

# THE MINDFULNESS WORKOUT

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### **Chapter 1: Start Where You Are**

Many people believe that the teenage years are destined to be stressful for everybody involved. But in my experience, as a mother who has raised four teenagers and a psychotherapist who works with teenagers, there are ways of dealing with the stresses, so that everybody involved can enjoy these important, creative, and fun years.

If you are a parent, a teacher, a guidance counsellor, a psychotherapist, or a sports coach who works with teenagers, my hope is that the ideas in this book will help you find ways of enjoying your time with teenagers, and supporting them through the inevitable challenges they will face.

Similarly if you are a teenager I hope this book will help you better understand your feelings, thoughts, and behaviours, and encourage you to find creative ways of dealing with the stresses in your life.

This chapter examines:

- Teenagers and Stress
- Engaging teenagers
- Why Mindfulness
- Moving from autopilot to mindful
- The observer inside
- Mindfulness is a skill

### **Chapter 2: Pack up Your Kit Bag**

Bob Phillips remarks, “Teenagers complain there is nothing to do, then stay out all night doing it”. Constant complaints of boredom, reckless behaviour, volatility and moodiness are typical charges that adults make against teenagers. The teenage years are a hectic time for everybody involved.

This chapter helps you pack up your kit bag in preparation for the workouts described in the remaining chapters. It explains some of the reasons why teenagers behave the way they do. When adults and teenagers recognise their behaviour as part of a natural developmental process it reduces conflict and makes life easier for all involved.

This chapter examines:

- Brain restructuring during the teenage years
- The role of dopamine in teenage behaviour
- The importance of social connection in teenage development
- Neuroplasticity and the teenage brain
- How mindfulness supports the development of the teenage brain
- The types of mindfulness exercises in this book

### **Chapter 3: Ride the Emotional Rollercoaster**

J K Rowling says, “You couldn't give me anything to make me go back to being a teenager. Never. No, I hated it.” Most adults remember the teenage years as an emotional rollercoaster ride that was at times thrilling and exciting but frequently

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confusing and distressing. Riding the emotional rollercoaster that is adolescence involves learning to handle the chaotic feelings that are a daily part of life.

This chapter focuses on:

- Understanding the difference between emotions and feelings
- Identifying and labelling emotions and feelings
- Becoming aware of any strategies used to avoid difficult feelings
- Soothing intense feelings with mindfulness

### **Chapter 4: Get Friendly with your Thoughts**

In his book *10% Happier: How I tamed the Voice in my Head* Dan Harris describes mindfulness as “The skill of knowing what’s happening in your head at any given moment without getting carried away by it.” In reality we all have a soundtrack going on in our minds, kind of like a radio chattering away in the background.

This chapter focuses on:

- Becoming aware of the soundtrack in your head
- Observing the tone of your thoughts
- Noticing when you are getting carried away by thoughts
- Getting on friendly terms with your thoughts

### **Chapter 5: Tall Tales and Fake News**

Truthiness is a word coined by Stephen Colbert, a US comedian, on his political satire show *The Colbert Report*, and means something that seems and feels like it is true, even though it is not. All good fake news stories have a ring of truthiness.

Did you know that our brains are the greatest purveyors of fake news ever? And just like the gullible people reading stories in their Facebook feed about a stranded polar bear that floated onto a Scottish island or Prince Harry’s secret wedding we believe the stories our brain serves up.

This chapter focuses on:

- Identifying the tall tales and fake news our brains tell us
- Looking at how these tall tales distort the truth
- Turning down the volume on the stories

### **Chapter 6: Value Finding and Strength Spotting**

Teenagers face many complex dilemmas on the journey to adulthood. As they gain independence from their family they need to develop their own value system to help them make wise choices, however they are given very little opportunity to develop their own personal code. In addition they are consistently ranked against other teenagers and end up feeling ‘not good enough’. This constant comparison game leaves them feeling under resourced. As Simon Sinek says, “Spending too much time focused on others’ strengths leaves us feeling weak. Focusing on our own strengths is what, in fact, makes us strong.”

This chapter focuses on:

- Developing a personal code through discovering inner values
- Identifying and developing personal strengths
- Using mindfulness to feel resourced by savouring strengths and values

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### **Chapter 7: Taking Care of Number One**

Many people live with a background chatter of harsh criticism and negative judgment in their heads. Doctor Kristin Neff, who has researched self-compassion extensively says, “The biggest reason people aren’t more self-compassionate is that they are afraid they’ll become self-indulgent. They believe self-criticism is what keeps them in line.” Her research shows that self-compassion is associated with high levels of happiness, optimism, initiative, curiosity, and agreeableness. When we take care of number one we have the energy and compassion to care for others.

This chapter focuses on:

- The problem with self-esteem
- The reasons why self-compassion works where self-esteem fails
- Using mindfulness to develop self-compassion

### **Chapter 8: Navigate Relationships Mindfully**

Relationships are both the primary source of joy and the primary source of stress in most people’s lives. If you don’t believe me take a moment to review the last week. Try and remember the three most stressful, annoying, or upsetting situations you found yourself in. Then count how many of these stressful incidents were related to your feelings about another person.

We can reduce relationship stress by changing how we communicate with and respond to others. As William James said, “Whenever you’re in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.”

This chapter focuses on:

- Discussing the importance of teenage friendships
- Examining why relationship stress arises
- Learning mindful approaches to improving communication and reducing relationship stress

### **Chapter 9: Workout Extras**

The mindfulness exercises described in Chapters 3 to 8 will help your teenager develop a core practice of mindfulness that supports mental fitness and emotional resilience in daily life. This section provides a variety of more targeted exercises tailored to particular areas that are common concerns in teenage life.

It includes sections on:

- Social media and social networking
- Addictive and compulsive behaviours
- Exam and performance anxiety
- Sleepless nights
- Mood busting
- Coping when life gets tough