

MINDFUL WALKING

For up-to-date information about COVID-19 Public Health guidelines, visit www.york.ca/safeatschool.

Physically active children who meet the [Canadian 24 Hour Movement Guidelines](#) have better physical, mental health and psychosocial well-being. Walking is a physical activity that can be done by most children. It does not require special skills or equipment, and it can be done anywhere, anytime at your own pace.

WHAT IS MINDFUL WALKING?

Mindful walking is the practice of combining walking with mindfulness. This means being aware of each step, and each breath you take and remaining in the present moment. The practice helps to strengthen your concentration and focus. It is a great way to de-stress and maintain a sense of calm.

Mindful walking can be done anywhere, but it can be more rewarding if you are able to get outside in the presence of nature, such as the back field of the school, a park, parkette or even an accessible trail or forest.



Mindful walking involves the following steps:

- **Breathe:** Have the students stand and take several [deep belly breaths](#) and allow their bodies to relax from head to toe
- **Smile:** Ask the students to smile slightly; smiling signals to the brain that what is going to happen is pleasant
- **Walk:** Ask the students to begin walking; bring their focus and attention to the movement of their breath; bring awareness to the body, the head, arms, torso, legs and feet. As they take each step, they should become aware of each foot as it rises and descends back to the ground
- **Stop and Observe:** Periodically ask students to stop and observe something around them such as a flower, stone, leaf, posters or signs, or a sound like a bird chirping, dog barking or people talking and laughing; spend a few moments in appreciation before continuing the walk
- **Breathe:** End the session by asking the students to take several deep belly breaths, allowing air to flow through their bodies from head to toe

*For a more purposeful walk consider adding a topic of study for discussion.

PUBLIC HEALTH

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York Region

ADDING VARIETY TO YOUR WALK

You can add interest and variety to the class's mindful walk by:

- Changing the walking pace:
 - If students seem tired, a faster walking pace may energize everyone
 - When students are feeling agitated or overstimulated, walking at a steady, even pace may provide comfort and calm
- Asking students to walk and imagine they are on different surfaces such as snow, mud, a rocky trail, walking through a fast-moving stream, or across a creek on stepping-stones

OTHER IDEAS FOR MINDFUL WALKING

Walk on the rainbow activity

This activity may be more appropriate for use with younger students (grades k-4). It teaches students to be mindful of their surroundings.

To prepare for the walk, have a class discussion about the colours of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Start the walk by asking students to take several deep breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth. As they walk, bring their awareness to the things around them. Ask them to find objects that represent each colour of the rainbow, for example, a red car, orange flowers, yellow butterfly or a blue bicycle. At the end of the walk, allow time for reflection. Ask the students which of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch or taste) they used most on the rainbow walk and what did they notice on the walk that they had not noticed before. Students may wish to draw some of the things they saw.

The five senses mindful walk

This activity uses the five senses to focus on being in the present moment as you walk. It can be done indoors or outdoors. Begin by asking students to focus on their [breath](#) – slow, deep and long breaths can help maintain a sense of calm. Start by walking slowly, breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.

Be aware of your surroundings and use the five senses to name:

- **Five** things you see around you, particularly things you would not normally pay attention to or notice, such as the number of petals on a flower, colours of a playground, shadows, a bird hopping from tree branch to tree branch or a park bench
- **Four** things you can feel or touch, such as your feet touching the ground, the wind on your face, the feeling of heat or cold on your skin, or your breath as you inhale and exhale
- **Three** things you hear, focus on external sounds, such as a school bell, a dog barking or the lawn being mowed
- **Two** things you can smell, such as freshly cut grass or cooking (e.g., a barbeque)
- **One** thing around you can taste in this moment, such as water

Finish this activity with a deep breath.

Additional video resources to help you lead a mindful walk:

- [Walking Meditation for Kids](#) from Little Flower Yoga: a demonstration on how to get students to connect to their body sensations, find grounding and focus
- [Mindful Walking](#) from Cosmic Kids Zen Den: a mindful walk through the countryside