

Befriending Boredom

by Sandi Schwartz

How parents can turn those irritating time wasters into golden opportunities for mindfulness.

As I approach yet another bright red traffic light, I can feel irritability surge through my veins. These damn traffic lights are always preventing me from crossing anything off my ever-growing list of errands. My rebellious response is to pull out my phone for those 2-3 minute increments of red light "free" time. I can respond to a few emails or text messages, but it only leads to more stress because I'm constantly looking up to make sure I don't miss the light turning green. God forbid I get honked at by the (similarly) impatient driver behind me! Sound familiar?

According to Elisha Goldstein Ph.D., author of *Uncovering Happiness* and co-founder of The Center for Mindful Living in Los Angeles, boredom like that felt at a red light is an emotion intertwined with anxiety. "We have an automatic reaction to boredom," he explains. "We tell ourselves that we should be doing something more valuable with our time . . . so we partake in activities to fill the space, such as stress eating, technology, and other poor habits."

Many of us spend our days rushing around, irritated by all things that seem to waste our time. This fixation on "time wasters" only exacerbates stress. What if we started viewing these moments as golden opportunities for mindfulness throughout our day, whether we are stuck in the school carpool line, sitting in a doctor's office, standing in a long line at a store, or working on mundane chores?

Mindfulness gives us an awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, and allows us to quiet the endless and distracting chatter of our mind so we can focus on the now. According to the Greater Good Science Center at University of California, Berkeley, thousands of studies have indicated that mindfulness improves our physical and mental health because it relaxes us and reduces stress and anxiety. To be more mindful, Dr. Goldstein recommends that instead of seeing dull tasks as a nuisance or impediment, we start engaging with them with a sense of curiosity. "Engaging with a 'beginner's mind' causes our brain to light up and helps us feel excited and energetic," revealed Dr. Goldstein.

"By learning to befriend boredom, we can consciously choose what we want to do in that moment and no longer be enslaved by negative emotions. Mindfulness can help transform our perspective during instances that we may otherwise consider to be boring. Being mindful . . . can be filled with curiosity, daydreaming, awe, and even bliss." We have endless opportunities to introduce mindful curiosity throughout our daily routine.

Fun mindfulness exercises to share with your kids.

MINDFUL EATING

Ask your children to describe the food on their plates by color, texture, smell, taste, and sound as they chew. While on the go, bring along some snacks to practice being mindful.

MINDFUL BREATHING

Teaching children to breathe mindfully is the cornerstone of stress reduction. **Bubbles:** Have them practice breathing by taking a deep breath in before blowing some bubbles. Once they have mastered this activity, you can always ask them to simply visualize blowing the bubbles. **Heart Hands:** Create a heart shape with your hands. As you breathe in, expand your hands to a heart shape. As you breathe out, collapse your hands into two fists side by side.

MINDFUL COLORING

In the last few years, coloring books for stress reduction have become all the rage. Creative activities like coloring have been scientifically proven to reduce stress levels because we become so focused on what we are doing that we forget what is going on around us.

In the Car

Dr. Ronald Siegel, author and professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School, suggests drivers practice a taillight meditation while waiting behind other cars. Simply focus on the colors and shapes of the taillights in front of you while remaining relaxed and alert. Let your body soften and your eyes lose focus for a few moments while stopped. Another idea, when stopped, is to look around to savor nature's beauty. Take a moment to notice the luscious trees, colorful flowers, and ever-changing clouds in the sky.

Kitchen Chores

Next time you find yourself dreading repetitive kitchen duties, try to turn them into a mini-meditation session by engaging your senses. When you are doing the dishes, think about how the soap feels and smells, see the colors reflected off of the bubbles, hear the water, and recall the flavors of your meal.

When you are setting or clearing the table ask yourself:

- How heavy does each cup, plate, utensil, and napkin feel in your hand?
- Are the objects smooth or rough, hard or soft?
- What sounds do you hear when you place each object on the table?
- What colors and patterns do you see?
- What do the plates smell like as you clear them off the table?

Putting Your Kids To Bed

Kate Hanley, personal development coach and author of *Stress Less*, suggests parents look forward to their children's bedtime as a chance to practice mindfulness. "When you snuggle with your kids you can count your breaths. If your children insist that you stay in the room while they fall asleep, instead of getting anxious about everything you could be doing, use that time to meditate until they fall asleep and you can quietly sneak out."

Our kids are like clever little spies — watching our every move. By turning irritating parts of our day into a more relaxing, introspective time, we are not only helping ourselves, but also passing along an invaluable tool to our children so they can live happier, healthier lives with a little mindfulness magic.