



Empowering Children through Meditation

By Shola Arewa

Meditation dates back to the very beginning of civilisation. People of old, not only observed their surroundings, they also learnt to master their inner world. Power was understood as something that resides within, this is the nature of true power; quite unlike external power, which is given by others and therefore can be removed at anytime. Meditation allowed us to gain a heightened awareness and we prospered.

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.

WHY IS MEDITATION SO IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN?

Teaching children to meditate can provide parents with much needed peace and quiet, but this is not the only benefit of teaching your child to meditate. Children experience a tremendous amount of pressure, which can take forms such as the demands of school, homework and exams, or bullying, peer pressure and identity issues. Many children suffer silently from various kinds of abuse. 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 children of all ages an excellent coping strategy. It also provides an opportunity for children to re-connect with the powerful inner world. This can be especially beneficial when children experience pain and powerlessness in their everyday lives.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN THROUGH MEDITATION

Our greatest growth and learning takes place in the first seven years of life. What we experience in these early years continues to influence and inform behavior throughout our adult lives. Yes, think about it. How were your first seven years? How were those of your children? What were you exposed to then, that still affects you today? Many of life's challenges are avoidable and many are an inevitable aspect of our very existence. Parents, educators and carers hold the most important role there is in life. Nothing is of greater magnitude than empowering the next generation. Empowering children doesn't mean getting everything right, you won't. It means providing children with coping skills for the times, when we, as adults, get it wrong.

Recent research (2004) at the Nataki Talibah School in Detroit, showed students who practised meditation had more positive feelings, were happier, had higher self-esteem, handled stress better, and got along more favourably with other students than non-meditators. These African-American students had been practicing

meditation as part of their curriculum for 6 years prior to the study. The research was conducted by Rita Benn, PhD, Director of Education at the Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, University of Michigan, with 5th and 6th grade students - 10 and 11 year olds.

Magidovitch, a parent who lobbies for meditation in schools, said of his children who regularly meditate, "They are calmer about approaching new situations, and that includes less anxiety about peer relations, and more willingness to go their own way. They're more comfortable about who they are. They're able to do more work in less time . . . and their standardized test scores have gone up."

Meditation clearly provides an excellent coping strategy for children. It is also a great tool for developing self-discipline.

Below is a simple meditation technique that can be used with children of three years plus.

3 STEP MEDITATION

- 1. Position:** Ask the child to 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.
- 2. Breathe:** Ask the child to breathe through their 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:** Agree a length of time with the child. I suggest anywhere between 2 – 10 minutes. You can lengthen the time with practise. Always inform the mind of the duration of the meditation, asking it to be still and silent throughout. Focus on every breath. The universal mantra 'Om' can be chanted silently with each breath to focus concentration and relax the mind.

If a child finds meditation particularly difficult then sitting still and listening to relaxing music is a great alternative. The best way to teach children meditation is by example. Hence the peace and quiet I mentioned initially. Additional benefits are the difference which meditation can make to your own life. Everyone can use these simple meditation tools. They will enrich the quality of your life and empower your children. Don't take my word for it. Give it a try.

Shola Arewa is a Master of Yoga, international Speaker, Life Coach and highly acclaimed Author with over 20 years experience. She is available to conduct meditation programmes for individuals, groups and organisations internationally. Contact her to find out how she can help you empower the leaders of tomorrow. Email her at: shola@shola.co.uk