



Center for Mindful Development, PLLC

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What is pulling me away from being present with my children?

- One's own expectations of what this moment should be like (these often come in the form of a thought such as, "my child should be playing with all of the other kids," or "I should be happier playing with my children.")
- Expectations of others who are present in the environment (e.g., spouse or partner, parent, boss) (perhaps thoughts such as, "I'm sure my mom is thinking that she could do this better.")
- Expectations of others who are not present in the immediate environment (e.g., parents, in-laws, society) ("I'm sure my mother-in-law would have something to say about our children's behavior" or "I should be outside playing with my children, not inside working on this paper for class.")
- Worries about not being good enough
- List making
- Audible notifications or alerts on a smartphone
- Visual notifications or alerts on a smartphone
- Stacks of laundry I can see out of the corner of my eye
- Stacks of dishes I can see out of the corner of my other eye
- Competing priorities in the moment (e.g., needs of other children)
- True emergencies (e.g., fire, health emergency of someone near)
- Fatigue
- Sadness
- Jealousy
- Nostalgia
- Comparing to another parent *with* judgment ("She probably has a maid, no wonder her house looks so good." Or "At least I don't have a child with *that* type of problem.")
- Comparing to another parent *without* judgment ("I don't read to my child that way." Or "I recently heard about that method of discipline.")
- _____
- _____
- _____

Mindfulness can help with the flood of thoughts tied to expectations. Essentially, expectations are just thoughts about what we are supposed to be doing. They may have been suggested to us out of kindness and love, and we can aspire to expectations if we feel they are right for us, our children and our families. However, notice when the expectations are actually pulling us away from what is actually happening in the moment.

Worries are thoughts about the future, and in some cases, about the past with some flavor of fear. Recognize the thoughts of worry *as thoughts* that can be acknowledged but not bought into. Also, get curious about the actual *physical* sensations of feeling anxious.

For thoughts of list making, it can be helpful to keep a notepad handy, if you are truly needing to remember the task or item. But, first get curious about the item to be written down – what will happen if I forget this? Will I remember this again at a more convenient time? It is also perfectly fine to involve your child or children in the remembering of the task or item. “Oh! I just remembered, we have to get milk at the grocery store! Will you help me remember this? How do you think we could remember to put this on the grocery list?” By involving your child in the remembering of the task, you are actually staying present.

Notifications on your phone? Either put your phone far enough away that you won't be tempted to check it. Better yet, turn all notifications off. We now know enough about how much this is a killer to productivity and well-being that it is kind-of a no-brainer.

When fatigue becomes a block to staying present, problem solve with your partner or spouse and other people who support you on how to get more sleep. It may require shifting some routines and habits greatly. It may be just a matter of getting to bed earlier. However, lack of sleep robs us from many valuable moments and opportunities to practice being the parents we want to be.

Comparisons are also thoughts. An effective acronym for coping with difficult emotions, which comparisons can often trigger, is RAIN and it stands for: **R**: Recognize what is happening, **A**: Allow the feeling (or the present life event) to be just as it is, **I**: Investigate inner experiences with kindness (no judgment!) and **N**: Non-identification, meaning your identity, or who you are, is not equal to the emotion you are feeling.