

# Our Do-BeMindful Journey

## Bonnybroom Nursery in Glasgow

'We thought we would dip our toe into mindfulness and it has become our whole ethos.'

Clair McLaughlan, Head Teacher

We wanted to teach mindfulness to our children to enable them to:

- understand their emotions and behaviour,
- recognise when they needed to change their behaviour,
- empower them to make that change.

We wanted our children to feel the benefit of experiencing some calm in their very busy and often stressful lives. Lastly, we wanted to build a daily '**mindfulness time**' in to our daily routine - we believe that relaxation is as important as play.

**Oh, and we wanted all of this to happen instantly!**

However, we quickly realised that mindfulness isn't instant, it takes time to nurture a mindful culture. First and foremost, we had to learn about Mindfulness and practice ourselves - we had to put on our oxygen masks first! We couldn't teach what we didn't know.

I knew that it was important that we had a whole-school approach - this wasn't going to be someone's 'thing' that they did to the children sometimes. This had to be 'how we are, how we teach'.

My staff were all fully committed because we'd researched the benefits of mindfulness and wanted our children to have this opportunity as part of the curriculum.

We met Louise and signed up to the **Do-BeMindful Foundation Programme** in 2018. My staff did it at their own pace as it is a very personal journey. We took time to practice mindfulness during INSET days. We started to do a few minutes of breathing before staff meetings. We incorporated mindfulness activities into our lives and our nursery practice.



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As it started to make more sense and more impact in our personal lives we could see how practising Mindfulness complemented and sustained some of the other programmes and initiatives we already had in place such as PATHS and our Language & Communication Friendly Establishment programmes.

Staff began inviting our children to practice Mindfulness-based activities using the **Do-BeMindful** pack. We began a daily mindful breathing practice and chose one activity and practiced it daily. '**Finger breathing**' resonated with the children right away - concentrating on their hands really helped them to stay focused. As the weeks went by we could really see their breathing changing (becoming deeper) and

observed them using their breathing when they needed to. It was wonderful to see! We did finger breathing everyday, twice a day for around 4 months.

Our hearts sang when we started to see and hear children using their finger breathing skills independently in play. We knew then that they were developing a skill. The block play was often a place of contention. We heard children say to others "**Don't knock my tower over - you should go and do your finger breathing if you are angry.**" I loved their ownership of it. It was 'my finger breathing' and 'your finger breathing'.

'A wee boy came into nursery one day and took himself into a corner, did his finger breathing, facing the wall then turned round and said good morning and carried on his day - how amazing! He was one of five children in the house including a two week old baby and it had been a busy morning at home, he just needed to gather himself and that's exactly what he did'.



We then went on to offer our children more mindfulness practices and worked our way through the pack doing one a week - mindfulness is about practice, so a new activity every session didn't feel a good fit for us.

Before we knew it, it was Christmas. Our usual Christmas was 'full-on'. We went over the top. We had a nativity show, a giant party, Santa came in as the children screamed jingle bells from the top of their lungs. We were all-singing, all-dancing for the whole month of December. On the last day of Christmas term staff were exhausted (as usual). Lots of our children didn't actually like some of the Christmas experiences but we encouraged them to join in.

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After we'd been practicing mindfulness for around 18 months staff started to question our 'usual' Christmas.

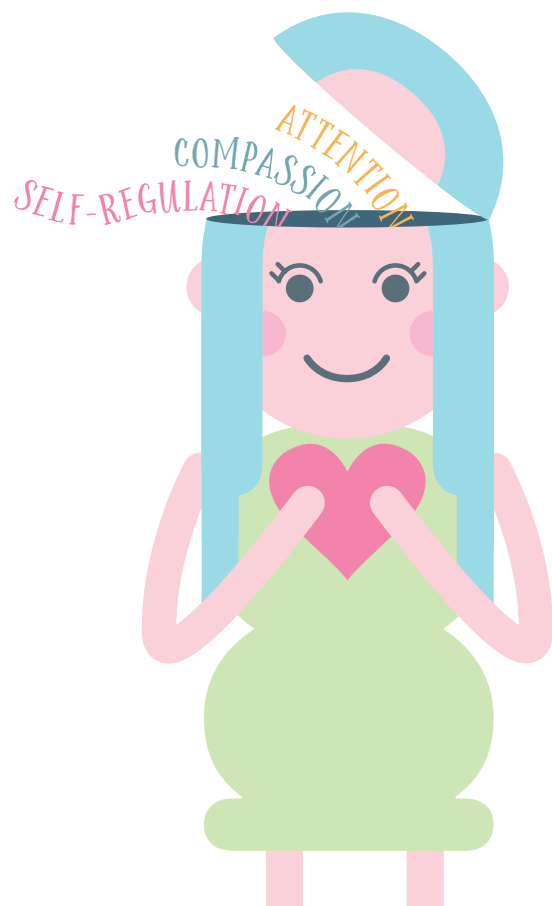
**'Who are we doing this for? Why are we doing it like this? Is there a better way? Is there a mindful way?'**

That year was our first **Merry Mindful Christmas**. We still partied, Santa still visited, presents were still given but all in a more subtle way. We didn't have a 'show' for parents/carers. We did still teach the nativity and the children were able to dress up all month and those who wanted to, put on a show for each other. Santa came two days and sat in our den, which was decorated beautifully and was very inviting. Children chose if they wanted to visit him to collect their gift or if they would rather him leave it for them in their playroom. Some children spoke with him for a while, some popped in for a minute. Basically children had more autonomy to do what felt right for them.

That month of December was by far the most relaxing for children and staff which meant it was better for wellbeing in general.

We kept parents informed through our newsletters and informal chats and parents started to tell us that the children were using what they'd learned at home. We began to send mindfulness activity cards home with the children to teach their parents/carers. We did not have one disappointed parent at Christmas they all understood what we were doing. Some of them actually commented that it was less stressful for them because they already have so much on at their other children's school and/or at work.

With this growing interest in Mindfulness amongst our parents, we decided to offer the **Do-BeMindful Essentials Programme** to them. We had ten parents sign up. It was a relationship-based programme and we all shared our experiences. I've done lots of fab parents groups over the years but this one felt particularly special. We all opened up, we all shared, we were all vulnerable and we all learned together. We spoke about the children, parenting styles, 'habitual behaviours', tantrums (children and adults). Ultimately, we looked at how practising mindfulness could help us at home. The feedback from parents was amazing. We had a celebration in a local restaurant for our parents where they received a certificate and a gift to celebrate their learning. It was emotional as we had all been on the journey together.



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Then COVID-19 hit.

" We had so many messages from our parents saying they were so glad that they had just completed the course as it was the only thing keeping them sane through lockdown. **One parent sent a heartfelt thank you and said without it he wouldn't be alive.**"



During Covid-19 all staff worked through **Do-BeMindful Resilience-based Recovery** course. This was a real positive focus for staff during this strange, stressful and uncertain time. This programme is now helping us to heal and recover. It has helped us understand the importance of being trauma-responsive and gave us and our children the tools and skills to cope with the pandemic. We are now continuing on our road to repair and recovery during what is still an uncertain time.

