

Teaching Children

by Jennifer Mercurio Leen

In 1998, the Chopra Center for Well Being in La Jolla, CA offered their first children's program called Conscious Kids. Conscious Kids provides various activities for children to learn meditation, yoga, and life skills. When creating Conscious Kids, I asked Deepak what he thought was the most valuable experience we can offer to children coming to the Chopra Center. His immediate reply was, "Let them know that they create their own reality." This remains the intention for me with every student I teach meditation. It is through meditation that a child can empower themselves to create the life they imagine. That same year at the Chopra Center, we taught a boy as young as 4 years old to meditate. Since then, many Chopra Center educators are introducing and guiding children and teens in meditation.

The children of today's society are entering into an age of enlightenment where the knowledge of the outer world must unite with the inner intelligence of the soul. Meditation becomes a vital tool in a child's success, as it fosters in them abundant creativity, more focused attention, and greater health and vitality. Through mediation, a child develops the emotional regulation and present moment awareness to thrive in the world and become a global citizen of humanity. Socio-emotional learning and compassionate relational skills are being taught in schools worldwide.

Children can learn to apply meditation in school settings, athletic organizations, arts and drama settings, and in their strivings for personal growth. Generally, the child's age is equal to the amount of minutes they should meditate. Meditation must not be imposed on the child, but rather encouraged and inspired. When children are beginning to learn the practice of mediation, you should slowly lead them into silence. They may experience stillness through creative visualization, mindful body scans, focusing on deep breathing, Primordial Sound Meditation, or counting 4,7,8 breath as taught by Dr. Andrew Weil.

When instructing children to meditate, talk to them about the benefits that meditation will have on their mind, brain, and body. Ask them questions. Get to know the child and their unique expressions. Do an activity to make it fun and engaging. However, do not say too much. Simply have them experience the novelty of stillness before fully defining and labeling the practice of meditation. Gradually they will desire to learn more on the subject matter. Teach them to yearn for silence. Those teaching children to meditate must have their own consistent meditation practice. One's own practice will allow focus and calm to illuminate around them and therefore mirror empathy, neutrality, patience, acceptance, and love. A soulful presence is the greatest gift to a child.

As adults and teachers, we need to protect our children from the need to hurry and perform. Children describe feelings of comfort, happiness, amazement, and gratitude for the gifts and time of constructed silence. Children often report such things as: 'I feel better now', 'This really helped me relax and put all of my worries and frustrations behind me', 'I feel like a new person',

‘I went to a very special place’, and ‘It really helped me focus’. There is important work and service to be accomplished in gifting the next generation with the personal power of meditation. As the Dalai Lama said, “If every eight year old in the world is taught meditation, we will eliminate violence from the world within one generation.”

Teaching children meditation is teaching children everything. It is allowing them to approach the world with a sense of gratitude and compassion. Every time a child dips into the ocean of silence, it helps cultivate a natural respect and compassion for themselves, others, nature, and the world around them. Meditation allows children to be in their true essence, which is one of great joy, connection, and peace.

Children intimately absorb and interact with sensitivity in their environment. Surrounding children with opportunities to practice calmness and focus is a necessary ingredient for them to accomplish their purpose, aims, and goals in life. Ultimately, we want children to discover the coherence in themselves and others. In the book, *The Ultimate Happiness Prescription; 7 Keys to Joy and Enlightenment*, by Deepak Chopra, it states, “We want to be at peace, nonviolent, awake and aware, fearless, without conflict and delusions, resilient, independent and free of outside influences.” Let us hold and nurture that intention when engaging with children as they become the creators of their own destiny.

For more information on Conscious Kids and teaching children meditation, please contact Jennifer Mercurio Leen at jennifer@inwardsuccess.com.

About the Author

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Jennifer Mercurio Leen has an M.ED. and is the founder of Inward Success, a consulting company that designs and facilitates health related education programs for individuals, schools, and businesses. In 1996, Jennifer became a certified mind/body educator from the Chopra Center for Well Being in San Diego, CA. She developed Conscious Kids, the first children’s program offered at the Chopra Center. Jennifer is also a certified Team Spirit facilitator, who consults organizations on team development. In addition, she serves as an independent contractor at Xavier University’s Montessori Education Department. Jennifer can be reached at jennifer@inwardsuccess.com.