

EVERYDAY  
MINDFULNESS

# Sleep Easy

A MINDFULNESS GUIDE  
TO GETTING A  
GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Paul Christelis  
Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli

free spirit  
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# Sleep Easy

## A MINDFULNESS GUIDE TO GETTING A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP

Written by  
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# WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?


Mindfulness is a way of paying attention to our present-moment experience with an attitude of kindness and curiosity. Most of the time, our attention is distracted—often by thoughts about the past or future—and this can make us feel jumpy, worried, unhappy, and confused. By gently moving our focus from our busy minds into the present moment (for example, by noticing how our bodies are feeling), we begin to let go of distraction and learn to tap into an ever-present supply of well-being and ease that resides in each moment. Mindfulness can also help us improve concentration, calm difficult emotions, and even boost our immune systems.

This book shows how mindfulness can support children as they settle down to sleep. It can be read interactively, allowing readers to pause at various points to turn their attention to what they are noticing.

Watch for the  PAUSE BUTTON in the text. It suggests opportunities to encourage readers to be curious about what's going on for them—in their minds, their bodies, and their breathing. You can do this in the form of an invitation:

*“Let’s take a break from the story and see what we can notice right now. It’s a bit like inviting your attention to move away from the story and into your mind, body, or breath. Close your eyes and see what you can feel . . .”*

Invite children to verbally share what they are noticing, reminding them that there are no right or wrong responses. There is simply their personal experience. You can share your experience too!

Each time this  PAUSE BUTTON is used, mindfulness is deepened. Research shows that, on a neurological level, the brain actually changes shape when consistent mindfulness is cultivated over time. Our brains are “rewired,” replacing patterns that support distraction with new circuits that help foster concentration and calm.

So try not to rush this pause. Really allow enough time for children to tune into their experience. It doesn't matter if what they notice feels pleasant or unpleasant. What's important is to pay attention to it with a friendly attitude. (It's also perfectly fine not to feel anything, and to be curious about this: What is the feeling of “nothing”?) This will introduce children to a way of being in the world that promotes health and happiness.

Have you ever had a hard time trying to get to sleep?  
Sometimes our busy minds can keep us awake  
with thoughts and worries and jumbles and  
mumbles and . . . well, anything you can think of!

Twins Billy and Betty sometimes have this problem.  
When Billy gets into bed, his head can be full  
of wondering thoughts.

"I wonder if I'll be picked  
for the soccer team."

"I wonder what  
presents I'll get  
for my birthday."

His sister, Betty, is kept awake by a Worry Truck  
driving around in her head.



“Mom, help! We’re wide awake! Will we **ever** fall asleep?”

Luckily, Mom knows a thing or two about a good night’s sleep. “Come on kids, let’s get you back to bed,” she says. “I’ll show you an easy-peasy way to drift off to dreamland.”



# NOTES FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Here are a few mindfulness exercises and suggestions to add to children's Mindfulness Toolkits. These are simple, effective, and fun to do!

## The Breath Buddy Exercise

Ask each child to choose a small object—such as a small cuddly toy—lie down, and place the object on his or her belly. This object is now a Breath Buddy. The aim of the exercise is to carefully watch the Breath Buddy move as the belly inflates and deflates. Have children see how long their attention can remain on the bobbing object before their mind wanders. When it does wander, bring attention back to the Breath Buddy. If the mind is very busy, the child can also silently count breaths until 10 are completed, and then count another 10, this time counting backward from 10 to 1.

## Nuts and Marshmallows

To help the body relax before bedtime, encourage children to let go of any tension they are holding, which is often in the form of muscular tension. You can demonstrate how to do this by having them feel a nut (hard) and comparing this to handling a marshmallow (soft). Then suggest that they use their breathing to gradually change their bodies from nuts into marshmallows. Ask them to imagine breathing out all the tightness, leaving their bodies less “nutty” and more “marshmallowy.” If they do this in bed, can they notice their bodies sinking a little deeper into the mattress each time they breathe out?

Another way to let go of tension is to intentionally tighten or clench the body from head to toe. Hold this for a few seconds, then let go and feel the muscles slacken back into a more relaxed state. Do this three or four times, each time noticing all the sensations that accompany the tensing and relaxing.

## Talk About Thoughts

Talk to children about the kinds of thoughts they have when they get into bed. Some thoughts are pleasant, some are unpleasant, and some don't feel pleasant or unpleasant. *All* thoughts are okay to have, and everyone has them. Simply making space to identify thoughts in a calm and interested way will help normalize them—especially unpleasant, worrying thoughts.

It can be very helpful for children (and adults!) to understand that they are not their thoughts. If you think a thought often enough, you may start to identify it as being “me”—it can feel like you *are* your thought. But if you look closely you will see that a thought has no substance. You cannot hold a thought in your hand; you cannot see or touch a thought. Clouds are similar: They look white and fluffy from a distance, but if you get closer to them you realize this is just an illusion.

Explore this idea with children. Reassure them that it's okay if worries or other thoughts keep returning. This is normal. A core skill of mindfulness is to keep returning to the sensations of the body and the breath when your attention has slipped back to thoughts. Every time you bring your attention back to the body you are strengthening your “attention muscle.”

Practice this together: Move your attention up and down from mind to body. You can notice what thoughts are present (maybe saying them aloud) and then turn your attention to your hands and notice how they are feeling. Then return to your thoughts for a few moments before shifting your focus to another body part, such as your feet, chest, or face. You can “yo-yo” up and down from thoughts to body as many times as you like.

## Setting a Bedtime Routine

Talk to children about preparing to go to bed. Do they have a routine, such as brushing teeth, putting on pajamas, and reading (or hearing) a bedtime story? A routine creates a safe and familiar atmosphere that can help our minds settle. It's also good to avoid all digital devices for at least an hour before going to bed because the light from screens can inhibit the natural release of melatonin in the body. Encourage children to take some time to purposefully switch off devices and put them to sleep for the night—a healthy habit for adults to cultivate too!