

# Empowering Our Children Through Meditation

By Shola Arewa

**M**editation dates back to the very beginning of civilisation. Meditation is an inner science, the act of going inside to discover the greatness of the internal landscape. Meditation rests the continuous activity of the mind and helps regulate the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which is responsible for balancing most of the body's functions and controls the 'flight or fight' response. It is when our minds and bodies are overworked that stress kicks in; excessive amounts of stress lead to all kinds of ailments. Through its balancing effect on the nervous system, meditation reduces stress. It improves concentration and memory, sleep patterns can be regulated, the immune system can be stimulated, blood pressure lowered and general performance improved.

Just like parents, children experience a tremendous amount of pressure, such as the demands of school, peer pressure, and identity issues. They are usually aware of the stresses their parents are experiencing and often harbour unwarranted fears and worries. We frequently underestimate the amount of anxiety children carry. Meditation offers the whole family an excellent coping strategy. It also provides an opportunity for us to reconnect with the powerful inner world.

In 2004, research was conducted on the benefits of meditation on students by Rita Benn, PhD, Director of Education at the Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, University of Michigan at the Nataki Talibah School in Detroit. Results showed 5th and 6th



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grade students (10 and 11 year olds) who practised meditation had more positive feelings, higher self-esteem, handled stress better, and got along more favourably with other students than non-meditators. These African-American students were practicing meditation as part of their curriculum for 6 years prior to the study.

Below is a simple meditation technique for adults and children of 3 years plus.

### 3 STEP MEDITATION

**1. Position:** Sit upright in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. The main thing is to keep the spine and head upright. This ensures that the chakras (energy centres) are in alignment.

While breathing through the nose. Instruct them to push their belly out on the in-breath and belly in on the out-breath. Each breath should be slow and rhythmic.

**3. Still the Mind:** Always inform the mind of the duration of the meditation, asking it to be still and silent throughout. I suggest anywhere between 2 - 10 minutes. You can lengthen the time with practise. Focus on every breath. The universal mantra 'Om' can be chanted silently with each breath to focus concentration and relax the mind.

**TIP:** If a child finds meditation particularly difficult then sitting still and listening to relaxing music is a great alternative.

Parents, educators, and carers hold the most important role there is in life, which is empowering the next generation. Meditation clearly provides an excellent coping strategy for children. It is also a great tool for developing self-discipline. The best way to teach children meditation is by example. Don't take my word for it. Give it a try.

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