

Meditation

Meditation for the Child Mind

You don't see much information on meditation when it comes to children. The reason for this is because there is a lot of debate in this area. Some say that children spend enough time in an altered state of wonder and delight (especially kids under 7) so there is no need for them to meditate. There are others that feel kids are never too young to meditate and even have group classes to teach them proper techniques. There is also a realistic view that if the child will be expected to meditate on a regular basis for religion the earlier they are introduced the better.

Great effort has been taken to address the issue while considering all the views on meditation. It is your decision if you want to teach your child meditation at a particular age or at all. For those of you that feel it an important thing to teach them to meditate, you will find a procedure explained in this lesson to cover most ages and stages of your child's life. Like all lessons learned it is a gradual and slow process that must be followed to achieve the goal of a full meditation realm. Your child is the first concern in this, so the procedure will be a slow one with only gradual changes as time passes.

--- Now to the lesson ---

Meditation is an important part of all Pagan religions. Raising a Pagan will mean that you will need to educate your child in meditation. Everyone is different, thankfully there are many ways to meditate, I am sure this lesson will aid in teaching your child to meditate. Please be open to all the ways of meditating, even if it isn't your way. Remember as with all things pertaining to your kids, you must find what is right for them. The goal of this lesson is to help your child find a fun way to meditate that fits them.

Meditation can be successful no matter what age you start your child at; but it will be easier if it is started young. There are three age groups and meditation exercises that reflect the capability and comfort of each that will make meditating fun and not a 'chore';

1. Ages 3-5 – will to sit and be still portion of meditating
2. Ages 6-7 – will learn the feeling behind meditation
3. Ages 8 and up – they will do the exercises for the 6-7 age group first for a couple of weeks if they are new at it and only as a basic crash course (be sure they know it, if not they repeat it until they understand it). Then they should begin a more in depth meditation training in the form of a lengthy meditation workbook located at the link provided at the end of the lesson.

3-5 yrs. Old conditioning method:

Although you may think that a child is too young for meditation, it is simply not true. You will find that the definition for a meditation session changes with the child's age.

This age group needs merely to sit still, do a little concentrating, and know the name of what they are doing. To accomplish this follow the suggestions below:

Stage – they will need a place to meditate (their own/not yours). Prefer that it be in a corner somewhere with access to the walls so they can lean back if they need to. It doesn't have to be a permanent place (roll the toy box over and pick up the rug) but it needs to be one that doesn't take a lot of effort to convert. It is best if they don't ever wait for you to prepare the spot so be sure it either doesn't take long to prepare or that they can help a little getting it ready. There should be nothing with major eye candy to distract them or any toys within reaching distance to play with. Be sure when tearing it down after each session that the same procedure is used as set up but in reverse.

Personalizing – this needs to be a special time for them so you will need to make it that way. Give them a special pillow (no lace or large buttons to play with) or something else to use just during this time. Make it a together time by joining in with your own object (similar to theirs) to add to the excitement. Add more fun to it by putting up a chart with stickers to put on it each time they do it (similar to toothbrush chart) and use it during meditation sessions. If you are adding in an incentive make it more a 'doing' thing than a material one (the walk in the woods vs. the new toy).

Procedure – the expectations of this 'mediating session' is going to seem low, but for a kid of this age it will be just right. They will need to start at 30 sec and by the time they are 5 years old most should be up to 3 minutes or more. Everyone will be different so these times aren't written in stone but it is important that they gradually move up in time as they are able to handle it. You are to use a clock on the wall or your wrist watch for timing, something they can't read and no bells or dings to distract and/or anticipate. Setting up a routine time is best; first thing in the morning, before mid-day nap, before bedtime. It is best to try it at different times at first to find the time that best suits your child and they can accomplish it without a lot of effort. The goal is to sit still, they can close their eyes, keep them open, tap fingers against thumb in turn, or any other small 'calm trance' type movement. You will need to enforce no toys, talking, or playing during this time and don't give in not even once. You will need to keep your eyes opened to make sure they are doing what they need to do and don't use this time for you to meditate, you are simply setting an example here. Be sure to tell your child before and after sessions what you are doing by saying its name which will help them understand it as the procedure changes as they get older.

6-7 yrs. Old (and 8 yrs. and up / for a couple weeks only) conditioning method:

If your child is just beginning to meditate in this age group please read the exercises for the younger group. Whether or not your child did exercises when they were younger will not effect what they learn in this age group. However, if they did not go through the younger stage you may want to complete it as a 'crash course' with them for a week or

two before beginning the one for this age group. If you did meditate with them as a young child, now that they are older, it is up to you to decide whether you move their meditation time, extend the time of the sessions, or even have them do it more than once daily. It is important that you keep meditation as a routine done on a daily basis, repetition is very important.

To add more flavor to the regular (by now) boring meditation routines. At this age it is time for children to condition themselves for full-blown meditation which will be coming, not far from now. To do this you will need to get them in tune with some main meditation elements like visualization and feeling. Now is when those things will be easier to explore, kids at this age are very open minded and their feelings are intensified.

You will do exercises with them when the whim hits you as a sort of 'work-out' and then when they are in meditation sessions they will be asked to incorporate them. There will be no way to know if they are actually doing them and that isn't as important as going through the motions. Meditation is like riding a bike; you hear what everyone says, go through the motions, then one day you ride your way. It is later that all the information and lessons fall into place as you work on fine-tuning your meditation. The key now is to make the lessons fun so the information will be retained and not like the spelling of words for Friday's test that are half forgotten on Saturday.

The lessons themselves will be short 'meditation' times but will focus on the element that is trying to be reached. It is good for some kids that you continue to sit with them however, they will need some exercises that they can do on their own. It is best to ask overall questions (did you like that, were you able to do it, do you think you will do it again) rather than drill them to see if they accomplished it. Make sure that there is not too much of a routine to the lessons because it is important they consider them a chore. It is important that you give them a 'reinforcement assignment' of each lesson the following day of the actual lesson as well as several other random times but don't overdue it. Once the concept is grasped you have finished with it. Introducing a different lesson under the same 'topic' of the last one is alright too just try and make the lesson as different as you can.

The main things you will need to teach or show your child will be visualization, feelings, and control of their bodies. There are so many ways to show these in so many different situations that you will have to come up with them on your own. There are a few ideas below for each of these lessons to give you an idea of what the lessons can be like. Pick some of them and add a lot more of your own, make this a 'bonding time' for both you and your child to each other and the art of meditation. If this is done for awhile allow your child time to come up with ideas for lessons on their own and/or share with you the experiences they had in one of the main lessons. Their ability to share and come up with things on their own will show you that they understood and give you assurance of your accomplishment.

Visualization –

Visualization is actually an optional element in meditation. A lot of people find that it is necessary for them (especially the younger kids) to actually go to a ‘visualized or imaginary’ place in order to get them settled into meditation. It is also used as a transition from current state into the meditative state. There are others that feel visualization is a way to improperly train to meditate and it hinders, more than helps. This is because visualizing will get the mind focused on something then require another task of bringing that focus back to the meditation itself, although others say that that is done automatically after the ‘day dream’ portion is done. Basically it seems that visualization is a personal choice. You are free to make that choice for your child or allow them to make it on their own.

Some exercises are:

Exercise: While spending time with your child one or both of you come up with a place or situation. Talk to one another as you mentally create it and share with one another the specifics you see.

Use of exercise: Allow them to start this procedure again before meditating but stop them and tell them to close their eyes and visit there quietly in their mind.

Exercise: Locate an object in a strange place and talk about the effects it would have on them if its shape were exaggerated; the pencil was longer than the table, the bowl was long instead of a perfect circle (what things it would knock over, how hard it would be to eat from, etc...). This will create a picture in their mind.

Use of exercise: Grab the same object used earlier in the exaggeration game and sit it in front of them telling them to stare at it and imagine this again – start off talking about it then stop them and tell them to close their eyes and visit there quietly in their mind.

Body Awareness –

It is important that everyone who meditates gets in touch with feelings. Knowing how to totally experience your feelings and mentally channel them, for most people, is the key factor in meditation. Although your child will do this on a small scale it will make him/her aware of their ability and will be one of the few things that will be used on a daily basis as they mature in their meditation.

Feeling Exercise: Use water as an eye-opener to feeling by letting them air-dry (in closed room with door shut) after a shower. have them get wet then step out of the water while still in the shower and feel as one water drop makes it’s journey to the tub. Do different movements with hands and legs above and below the water while in the bathtub and compare and feel the differences.

Use of Exercise: Move a fan or open the window not far from where they are to meditate (don’t allow them to get a cold from this – check the temperatures and distance as

needed) and have them close their eyes as they meditate and feel the effects on their body and skin as they meditate.

Senses Exercise: Have a total experience eating an orange (or any citrus fruit of their choice) by using mostly their senses. Let the procedure be a total experience for them, but be in a little control to see that they are taking their time and enjoying it at the same time. Have them smell and feel it slowly while eyes closed before peeling it. Next they will slowly peel it while they closely watch how it comes off of the ‘meat’ of the orange and have them feel it once the rim is off. Have them watch it up close when they pull apart a piece to eat and watch the juices squirting out then look at and feel the small cells that are still containing the juices. Before taking a bite have them smell it and ask them the difference between the smell now and the smell before any juice had been released. Lastly have them taste it and allow it to sit in their mouth for awhile as they feel the juice filling their mouth with sweetness before swallowing.

Use of Exercise: Have your child meditate in a different place (outside, a different room, etc...) have them close their eyes and use taste and smell the room. This will liven up things a little and can be used every now and then.

Controlling your body exercise: When your child has a (small) cut, pain, or an itch have them imagine it as something they can work well with (a group of pricklies, ball of light, etc...). The image can be mentally pictured around where the actual pain is. Have them imagine it leaving the body taking any desired path the child feels necessary – but it will need to leave from the spot of it’s origin to assure that it doesn’t return.

Use of Exercise: Another meditation period can have your child picture a figure (square, circle, etc..) and imagine it entering into their body from one point and then channeling it through the body as they feel it. The figure will need to leave at its origin point.

Becoming one with energy: Have them do something to themselves that is annoying (lightly pinch, lightly tugging hair, etc...) but be sure they notice the effect it has over and over again. Once they have become annoyed, or are concentrating on the pain, have them relax their body and concentrate more on the hand doing it or the way the hair moves when they are doing it. This will make the pain or effect of the action less noticeable. Tell them to continue this until they don’t feel anything and let them know that at this point they have become one with energy.

Take note of the things that they liked and maybe use it as a cue to use similar things with the same result.

As your child gets older the amount of time meditating should increase, however, don’t get caught up in watching the clock. It is more important that the concepts be grasped and executed during this stage. The first session with a new idea might take 30 minutes before they willingly stop the session, at other times it may only be a few minutes. Be

sure they are working on their techniques though, but don't worry them too much with time and give them some control of the meditation periods.

Towards the end of this period you will need to wean them off of you, when they are older they will be meditating on their own. Do this in a gradual manner but continue to 'sit in' during some sessions to comfort and/or keep them on track with meditation. Have some fun by stirring things up a bit from time to time; move the place, time, lighting, smell or any other thing from time to time for added fun and conditioning. Be sure not to make each meditation session new and exciting, only do that sometimes, they will need to be more comfortable with the hum-drum form of meditating but aware of the changes that can be used when needed. If your child asks to 'try something' different in their technique or place today allow them the freedom to do this and take the question as a sign that they are starting to understand meditations purpose and uses. Do not allow them to take control of the meditation learning procedure as a whole or venture too far from it though..

8 yrs. and up meditation workbook:

<http://www.geocities.com/oitbme/Eldertree/MeditationWrkBk.pdf>