**Mindfulness**

“You practice mindfulness, on the one hand, to be calm and peaceful. On the other hand, as you practice mindfulness and live a life of peace, you inspire hope for a future of peace.” Thich Nhat Hanh.

Dear Families,

With the holidays fast approaching, this might be a time for us all to slow down and take a breath. I understand the challenges of home schooling and remote learning. Many of us have been pushed further than we might have wanted to be. I don’t know anyone who signed up for this! Bring on the break, chill out and rest. Perhaps you might like to consider some *mindfulness*.

Mindfulness could be thought of as a calm and focused effort to be present to the moment. It could be an awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment without judgement. Mindfulness is not thinking about the past or the future.

Some scientists believe that practising mindfulness can help us reduce our anxiety and help us avoid depression. They also say that it can reduce our distractions and improve focus. American author, scientist and mindfulness expert, Jon Kabat-Zinn, said, “In Asian languages, the word for 'mind' and the word for 'heart' are same. So, if you're not hearing mindfulness in some deep way as heartfulness, you're not really understanding it. Compassion and kindness towards oneself are intrinsically woven into it. You could think of mindfulness as wise and affectionate attention.” Mindfulness might also be thought of as being in the moment or being present to what is happening right now. ‘If you are depressed you are living in the past. If you are anxious you are living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the present.’ Lao Tsu

To help foster mindfulness over the school break, you might like to choose one or two activities from the following list to do together as a family.

* Turn off the lights and sit quietly somewhere. Notice your breathing. Feel each breath as it enters your body and then calmly exits. Do this for five or 10 minutes. Talk about what you noticed.
* As a family, do some colouring in together in silence. Listen to the noises outside. Can you hear the pencils rubbing on the paper? What other noises do you notice? What body sensations do you feel?
* Go for a walk to the local park, river or beach. Sit quietly and listen to the sounds around you. Take some paper and a pencil and divide your page into five parts. In each section, write down everything you hear, what you see, any smells you notice, anything you physically feel and also the emotions that you feel.
* When you are having a meal together, choose one item of food from your plate. Look carefully at it before smelling it then slowly eating it. Talk about all the things that you notice before doing it again with another item of food.
* Blindfold someone in the group. Have them smell different items and let them describe what they smell. Does the smell remind them of anything else? Repeat with taste, touch and listening.
* Download the free app ‘Smiling Mind’ and have a play with it. See what you discover.
* Go outside and lie on the grass and watch the clouds float past. Try this during the day and also when it starts to get dark at night.

“Mindfulness is about love and loving life. When you cultivate this love, it gives you clarity and compassion for life, and your actions happen in accordance with that.” Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Have a restful break and I hope that all your holiday plans come true. I hope to see all of our wonderful kids back here onsite next term.

Thanks for your support,

Andy McNeilly

Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator

