

# Activities to Build Resilience in Children

Adaptable for levels K-12

## Mindful Breathing

Ask the children to get into a comfy position and close their eyes. Have them put their hand on their stomach to feel the rise and fall of their breath.

Instruct the children to breathe:

- In slowly for 4 seconds Hold for 4 seconds
- Breathe out slowly for 4 seconds Hold for 4 seconds

Do this about 4 times, guide them to any thoughts or feelings they may have. Invite them to let go of those thoughts or feelings. Have them imagine the thoughts as bubbles or clouds, floating away as they breathe out.

## Body Scan

Have the children lie down on their backs and close their eyes. Tell them to squeeze every muscle in their body as tight as they can. Tell them to squish their toes and feet, squeeze their hands into fists, and make their legs and arms as hard as stone. After a few seconds, have them release all their muscles and relax for a minute. Encourage them to think about how their body is feeling throughout the activity.

## The Worry Box

Make a worry box with your class.

Have the kids draw or write their worries from school or home, and put them in the box. Check the box and then you can discuss the issues with the child or anonymously or with the whole class, depending on the worry.

Then have the kids make a list of things they can do to feel better when they are worried or feel sad/mad or things that make them feel safe. Have them put the list somewhere visible like the refrigerator, a bathroom mirror, or make a list for the classroom!

## Mindful Bell

Have the children enter their “mindful bodies”-still and quiet, sitting upright, eyes closed. Have the children place all their attention on the sound they are about to hear, listening until the sound is completely gone. Ring a bell with a sustained sound or a rainstick.

Have them raise their hands when they can no longer hear the bell. When most or all have raised their hands, have the children slowly, mindfully move their hand to their stomach and just feel their breathing.

You can help students stay focused during the breathing by reminding them “Just breathing in...just breathing out.”

## Mindful Senses

Bring in scented items (candles, fresh herbs, grass) and invite the kids to breathe in the smell and to feel what happens in their body as they do that. (The cinnamon reminds me of Christmas or the lavender makes me feel sleepy.)

Another option is mindful eating. Have the kids slow down while they eat so they notice things they wouldn't usually. Ask them “What does your food feel like to touch?”, “What about the smell?”, “Take a bite and chew very slowly, notice your mouth moving up and down. Keep chewing for a while and notice how your food feels as it moves down your throat and towards your belly.”

You can adapt this into a superhero theme by calling it “Spidey Senses.” Tell the kids to turn on their “Spidey Senses,” The super focused senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste, and touch like Spiderman. Ask them what they notice. This will encourage them to pause and focus their attention on the present, opening their awareness to the information their senses bring in.

# Activities to Build Resilience in Children

Adaptable for levels K-5

## Safari Walk

Take the kids outside and have them pretend they are on a safari, looking for animals that crawl, fly, or walk. Tell them to be quiet switch on their super senses, looking for tiny animals they may not have seen before.

A similar exercise for older kids is a mindfulness walk. Tell the kids to focus on their breath. Then have them to focus their senses on their surroundings, the breeze on their skin, the sound of the trees, the smell of the air, the way their body feels as it moves This helps them be grounded and experience the sensations rather than becoming to “heady” by thinking too hard about them.

## Mindful Jar

Get a clear jar and fill it almost all the way with water. Add a spoonful of glitter glue or glue and dry glitter. Shake it to make the glitter swirl. You can say “Imagine the glitter is like your thoughts when you are stressed. See how they whirl around and make it hard to see clearly? That’s why it’s so easy to make silly decisions when you’re upset, because you’re not thinking clearly. This is normal and happens to grown ups too.” Then put the jar down. Now watch what happens when you’re still for a moment. See how the glitter settles and the water clears? Your mind works the same way. When we take a moment, our thoughts settle and we can see more clearly.

## Worry Egg Carton

Have the children write or draw things they are worried about or that make them mad and put them in an egg carton.

When the child feels there are enough items in the egg carton, have them stomp on it or smash them to show they are stronger and more powerful than the things that were bothering them.

## Mindful Posing

Tell the kids that doing fun poses can help them feel strong and brave. Then, tell them to try one of these poses:

The Superman: have them stand with the feet just wider than the hips, fists clenched, and arms reached out, stretching the body out as long as possible.

The Wonder Woman: have them stand tall with legs wider than hip width apart and hands or fists placed on the hips.

Have the kids use positive self-talk by saying things out loud like “I’m strong and powerful”, “I am brave,” or “I can do this.” You can expand on this with superhero drawings.

Have the children draw a picture of themselves as a superhero that fights against their worries. Ask them how their body or mind fights against these things and keeps the bad things away, what are their superpowers, etc.

## Additional Resources

Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children by Thich Nhat Hanh and the Plum Village Community

Mindfulness Exercises for Educators from children’s book author Annaka Harris: <https://annakaharris.com/mindfulness-for-children/>

Worry Woo Monsters: A series of books and characters to help kids learn about empathy, self-confidence, and mindfulness. Lesson plans for grades K-5: <http://www.worrywoos.com/teach-woo.html>

Resiliency Building Lesson Plans starting on page 28: <http://lynnenamka.com/resilience.pdf>