

Book Review

Just breathe: A mindfulness adventure

Sievers, Jen (2018). N.Z.: New Shoots Publishing.

Just Breathe is a delightful picture book written for children aged 3–8 years old. It tells a story that takes children (and parents) through a simple and engaging mindfulness exercise.

The story depicts a young girl struggling with big and small feelings in her head in a “mixed-up sort of morning”. This is the perfect timing in which to anchor the story as mornings are often busy, chaotic times for families that can leave children with conflicting emotions.

In her frustration the child looks up to the sky and is guided by a smiling cloud who tells her to sit down and just breathe, and then observe the effect this has on her rising and falling tummy. The cloud also reassures her that it’s okay that the mixed-up feelings may return and guides her back to concentrating on her breathing, placing her hands back on her belly and having an awareness of how her body is feeling.

Mindfulness is a moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgement. Many early childhood centres have already introduced the practice into their programme recognising the many positive benefits to children, including reducing stress and anxiety, promoting empathy and compassion, self-control and less emotional reactivity.

One of the strengths of this book is enabling children to recognise and understand their feelings and emotions and once the simple technique is mastered, guide themselves to a place of calmness. It is a story that can be read over and over again just for pleasure or to practise the technique together with your child, or a group of children.

Just Breathe is the first book by New Zealand artist Jen Sievers. The illustrations are simple, and use fresh colours and playful brush strokes to depict emotions. The artwork in itself is both calming and joyful. This book is an excellent resource to have at home, preschool or school to teach children this invaluable life skill.

Reviewed by Charmaine Denney, Early Childhood Teacher and mum to two boys.

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