

Observe Walk #1

Parents with Children up to age 12

We have all heard that living mindfully increases happiness, but what is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is... experiencing and participating fully in the present moment, without judgment. One of the ways mindfulness can be developed is through observation and conversation about what it is your senses are telling you, especially when walking in nature.

It sounds fairly simple, but how is it done? Why is it that when I try to clear my mind, it fills with thousands of thoughts immediately? The answer is that mindfulness is a practice, just like practicing any other skill. When you do it more frequently, it becomes easier. Part of practicing mindfulness is not judging yourself for your imperfect mindfulness practice. When your mind wanders, simply and gently bring it back. This walk is one way you can begin to bring mindfulness into your life.

This walk is great for you to do alone or with your child. The recommended trail is the White Cedar Trail, but you can use it on any trail by reading the prompts whenever you want during your walk. Please read slowly. Please read slowly, with pauses. Listen to your child's responses and share your responses with them.



Turtle Pond - Find a spot a little way from others where you can gaze out at the pond. Put away distractions. Zip phones into pockets.

Take several deep breaths, breathing out as slowly as you can. Breathe in slowly, letting your breath out slowly, focusing on your body. Try to be completely silent. Listen to the sounds around you. What sounds do you hear? How many different sounds do you hear? As thoughts come in your head, try to push them out. Concentrate only on the sounds that you hear as you look out onto the pond. Spend several silent moments just listening to the sounds around you. Did you have a hard time not thinking about just the sounds you were hearing?

Tip: As you walk, use your senses to notice and experience colors, textures, smells, and the sounds around you... Walk in silence down the second path to the right to get to the **White Cedar Trail**.

Prairie Platform - Sit down on the bench, or stand nearby. Watch the waving grasses of the prairie and the trees in the distance. As you rest, feel the air moving across your skin. Focus on a part of your body where they can feel the wind – your hands, your neck, your nose. Do you like the feeling of the wind on your face?

Take a left at the fork to continue on the **White Cedar Trail**. Go silently, focusing on the sound of that your feet make as they walk on the trail.

Stay right at the crossroads, following the path and watch for the movement when the scenery changes from swamp to a cedar forest.

Nature's playground—The trees invite you in and it is suddenly darker. Go off the path and explore. What is under the ferns? Allow yourself to be five years old and discover interesting places behind the pine trees. Children are naturally mindful; allow your younger self to be your teacher in this moment.

Stay right to follow the **White Cedar Trail**. Continue to closely attend to the sensations you are experiencing.

Maple Trees - At the post marked #35 is a beautiful maple tree, its bark has marks from drilling for syrup, and burrowing insects. Examine the tree, noticing its rough bark, its leaves, its roots, and its place in the surrounding woods. What makes this tree different from the others? What make it special? Think about something that is special about the person you are with. Now think about something that is special about you. Share your thoughts with your walking buddy. As you walk down the path, continue to think about all the ways you are special and unique.

Stay right, following the path and watch for the moment when the scenery changes. Stay right to follow the **White Cedar Trail**. Walk in silence and concentrate on the sounds around you. Are they different from the sounds you remember hearing at the pond when you started the walk?

Turtle Pond - As you again see Turtle Pond, reflect upon your time on this walk. How can you practice being mindful in your own backyard? In your house? At school or work? Thank your walking buddy for taking this walk with you.