



Loving-Kindness Meditation: Five Pointers to Get Kids Started



Thinking good thoughts about themselves and others can help kids be happier and healthier. Loving-kindness meditation toward themselves and others can comfort and strengthen young hearts.

Loving-kindness is a kind of heart meditation that consists of sending love, kindness, and compassion by directing positive thoughts, good intentions, or well wishes toward ourselves and others. When people practice loving-kindness meditation on a regular basis, they feel a sense of goodness about themselves and others. It produces a reaction in the brain similar to when one engages in acts of kindness, producing positive feelings which can lead to positive behaviors. Practicing loving-kindness meditation has been shown to:

- Decrease stress and anxiety
- Increase feelings of hope
- Reduce feelings of anger
- Increase empathy
- Increase feelings of self-esteem and decrease self-criticism

In *Bee Heartful: Spread Loving-Kindness* by Frank J. Sileo, PhD, Bentley Bee sends loving-kindness thoughts to himself and others, and can feel his heart growing. This excerpt from the “Note to Adult Beekeepers” describes how to practice loving-kindness meditation with children.

Loving-kindness meditation is great for kids because it is more concrete and structured than other forms of meditation. The child recites specific phrases and brings up images in their minds of the people they are sending loving-kindness to.

It’s important that children understand that when they send loving-kindness thoughts to others, it may not change the other person or how that person feels about them. Loving-kindness does not work like magic or serve as some type of spell on another person. The meditation is more focused on the meditator developing loving-kindness toward others.

Check out *Bee Heartful* here: www.apa.org/pubs/magination/441B274

Getting Started

- Meditation is a quiet activity, so you want to choose a place for your child that is free from distractions. It can be a room in your home, someplace outside like a garden or patio, or any place without interruptions.
- They can sit on the floor, a mat, a pillow or in a chair, or lie down.
- They can close their eyes or cast their eyes downward and a few feet in front of them. This will help avoid any visual distractions.
- Your child can place one or both hands on their heart and take three deep breaths.
- Ask your child to repeat these phrases silently in their head a few times.

May I be happy.

May I be healthy.

May I be safe.

May I be peaceful.

After your child sends loving-kindness intentions toward themselves, they can use the same intention toward other people.

Keep it short at first

Sitting still and focusing can be challenging for children and adults alike. Keeping meditation short in the beginning can be helpful in maintaining young children's interest, attention, and focus. For young children, 3-5 minutes is a good starting point. You can gradually increase the time as children mature and their practice grows.

Mix up the loving-kindness intentions

Your child can vary the practice of loving-kindness meditation by varying who they pick to send intentions to. A common approach is to send loving-kindness intentions to: self, a loved-one, a neutral person, a difficult person, and the world. Your child doesn't have to do all five. They can send intentions to themselves and a loved-one or themselves and the world. Who they want to focus on may change from day to day, so talk with your child before you start your meditation.

Change the words in the intentions

When saying these phrases, your child may not believe them in the moment. Encourage them to say them anyway, as they may lead to greater empathy and heartfulness toward self and others. Parents and children can be creative by coming up with their own loving kindness intentions. For example:

May I/You/We be free from danger.

May I/You/We have a strong mind and body.

May I/You/We be filled with comfort.

May I/You/We have a good day.

Check out *Bee Heartful* here: www.apa.org/pubs/magination/441B274

Spread loving-kindness together

The loving-kindness meditation is a great meditation to do together. When you meditate with our children, you are leading by example. Not all children will be receptive to meditation at first. Encourage your child to continue meditating even if they belittle it. Discuss with them your feelings about meditation and how you think it may help them. Never push your child, though, as this may cause resistance to meditation. Meditation is a practice that builds over time. If you make it a regular activity, it will become part of a morning or evening routine that you or they look forward to doing.

Loving-kindness meditation is a beautiful, calming, and special type of meditation for children. It should never be a replacement for professional mental health care if your child is struggling with clinical issues such as anxiety, depression, or other serious problems. Consult with a mental health professional if you have concerns about your child.

This is an excerpt from Magination Press book, *Bee Heartful: Spread Loving-Kindness*, by Frank Sileo, PhD. The Note to Adult Beekeepers also includes a loving-kindness meditation script to use with your child.

This Article's Author

Frank J. Sileo, PhD, is a New Jersey licensed psychologist and the founder and executive director of the Center for Psychological Enhancement in Ridgewood, New Jersey. He received his doctorate from Fordham University in New York City.

In his practice, Dr. Sileo works with children, adolescents, adults, and families. Since 2010, he has been consistently recognized as one of New Jersey's top kids' doctors.

He has authored several children's books including: *A World of Pausabilities: An Exercise in Mindfulness*, *Did You Hear?: A Story About Gossip*, *Bug Bites and Campfires: A Story for Kids About Homesickness*, and *Sally Sore Loser: A Story About Winning and Losing*, which is the Gold Medal recipient of the prestigious Mom's Choice Award.

Bee Heartful

Bee Heartful: Spread Loving Kindness shows the power of strong, positive, and loving thoughts. Includes a note from the author with more information about loving-kindness and related meditation, and guidelines for how readers can practice being heartfelt just like Bentley!

Check out *Bee Heartful* here: www.apa.org/pubs/magination/441B274