



Mind, Body, Soul

MINDFULNESS IN THE ELC

LIZ BAWDEN DIRECTOR OF THE EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

“It feels like meditation. It feels like happiness.” – Ava

In today's world of hectic schedules and with the frenetic pace of life, children and families in the Early Learning Centre (ELC) are experiencing the benefits of mindfulness. Research indicates that children benefit from mindfulness practice throughout their busy day, as it promotes social and emotional wellbeing. Children are active learners who engage with their peers and the many opportunities their learning environment offers. Our pedagogy promotes learning through play, fostering curiosity and wonder for active and authentic learning.

On any given day in the ELC children are actively exploring their world, both indoors and out. They test theories, develop elaborate imaginary games involving other children, negotiate with others to create dams and canals in the sandpit, build together to discover the effects of symmetry, and demonstrate their thinking as they explore and manipulate different types of materials.

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, which guides all early childhood educational programs, promotes the concept of children developing a strong social and emotional wellbeing. During these important years children experience being part of a group and begin to understand the roles and responsibilities that foster belonging. Wellbeing includes good mental and physical health, as well as feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Mindfulness practice promotes wellbeing and encourages positive relationships and resilience by helping children to be more attentive and engaged in their learning. When it is time to transition to another part of the day, the children respond to us coming together as a group to concentrate on our breathing and to take time to pause in our busy day before refocusing our attention on the next activity.

On a weekly basis the children participate in mindfulness and meditation activities. Our Mind Body Soul program, run by Educator Katherine Zachest, specifically focuses on different

aspects of mindfulness each week. There is a strong emphasis on yoga, which helps children to become aware of their bodies and calm their mind. Practising yoga regularly has helped the children develop better posture, balance and flexibility. They look forward to these sessions and it has been wonderful to watch their skills develop in yoga and mindfulness practice.

“When I do stretches it gives me energy” – Lucas

“When we do mindfulness my body feels good. It makes me think about how my body works.” – Louis

“When we do mindfulness I think about going to the beach – to Anglesea – and things that aren't even real, like unicorns and dragons. It makes me feel great.” – Alice

“I was hearing my brain breathing.” – Cameron

Educators in the ELC are exploring a range of approaches in the classroom to provide an environment that supports focus and attention, and promotes clear thinking, learning, creativity and emotional management. During mindfulness sessions we bring the children's attention to their senses, and this helps them to focus on the present. It may be a sprig of rosemary to smell, a feather to touch, or a noise we can hear outside. Mindful education consultant, Janet Ety-Leal said “With heightened awareness of our senses, concentration effortlessly improves and our experience of life becomes all the richer. We focus and tune in to the present moment, and the mind and body start to calm down.”

The children enjoy massaging each other's hands, using a breathing ball to concentrate on their breaths in and out as the ball expands and contracts, or watching a gooey mixture go slowly through a timer. Parents report that they are also enjoying the benefits of mindfulness, receiving massages at home and being shown yoga poses by their children.

The ELC classroom environment is filled with provocations for children to explore their world, to be curious, and engage with others through play. In this fun and busy environment the children and Educators welcome the benefits that mindful practice brings.

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