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# EVERY Child



Early Childhood  
Australia

A voice for young children

Australia's leading early childhood magazine

VOL.23 NO.3 2017

RECONCILIATION—THE HEART OF ADVOCACY



## WHAT'S INSIDE:

- ECA's reconciliation journey
- Dreaming corner
- Childcare co-working
- Living and learning in a remote Aboriginal community
- The mindful educator

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Early Childhood Australia Inc.  
ISSN 1322-0659  
Print Post 100000752  
ABN 44 950 767 752

Printed by: Horizon Print

Co-Editor: Jackie Brien

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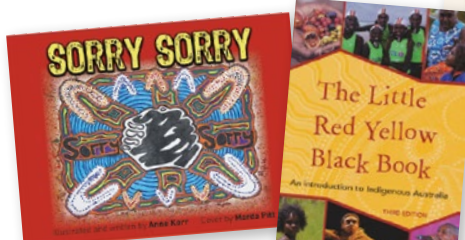
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# The Mindful educator

**'Just by becoming aware of what is occurring within and around us, we can begin to untangle ourselves from mental preoccupations and difficult emotions' (Siegel, Germer & Olendzki, 2009).**

The practice of being 'mindful' is a 2500-year-old Buddhist tradition that calls for one to be aware and present in the way that one experiences and accepts the current moment. Educators working with children and families can gain more in-tune ways of being with children when they become mindful about the way in which they engage, interact and respond to children.

So what does being a mindful educator mean? To be *present* is to be *aware* of what is happening in each of the moments throughout the time we work with children. Noticing the cues of children and the way we feel within each situation takes practise and commitment. In the busy world of early childhood these elements can become blurred and hurried to fulfil the tasks that inevitably filter the daily schedules of the early childhood world.

How then does one create space to *be*? To be present sounds simple, however it is a complex way of working that requires practise; becoming aware of the way we are as educators calls for one to slow down, focus and tune in to what is happening within the program. Knowing what triggers you as an educator is critical and essential to understanding how you might react over how you may respond when in tune.

Triggers or circumstances that create a reactive response, such as rushing through mealtimes or nappy changes, are opportunities for educators to practise being mindful. By quietening the need to rush through routines and being present to what is occurring for children opens space within practice to be present and to tune in to children within these busy times. Pausing to breathe and becoming still to focus, allows educators to become aware of what is happening not only within the program but how they are feeling within themselves. Being consciously aware of how situations make you feel enables you to reflect on how children may be feeling at any given moment. This awareness can often empower educators to take note of when they need to slow down and create calm.



## 'Breathing is a powerful tool that educators can use not only for themselves, but also to support children to become emotionally aware.'

educators can also begin talking about the brain and how breathing supports the mind to take care of the body. Meditation and visualisation stories are wonderful tools that connect with children's imagination while also enabling pockets of calm through the day.

Preschool children can engage in mindful practices such as eating mindfully and noticing the body's response in different situations. During mealtimes, educators can create space to engage not only children, but themselves, in consciously noticing the texture, taste and smell of food. Children can also be encouraged to reflect on the way their body feels before and after eating and how this supports healthy brain and mind functioning. This can be further enhanced by building children's competence around emotional literacy and the relation to the body's response. When educators are feeling hurried or rushed, try discussing this with children and taking time out to feel your pulse (or allowing children to feel your pulse), then breathing in and slowing down, and reviewing your pulse rate again.

Creating opportunities to be present takes planning and practise. One of the best ways educators can embed mindful moments in their daily curriculum is to document short sessions throughout the day in their program. The benefits, as I have experienced, are when educators are calm, as this flows onto the children in the room and creates a consciously calm and thoughtful way of approaching practice. Educators are present which means they demonstrate to children that each moment of the program is a space for being in the moment and with each other. As educators we are all aware that children imitate the world around them. For children, seeing the adults in their world slowing down, being aware and really being in the moment with them, allows children to also experience the beauty of being present.

### Shayne Hinton

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### References and further reading

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### The mindful educator in practice

Breathing is a powerful tool that educators can use not only for themselves, but also to support children to become emotionally aware. Breathing techniques can be embedded in practice from infants to preschool children. Mindful breathing with babies can be implemented as an educator holds the young child. The educator pausing and taking some slow, deep breaths, narrating to the child 'as I breathe in I slow down, as I breathe out I calm'. The tactile and auditory experience during this interaction enables educators to connect with the child; and for the child, the slowing down of the educator flows through from the interaction. The language being used during such interactions becomes part of the learning for the child, providing strong foundations for self-regulation strategies as they grow and develop.

For toddlers, placing a favourite toy on the child's stomach and asking them to explore breathing in and out and discussing how the breath makes them feel is a powerful visual method. Educators can join in this exercise, supporting the child's understanding of the practice and offering time to pause and be. In simple ways,



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