

## Tips for parents of preschoolers: Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 situation can be a stressful time for both parents and children. Here are some tips on what parents can do to keep themselves and their children physically and emotionally well.

### 1. Take care of yourself

It can be difficult to manage your child's feelings and behaviours if you are feeling stressed, worried or sad. Children often take emotional cues from parents, so they are more likely to feel calm and assured when parents feel the same.

- Ensure that you and your family members eat healthily, have enough sleep, exercise, and continue other healthy habits that build immunity and encourage positive mood.
- Talk to family and friends, or seek professional help if needed.
- Take a few minutes a day to do deep breathing or practice mindfulness which have been known to help people stay calm, stay in the present moment and think of what to do now, instead of worrying about the future or things that are not in one's control.
- Take time either each night or in the morning to think of three good things that happened in the past 24 hours. These can be anything that you liked or enjoyed and do not need to be important. Examples could be "I enjoyed my tea this morning", "I feel well today". Write them down, and think about why each good thing happened. This can be an activity you can do with your family.



- Keep updated on the COVID-19 situation, but set limits as too much information can cause undue anxiety for yourself and your child.

## 2. Talk to your child about COVID-19 in an honest, empathetic and accurate way

- Pay attention to what your child may have seen or heard from the television, online, the radio, the newspaper, school or your conversations with another caregiver.

The news talked about COVID-19 just now. Do you have any questions?



- Check with your child once every few days about what they know, how they feel, and questions that they have. It's ok to share your own feelings and thoughts, although do so in a way that shows your child how to cope with any negative feeling.



It's been a few days since we have been staying at home.  
How do you feel about it?  
Do you feel ok, happy, sad, scared, or angry?

I feel a bit sad that we are not going to visit grandpa and grandma, but I am happy that you and I get to spend more time together. We can call grandpa and grandma to talk to them about what we have been doing at home.

- Take the time to listen to your child first, before you share your thoughts or try to help. Respond **FIRST** by acknowledging your child's feelings. **DO NOT** dismiss them.



I see that you are feeling worried about this.

I know you really want to go swimming.

I hear that you really want to go to the indoor playground.

- Also provide confidence that things will get better.



I know you will feel better after a while.

This is only until the COVID-19 situation gets better. It may take some time, but after that we can go swimming and go to the indoor playground again.

- Answer your child's questions in a factual and age-appropriate manner. There is no need to provide too many details that may confuse them or worry them. Provide enough information for your child to understand the situation in a truthful manner.



Covid-19 is a nasty illness that can make people very sick. Some people find it really difficult to get better from it, some people are only a little sick, and many people (including children) have recovered from it. Many people are working very hard to stop this virus, like our health care workers, cleaners, and police officers. We can also do our part by taking care of ourselves, staying home more, and keeping our hands clean and away from our faces.

I don't have all the answers right now, but I know many scientists in Singapore and all over the world are finding out more about the virus every day. I will let you know when I learn more about the virus.

- Do not shy away from talking about the topic, as it may make your child feel more uncomfortable about the issue.
- Let them know that it is not unusual to feel worried, but it is important that we make sure the worry does not become unhelpful.



Your preschool is closed for the next month as our country is trying to stop Covid-19 from making more people sick. We are going to be staying home more in the next month too. We will try our best to make your time at home as fun as we can. There are times when Mommy and Daddy can play with you, there are times when you can play on your own. I know it will be different from going to preschool, but I know you can be ok with it. Staying at home helps us all be safer from COVID-19.

I hear that you are worried because you heard that (Name of person they know) has COVID-19. I also feel worried for (Name of the person), and it's ok to feel worried for someone we love when they are unwell. But it is also very important that we do not let our worries become too big and unhelpful. (Name of person) is in hospital now, and there are many doctors and nurses who are working hard to help (Name of person) get well. People have recovered from COVID-19, so let's hope that (Name of person) gets well soon. What we can do is to continue working on keeping ourselves healthy, so that we can play our part in stopping this nasty virus.”

### 3. Teach your child good personal hygiene and socially responsible behaviours.

- Use verbal instructions, pictures, stories, demonstrations, and games to help your child understand and learn useful behaviours during this time.
- The following resources may be useful for teaching your child:
  - <https://www.superherome.sg/covid19>
  - <https://www.myfirstskool.com/covid-19-a-childs-voice>
  - Poster for “Let’s all do our part” and “Practice Good Personal Hygiene” on <https://www.gov.sg/article/covid-19-resources>
- Provide more WHAT TO DO than WHAT NOT TO DO instructions. For example, instead of only telling your child “Don’t touch the railings”, tell your child also to “keep your hands in your pockets” or “keep your hands by your side”.
- Provide labelled praises for when your child shows good personal hygiene and socially responsible behaviours. Labelled praises inform a child that they did well, and provide a clear description of exactly what they did well. For example, parents may provide labelled praises such as “(Name of child), good washing your hands before you eat”, “(Name of child), great that you covered your mouth when you coughed”.



- Make it fun for your child to practice good personal hygiene and socially responsible behaviours. You can make up a game, where family members can watch each other to see if anyone touches their faces. If they do, a point will be added to their score. At the end of the day, the parent or child with the least scores gets a treat. You can also make up silly songs to remind your children on good personal hygiene habits, and sing it right before situations that they may forget to remind them of what to do.

**References:**

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- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/talking-with-children.html>
- <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/using-your-senses/>
- Bolier, L., Haverman, M., Westerhof, G. J., Riper, H., Smit, F., & Bohlmeijer, E. (2013). Positive psychology interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC public health*, 13(1), 119.

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## Tips for parents of preschoolers:

# Keeping our children meaningfully occupied during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 situation has disrupted the routines of many of us. Children may no longer be able to attend schools or activities outside of home that are meaningful and enjoyable to them. These changes to normal routine can be difficult for children to cope with and may mean fewer opportunities for children to learn. When children experience a disruption in normal routine, they may display disruptive behaviour or engage in undesirable activities.

Here are some tips on what parents can do to help children cope with the changes in their normal routine.

### 1. Consider your resources:

- Discuss daily routine and household chores with your spouse and/or other caregivers in your household. Find out when they are busy or unavailable to the child, and when they are able to engage with the child in an activity.
- If you are working from home, discuss with your employer your work arrangements so that it is possible for you to take care of your children.
- Determine the toys, materials, and equipment available in your home that can be safely used or repurposed for your child's activities during this time.

### 2. Brainstorm different home activities that your child can engage in and outdoor activities (if any) that are within the current government safe distancing measures

(<https://www.gov.sg/>). Examples of activities could be colouring, painting, reading books, playing card or board games, writing activities, indoor hopscotch, exercising within the neighbourhood. Try to involve your child, especially 4 to 6-years-olds, when thinking about activities to do at home.



- Points to bear in mind when planning for activities:

- Consider if the activities need to be supervised by an adult and plan accordingly. If it is a new activity, it is best that an adult introduces the activity and sets limits on what the child can and cannot do.



- Find new ways to play with toys. If your child is used to playing with many toys at one time and is easily bored with them, consider packing the toys into boxes and giving your child one box at a time. Allow time for your child to play independently with those toys.



- Create new experiences for your child at home, such as setting up science experiments with household items (e.g., baking soda and vinegar experiments) and making toys with recyclable materials (e.g., play dough, sensory boxes or bottles).



- Get your child involved in household chores that are age-appropriate (e.g., pluck out the stalks for mushrooms that you are going to cook, put away their clothes in the drawer).



- Take note of your child's preferences. Have a mix of activities that they enjoy and contribute to their learning and development. Start small with activities that they do not like (e.g., write small letter "a" 4 times for a 4.5 years old). Increase the amount of time or effort that the child needs to spend on the task gradually (e.g., next time to write small letter "a" 7 times,). Involve your child in your goals for them and let them know that you will be increasing the expectation for the tasks.



- Manage screen time at home.



- ✓ For children under 18 months old, avoid any screen time other than video calls
- ✓ For children 18 months to 2 years old, if parents want to introduce digital media, they should guide them in understanding what they are seeing when they watch high quality TV shows or use educational apps
- ✓ For children 2 to 5 years old, no more than 1 hour of screen time a day with parental guidance. Engage your child in discussions about what they just watched by sharing your thoughts and asking them questions. You may even engage your child in pretend play that is related to the story or topic that you just watched on screen.



Please refer to the following website for further information:

[https://www.babybonus.msf.gov.sg/parentingresources/web/Young-Children/YoungChildrenPlay\\_and\\_Learning/Screen\\_Time/Young\\_Children\\_Screen\\_Time](https://www.babybonus.msf.gov.sg/parentingresources/web/Young-Children/YoungChildrenPlay_and_Learning/Screen_Time/Young_Children_Screen_Time)



3. Schedule the day in half-hour/1-hour time slots.



















- First, schedule wake, nap, and bed times for your child.
- Next, fill in slots for mealtimes and self-care activities (e.g., brushing teeth, washing face, shower).
- Insert the activities that you have brainstormed in the remaining time slots. Be clear about when your child needs to be doing activities independently and when they need supervision. Involve your child, especially 4 to 6-year-olds, when inserting the activities in the time slots. You can let them choose when they want to do the tasks (e.g., if they have to do 2 worksheets in a time slot, they can choose which worksheet to do first), who they want to do it with (e.g., with mummy or daddy or an older sibling), and how they want to do it (e.g., colour the correct answer rather than circle or use a crayon rather than pencil). Be mindful to provide choices that are available to them.
- Consider alternating activities that your child enjoys with activities that they need guidance and encouragement to complete. This may help to motivate your child to engage in activities that they have difficulty with.
- Write down the schedule with pictures to support the words, and post the schedule in place that is visible to all. Image 1 and 2 below are examples of schedules for children.
- If your child is not used to having a schedule, you can start by implementing a schedule for 2 to 3 hours of the day to introduce the idea.
- Before implementing the schedule, show and talk to your child about it.



- When implementing the schedule, show it to your child each time they start and end an activity. You can also get them to tick off an activity once it is done so that they can keep track of which activity they are at on the schedule, and feel a sense of achievement as they complete the activities. Direct your child to the schedule whenever they move away from an activity before finishing it. Provide them with a labelled praise each time they complete an activity. Provide labelled praises and celebrate when they complete each activity and/or put in efforts for the activities.
- There will be times when plans do not go your way. Be kind to yourself when that happens, and tell yourself you are doing your best given the situation. Review what you can do better and try again the next time.

Example schedule for a 6-year-old child

### Today's schedule

7:30am		Wake up	Brush teeth wash up drink milk change clothes with Daddy
8am		Breakfast with family	
8:30am		Colouring or jigsaw puzzle	on my own (helper to check child is on-task)
9:00am		English worksheets	on my own (helper to check child is on-task)
9:30am		Bubble Play with sibling	(helper to supervise)
10:00am		Math worksheets	on my own (helper to check child is on-task)
10:30am		Play a game with sibling	(helper to supervise)
11:00am		Help with a household chore	
11:30am		Mommy to review homework with child	
12pm		Lunch with Mommy	
12:30pm		Shower on my own	(Mommy to check child is on-task)
1pm		Play toys on mat	
2pm		Painting / Play-Doh / Science Experiment	(with sibling; Helper to supervise)
3pm		Play toys	
4pm		Exercise	(with sibling and Daddy)
5pm		Watch TV	
6pm		Shower on my own	(Mommy to check child is on-task)
6:30pm		Dinner	

Example schedule for a 3-year-old child



4. Make the best of this extra time with your family. Work to keep interactions with your children positive, and focus on teaching rather than punishing them. Enjoy being with your children. Positive parent-child relationship is foundational for social and emotional well-being of our children. Look out for our next issue on positive behaviour management at home.



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*Graphics used in this handout were taken from Piktochart*



## Tips for parents of preschoolers: Preventing and Managing Misbehaviour

Children's misbehaviour may frustrate us so much that we resort to physical punishment, such as using the cane. There are more effective ways to respond to our children's misbehaviour than with physical punishment. When we use the cane (either to actually hit OR threaten), we may accidentally hurt our children physically or emotionally, send them the message that aggression is the solution to problems, or they may learn to use hitting or threatening to respond to disagreements with their peers, siblings or us. Furthermore, physical punishment only stops the misbehaviour temporarily in some children.

We want our children to follow instructions and rules willingly, not out of fear of punishment. Here are some tips on what parents can do to support their children to follow instructions better, and to respond in a helpful manner to their children's misbehaviour.

### 1. Giving Effective Instructions

- Instructions can be triggers for behaviours that we want to see in our children. We can give instructions in a way that increases the likelihood of them following instructions.
- Consider the following **before** you give an instruction to your child:

#### What do you want your child to do?

Say it clearly and in a way that your child can understand. Say more of **WHAT TO DO** than **WHAT NOT TO DO**.

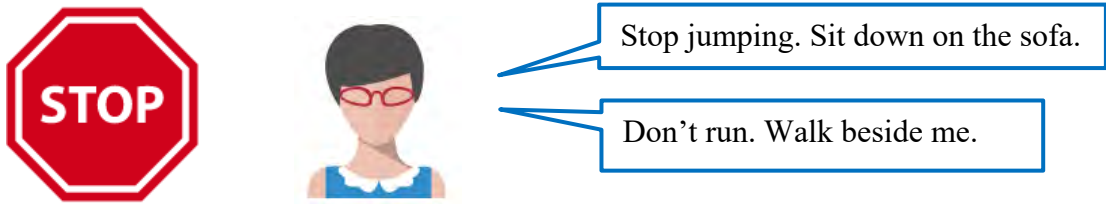
**Is it a request or an instruction?** Asking your child "Do you want to keep your toys?" is giving him a chance to say "No". Say "(Name of child), keep your toys in the box" if it is an instruction.

**Is it a good time?** If your child is in the middle of his favourite TV show, this may not be a good time to ask your child to go and shower. Plan your child's time such that his TV show finishes when you ask your child to shower, or tell your child beforehand how much TV he can have before shower time.

**Is it something your child can do on their own?** Do you need to help your child? Or do you need to tell them step by step what to do?



- When your child misbehaves, you can tell him WHAT NOT TO DO by saying “STOP/ NO/ DON’T (description of what he is doing)”, **and** WHAT TO DO instead – “DO (description of what he should do)”.



***Do not wait for your child to follow your STOP instruction if he is in danger. Go to him immediately to get him to safety.***

- Do the following when giving an instruction to your child:
  - Get your child’s attention by moving close to him (i.e., one arm’s length) and calling his name.
  - Make eye contact and use a firm but gentle voice to tell your child what to do.
  - Wait for a response for 5 seconds. If your child does not respond, repeat the instruction (only once more). Note: if you first gave the instruction from a distance away, repeat the instruction after moving close to your child.
  - Respond positively with a labelled praise (discussed below) when your child follows your instruction.
  - If your child does not follow your instruction, provide a logical consequence and/or wait out the tantrum if he gets very upset (discussed below).

## 2. Labelled Praise

- Notice when our children are doing good, and provide them with labelled praise so as to increase the likelihood that they will continue to do so in future.
- Labelled praise inform the child that (1) they did well (e.g., *good, well done, good job, I like it*), and (2) provide a clear description of exactly what they did well in (e.g., *sitting on chair, washing your hands before you eat, playing on your own*).



### 3. Logical Consequences

- A logical consequence to misbehaviour is a parent administered consequence that is related to the behaviour. For example, if a child does not follow an instruction, the child's current activity can be stopped and the child cannot move on to the next activity, until the child follows the instruction. Other examples are:

Misbehaviour	Logical Consequence
Child does not finish work.	Does not get to move on to the next activity to play.
Child makes a mess.	Child is asked to clean up the mess.
Child does not listen to instruction to sit on sofa when watching TV.	Switch off the TV until child is ready to follow the instruction.
Child was upset with sibling snatching his toy and hit sibling.	Child does not get to play with toy for a period of time. Child to say sorry to sibling.

- Ensure that the logical consequence is reasonable and appropriate for their age. If a 3-year-old did not follow instruction to stop playing with his cup of milk and then spilled it, you can get him to clean up with some help from you. You can get him to pick up the cup and put it in the sink, and physically guide him to clean up the spill using a cloth. You can wash and wring the cloth after that.

### 4. Wait Out Tantrums

- Tantrums are strong emotional outbursts.
- When our children are having a tantrum, we as parents may also be upset and angry. Trying to reason with our child during a tantrum is unhelpful. It is best to wait out the emotions for the child and for the parent, but ensure that the child is safe.

- Do the following when your child is in a tantrum:
  - Acknowledge your child’s feelings and difficulties **and** provide confidence that they can be okay. Say this only once.



I know you are angry. I know you can be okay after a while.

I know you are angry because you wanted another cookie. You cannot have anymore because you had too many already, but I know you can be calm and cool after a while, and we can continue our game.

- Let your child know that you are going to wait out their tantrum. Say this only once.



I am going to be quiet now. We can talk again when both of us are calm and cool.

- Be quiet. Stay close to your child if you can. You may sit and do deep breathing and tell yourself it will be okay. If you are too angry to stay close to your child and be quiet, ensure the safety of your child before you move away to cool down.
- Talk to your child only when both you and your child are calm and cool. Tell your child “I am glad that you are calm and cool now”. Talk to your child about the learning point from this situation, or depending on your child’s age and language level, engage them in discussion about how to solve the problem that got him upset.
- Then, decide (with your child if possible) on the next step. If your child threw a tantrum because he was asked to do something, get your child to return to the task and complete it and provide a labelled praise when the task is completed, or provide a logical consequence if the child does not have a chance to do the task anymore. If the child threw a tantrum because he did not get what he wanted, move on to the next activity.

As parents, we can teach our children when they misbehave, not punish them. Our children learn best when we teach with empathy, consistency and clear limits. Helping our children learn to regulate their emotions and problem solve allows them to have better social skills and emotional health as they grow up.

References:

- <https://childmind.org/article/how-to-give-kids-effective-instructions/>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/behaviour/behaviour-management-tips-tools/requests-instructions>
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- <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/three-types-of-logical-consequences/>
- <http://blog.positivediscipline.com/2013/05/logical-consequences.html>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/sg/blog/going-beyond-intelligence/201710/logical-consequences-helping-kids-learn-their-mistakes>
- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/behaviour/crying-tantrums/tantrums#tantrums-in-preschoolers-and-early-school-age-children-nav-title>

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*Graphics used in this handout were taken from Piktochart*

## Deep breathing exercise

First we are going to breathe out all the air in our lungs. Let the air out slowly through your mouth. Breathe it out slowly as though you were using a soap bubble toy and wanted to make a really big bubble without letting it pop.

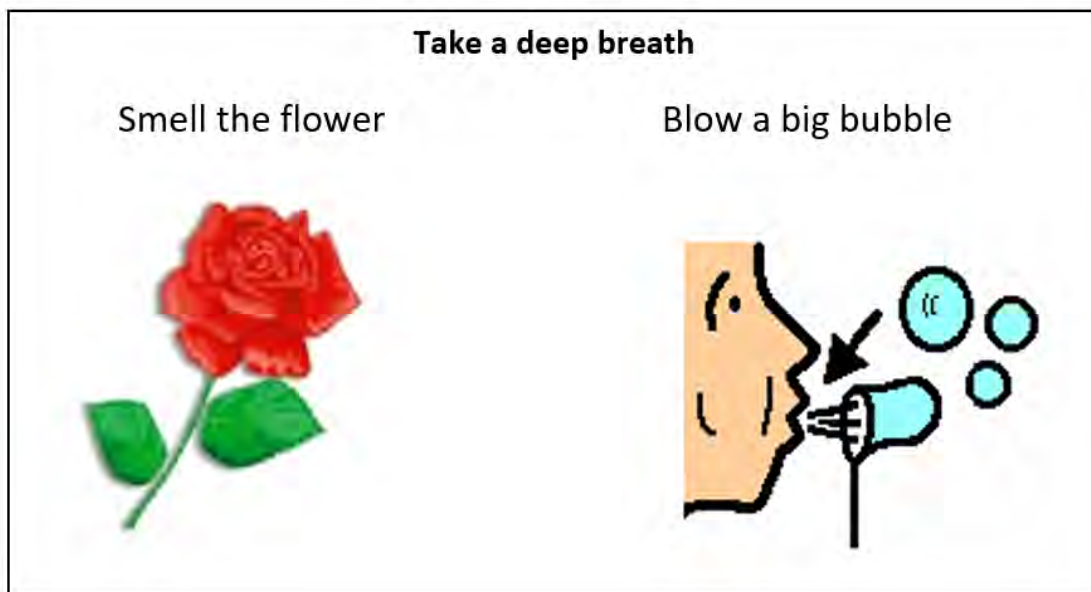
As we breathe out, we are going to push our tummy in, toward the back, with our hand. Not too hard, just squeezing it back a little.

When we feel like we need to breathe in again we'll take in air through our nose.

As we do, we'll let our tummy rise back up again as though being puffed up with the air we are breathing in.

Let's do it together. Slowly breathe out and push your tummy back. Wait a few seconds...

Now breathe in and let your tummy puff out again.



Practice this deep breathing exercise on a daily or regular basis, so you know how to use it when you are feeling very upset.

Adapted from:

Chapter 12: Tools for Troubleshooting the SPACE Program, Session Modules; Session Module – Teaching the Child Anxiety Regulation Strategies, Page 209. Treating Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety, A Guide for Caregivers, Eli R. Lebowitz and Haim Omer.



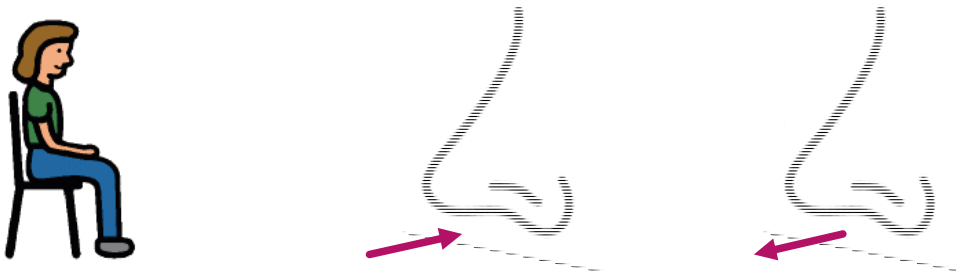
## 5 Senses Mindfulness exercise

Mindfulness involves awareness of the present moment without judgement and clinging on to any past or future moments. It is known to help reduce stress and improve one's focus on what is happening now.

It is good to start practising when you are not as stressed so you know how to use it when you need it most. Mindfulness exercises can be done at any time of the day (e.g., while taking the MRT, while waiting for a meeting to start, while drinking your morning coffee, at the end of a stressful day to help you relax).

*If you notice yourself getting distracted and having thoughts coming into your mind as you do the exercise, that is COMPLETELY normal. It is natural for our minds to bring us thoughts, but we can learn to refocus our attention. Be kind to yourself when this happens, just notice that you are having thoughts, and then redirect your attention to the present moment.*

Sit in a comfortable upright position with your feet placed flat on the ground. Rest your hands on your lap or on the table in front of you. You may close your eyes, or rest your eyes on one spot in front of you.



Notice your breathing. No need to breath in any specific way. Just bring attention to each part of the breath – when you are breathing in, when you are breathing out, and in between you breathing in and out.

Pay attention to each of your 5 senses. One at a time, for about one minute each. You can start with your own chosen sense and go in any order, as long as you focus on each one at a time. The point here is to focus on the present moment and what you feel through each of your senses in that moment.



**Hearing:** Begin to notice all of the sounds around you. Try not to judge the sounds – just notice them. They are not good or bad. Sounds might be internal, like breathing or the grumbling of your tummy. Sounds might be close by, like the flipping of the newspaper or the jingling sound of keys. Sounds might be distant, like the sound of a motorcycle on the road outside your apartment block, or construction noise from the worksite next to your block. As you start noticing all of the sounds around you, you may begin to notice soft sounds you did not hear before.



**Smell:** Now notice the smells around you. Maybe you smell food. You might notice the smell of books or paper. You might notice the smell of the air in the room. Sometimes closing your eyes can help you notice more smells around you.



**Seeing:** Look around you and pay attention to a few objects. Notice the colour of the object, the shape, and texture. If you really look, you may notice things that have gone unnoticed.



**Taste:** If you have food or drink in your mouth, notice the taste. Is it sweet, sour, bitter or salty? If you do not have food in your mouth, you may notice the taste of food or drink that you had earlier. Run your tongue over your teeth and around your mouth. Notice the taste of your saliva and your breath as you breathe out. We have tastes in our mouth that often go unnoticed.



**Touch:** Last one. Bring your attention to the feeling of your body on your chair, your skin with your clothes, and your feet on the floor. Notice the warmth or coolness of your hands or feet. You can squeeze your hands together and notice the pressure. You can feel the table in front of you or the sides of your chair, to focus your attention on the present.

When finished, take a moment to notice how your body feels. Compare how you feel now with how you felt 5 minutes ago – what has changed?

Adapted from:

<https://www.clayton.edu/Portals/541/docs/Five%20Senses%20Mindfulness%20Exercise.pdf>