.

As Dr. Helen E. Lees notes in her book, *Silence in Schools* “Silence brings peace, healing, joy, simplicity and truth. It brings about the layering of foundations of understanding”

(2012, p. vii). There are many who believe that silence is a powerful tool or commodity in today's hyper-speed culture. Some pursue areas of the world, or of their own hearts and minds that provide this sort of space for silence. Some consider the lack of silence troubling, especially for our youth:

I am increasingly persuaded that both the worrying increase in mental health problems and the demonstrations of antisocial, even violent behavior in younger people in the West at present must be related to a lack of silence and a lack of training in how to use silence (Maitland, 2009, p. 250).

Sara Maitland dedicated years of her life exploring the different nuances of silence and when and where they were beneficial in her own life. Her worry about mental health problems with youth came about because as she was cultivating silence in her life, she was also raising a family.

Others remind us of the deep reservoir of wisdom that is available in silence. Charlotte Kasl states it so simply and deeply in her book, *If the Buddha Had Kids*, "Silence and knowing flow together" (2012, p. 124). Dr. Kasl also points to the specific kinds of noises that are allotted to children when they are afforded good and intentional silence:

What do we want our children to hear? Think of the song of a bird, the crunch of fallen leaves under foot, the purring of a kitten, the silence of clouds moving across the sky. Think of the subtle qualities of art, music, writing, and sports that elicit feelings of motion, space, awe, and wonder. The more we feel stillness in the midst of motion, the more we experience bring connected, engaged" (2012, p. 124).

Here, Kasl reminds us, that the more natural noises that children are exposed to don't need to be eliminated entirely, but rather, given their own space to be heard.

The adapted MBSR program that Dr. Amy Saltzman created is aptly titled, “A Still Quiet Place,” and encourages children to pay close attention to the brief pause that exists between each in-breath and out-breath. She explains that the children experience a natural and reliable stillness and quietness within them that they always have access to (2014, p 1).

Silence is also an important theme that arises in conversations about children finding time and space to interact with their natural world. Silence can offer children a nurturing solitude and there are examples in studies where students went into nature after upsetting events to relax, clear their minds, and gain perspective (Louv, 2005). The natural silence away from modern day distraction and noise offers a connection that benefits human emotion and processing.

For older children, the silence of unplugging also comes from eliminating the stream of peer review and comments that come with social media sites and “offers a way for children to appreciate their own natural inner resources in a world of mainly media-driven externalizing tendencies of the self” (Lees, 2012, xiii). When children and adolescents are taught to be mindful in their family home of the present moment they are being instructed on the intrinsic value of their inner worlds. The silence that is afforded with meditation practice allows these children to connect to this inner world. Children are taught that this time of silence is valuable and important. In addition, research shows just how important daydreaming is for our brains as it replenishes stores of attention and motivation. It also encourages productivity and creativity, and becomes indispensable to achieving high levels of performance and memory acquisition (Jabr, 2013).

Other ways, in which silence becomes a commodity in the family home, is when parents make decisions to slow down the pace of extra-curricular activities and the level to which children engage in those activities. Children learn the value of spending time connecting with

parents, siblings and other family members when decisions are made to refocus on quiet times at home:

The pursuit of silence, likewise, is dissimilar from most other pursuits in that it generally begins with the surrender of the chase, the abandonment of efforts to impose our will and vision on the world. Not only is it about standing still; with rare exceptions, the pursuit of silence seems initially to involved a step backward form the tussle of life. The different stories that first drove home to me what the engagement with silence could bring were centered on a kind of listening that only occurs after a break in the circuit of busyness.

(Prochnik, 2010, p. 12)

American families are no doubt filled with pressures, activities, expectations, and societal demands. While these are not all negative and harmful, bringing a mindful awareness into finding balance can be essential to maintaining health emotional and physical well being.

**Negative associations with silence and childhood.** It is important to point out, that in any conversation regarding silence, especially as it relates to childhood, that there do exist many examples of unskilled and even harmful examples of how silence is experienced. Research on the subject of silence for children can bring up a myriad of these examples that include: being silent about sexual abuse, language restrictions, silence from older generations regarding holocaust survival, adult supervisor silence, exposing culture of silence in abuse examples, speech issues, late language acquisition, silence and memory in trauma narratives, childhood displacement, selective mutism, silence as an absence of something, post-traumatic stress mothers incarcerated, mothers international silence, silence on issues of race, results of deaf parents, stigma and silence, and there are more. For the purposes of this review these examples are not included and the focus will be on the intentional cultivation of “good” and “strong”

silence that is meant to act as a mindful space of nourishment, and not associated with being silenced in a negative way.

**Silence for the Family.** Parents are the contemplative leaders in the lives of their children, and their influence can provide children with much needed direction in valuing slower and quieter times in the home. With all that parents strive to give their children in terms of health, education, benefit, and well-being, the inclusion of mindfulness practice, which is starting to be firmly based in evidence-based research, makes enormous sense in today's world, "...to leave children and grandchildren a legacy of wisdom and compassion embodied in the way we live, in our institutions, and in our honoring of interconnectedness, at home and around the world" (Kabat-Zinn, 2005, p. 16). Bringing the idea of good and intentional silence into the busy and stressful homes of the modern family can be a simple first step in understanding and practicing mindfulness.

Parents can bring good and intentional silence into the home by actively decreasing the level of extra-curricular activities kids participate in, encouraging time for the family to unplug from digital devices, and creating a physical space in the home dedicated to quiet. The silence that might be strongly and intentionally established in the household, in age appropriate ways might contribute a great deal to a healthy childhood. When this silence includes unplugging from digital devices, making strong connections with family relationships away from the always-on social media, and time away from unstructured activities and sports, childhood regains some space for natural brain and emotional development. Studies show that unstructured time for play helps children not only with their ability to learn and develop their social and language skills, but also increases their creative ability. This idea of unstructured play is the not "quality time," which suggests a level of planning and scheduling for a desired purpose. It is more about

exploration of the world the child lives in and how they interact with it, according to their unique mind and experience (Honore, p. 266).

When family life begins to include an understanding of how each member can be mindful of the present moment and our reaction to it, cultivated with the inclusion of intentional silence, all of the rich benefits that researchers and scientists point to in mindfulness practice, begin to permeate the foundation of all other relationships, interactions, and future journey's.

### **Conclusion**

Based on some of the experts and research presented in this paper, it is reasonable to suggest that parents and caretakers can bring mindfulness practice to their children to assist in managing some of the negative effects of the stress, lack of nature time, and digital distraction in childhood. Modern society provides children with unique obstacles in forming and maintaining strong mental and social health and well being. Mindfulness practice, in particular the addition of good and intentional silence, can provide the needed space and time for children to be able to enjoy healthy development as they navigate important growth, learning, communication, and interpersonal relationships. It seems reasonable to assume that research investigating effective mindfulness implementations in different family structures with varying needs will be necessary and continue to grow. With the growing attention and popularity that mindfulness continues to enjoy, with specific interest on components such as kindness and compassion, it is also reasonable to assume that research and conversations on silence in particular will gain attraction and scholarship.

### **Rationale for Field Guides**

The creative portion of this thesis includes four field guides written for parents under the heading, “Silence for Children.” The four volumes each have their own subject theme and are arranged as follows: Mindfulness, Childhood Mindfulness, Family Mindfulness, and Digital Mindfulness. Each one of these guides will be organized with the help of the four directions: North will provide a direct look at the main idea of the topic; East will explore the topic in reference to mindfulness origin, theory and practice; West will explore what modern science and research is showing; South shares examples in society and culture; and Center offers instruction on how the reader can add elements to family life.

These field guides have the intended audience of parents who might be looking for an easy but thorough place to get all the information in one place. Parents are busy and might not be ready to commit their time to a new class on mindfulness or even recently published scholarship. These mini-books serve as field guides to lay the groundwork for further study, practice, and inquiry.

These field guides are visually appealing, inspiring, and academically supported. They explore silence and specific instruction on how to begin a mindfulness meditation practice with multi-media component. Information, resources, and specific mindfulness practices revolving around the issue of digital technology and communication, especially as it affects the younger generation are included. A key component of one guide will be including parents in the recent conversation regarding the developing adolescent brain. Using recent research connecting mindfulness practice and brain activity will be of great importance to these guides. Parents will hopefully gain a confidence in the material and be interested in further offerings that will be planned for distribution of future guides that will delve into themes even more thoroughly.



These four books on bringing mindfulness into the family will serve as a starting point in bringing a certain awareness to some of the aspects of the changing nature of childhood. Mindfulness practice will assist parents in bringing greater intentionality to the decisions that they make for themselves and their children. This might better influence behaviors and patterns that bring balance to modern childhood. These guides will hopefully serve as a resource in fusing knowledge, research and practice surrounding mindfulness and childhood in ways that will resonate with busy parents. While parents do not usually draw from the most recent neuroscience findings, when presented to them in these familiar and appealing field guide formats, the information might substantially influence parents. There might be avenues of getting the information currently, like the news, but because it is unorganized and plentiful, it might not have cohesive strength. These field guides can be seen as a conversation bridge and building block for parents to be empowered and informed about bringing intentional silence and other mindful practices to themselves, their growing children of various ages, and the family unit as a whole.

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