

The start of a new school year seems to set in motion everyone's busiest schedules, and they just keep gaining momentum through the end of the year. Things can get hectic, and it's often hard to find a moment to catch your breath!

Even if your family doesn't have a lot of free time, what you do with that free time can help you all slow down and stay in the moment. Mindfulness is a buzzword these days, and for good reason. Mindfulness is the ability to be present in the moment, without thinking or worrying about what's to come or what has already happened. It can be really helpful to keep yourself and your family grounded in stressful times. Here are some books that can help your family practice mindfulness, whether you're looking to try meditation or enjoy a fun story that can help your child stay in the moment.

"Quiet" by Tomie dePaola. This picture book teaches how to be mindful without ever mentioning the word. A grandfather and his two grandchildren notice how the forest around them is "in a hurry." They point out the fast-flying birds, a frog jumping into a pond, and a dragonfly zooming over the water. Then they sit on a bench and are quiet and still, and the world around them quiets down, too. The birds sit in a tree, the frog sits motionless in the water, and the dragonfly stops beating its wings.

"Grumpy Pants" by Claire Messer. Penguin is in a very bad mood, and he doesn't know why. Taking off his grumpy hat, grumpy boots, grumpy socks, and grumpy overalls doesn't help. But when he dives into a nice cold bath, the grumpiness starts to float away. He focuses on playing with his duck and making himself a bubble beard, and eventually his bad mood is washed away.

"Anh's Anger" by Gail Silver and Christiane Kromer. This excellent picture book is perfect for showing young children how to identify and accept their emotions so they can work through them. Anh is angry at his grandfather and shouts that he hates him, and Grandfather tells Anh to go to his room to "sit with your anger." Anh's anger appears as a little monster and shows Anh how to dance and breathe his difficult feelings away.

"Meditate With Me: A Step-by-Step Mindfulness Journey" by Mariam Gates and Margarita Surnaite, is a picture book guide to meditation for very young children. The text describes ways to move and breathe to help center yourself, and the adorable animals in the illustrations help to demonstrate.

"The Kids' Yoga Book of Feelings" by Mary Humphey and Michael Frost. This book about yoga for kids has it all: photos of children doing the poses, descriptions of how to do the poses, an affirmation with each pose, and suggestions for how to breathe. A perfect guide to using the body to help center the mind for all ages.

"Hi, Koo! A Year of Seasons" by John J. Muth. Reading and getting lost in a story can be a form of mindfulness. This story is told in haiku, using limited but evocative words. Each haiku describes a special moment in Koo the panda's life, and all together they tell the story of a year of small but meaningful experiences. The illustrations of Koo are also funny and adorable.