

Lesson 2: Benefits of Meditation

Key Elements of Lesson:

1. Did you feel better after meditation? (Glitter Jar)
2. Why do people meditate? How does meditation help people?
3. What other children say about the benefits of meditation.
 - a. You Let Go of All the Drama
 - b. You Feel Calm and Relaxed
 - c. You Have More Energy & Confidence
 - d. You Make Better Decisions

As noted above, Lesson 1 was written in a style that allows a parent or teacher to follow it *verbatim* if they wish. Lessons 2 and 3 are presented differently, as a series of key points to be made. These can form the basis of a lesson plan for you or they could be spread over a number of lessons if you wish. You can adapt the tone and language to suit the ages and needs of the children in your care.

1. You might begin the discussion by saying that we have been meditating now for a while and you wonder what the children think of it. Ask: *Did you feel better after meditation?* If you had introduced the glitter jar in the first lesson or subsequently, you might remind them about it (or introduce it now) and recall how it indicated that meditation calms our bodies and gives us a break from our thoughts.

You might then ask “*I wonder are there other ways in which meditation might help us.*” Wondering questions are really good for getting children to open up about their experience. So ask, ‘*I wonder how you feel meditation helps.*’ However, never direct the question at a particular child. Some children may be very willing to talk about it but others may not. My research found that as a general rule children don’t talk to one another readily about such things.

2. It may be more helpful to phrase the question more indirectly e.g. ‘*I wonder why people meditate? Why do you think people meditate?*’ Listen respectfully to what they say, honouring their privacy and sensitivities. The intention here is not to expect the class to engage in a wide-ranging discussion, but to give an opportunity for children to say something about their experience if they wish and to create an opportunity for you to share with them some information about the benefits of meditation. You can summarise what they are saying on the whiteboard if you wish, but it’s not necessary to do so.

3. After a while you can bring that part of the discussion to a close and say that others have spoken with children about what they think of meditation and how they gain from it and that you are going to look at what they said. Depending on the length of the discussion you had with your class and the time available now, you can choose to continue with the next part of this lesson or defer it to the next meditation day.

The things that other children say about the benefits of meditation are shown in the **Figure 5.1** below which you are free to photograph and display as a PowerPoint slide if you wish.¹

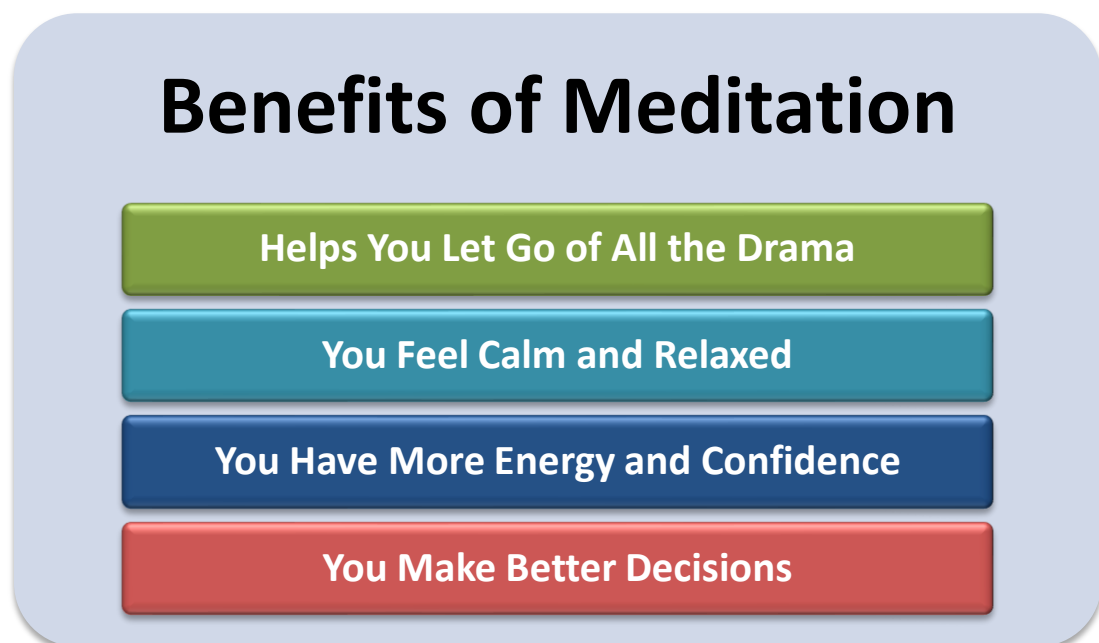


Figure Error! No text of specified style in document..1 The Benefits of Meditation According to Children

There are lots of benefits to meditation and there is no one right way to describe them; the diagram presents how the children in my study described the benefits of meditation as they experienced them. If I spoke to a different group of children they might have expressed them differently. My research was conducted in a particular context in primary schools in the cultural context of Ireland.

You may spend a little while comparing what the children told you from their own experience to what appears on the diagram and you can make connections between them.

¹ The website www.christianmeditation.ie will have .pdf and .jpg versions which can be downloaded free of charge.

Over the next few paragraphs I will tease out what the children said, as much as possible in child-friendly language. You may present them as simply as you think fit for the group of children in your care. They identified the benefits under the four headings shown in **Figure 5.1** above. These benefits were teased out in detail in Chapter 1, section 5 and are summarised as bullet points below.

3a. *Helps You Let Go of All the Drama:*

- Meditation helps children to let go of all the drama of a busy school day.
- When we take time out to meditate, we can let go of everything that is bothering us, even for a few minutes and that can be enough to clear the mind and let go of anxiety and worry.
- ***Meditation is all about letting go.*** Every time we meditate we build up our ‘letting go’ muscle – of course it’s not a muscle, it’s more of an attitude. As we practice letting go our thoughts, we also learn to let go of our worries, our fears, and all the things that make us stressed.
- Many children also commented that they meditated before or during sports competitions, even before tests in school.

3b. *You Feel Calm and Relaxed:*

- Meditation makes children feel really calm and relaxed, chilled out. Sometimes when we are under pressure, even the smallest thing can upset us. But when we meditate we no longer feel overwhelmed by what happens to us, no longer as angry when something goes wrong.
- That means too that we are able to think more clearly and are more likely to get things right, to make less mistakes.
- Sometimes when we are tense and uptight, we put up barriers, we don’t let others in. But when we are calm and relaxed, we are more open to people, more open to seeing things differently, more open even to trying new things.
- Lots of children said they loved the peace and quiet of the classroom during meditation. Normally, the classroom is a busy, noisy, boisterous space and it changes the whole atmosphere when everybody calms down at the same time.

3c. *You Have More Energy and Confidence:*

- Children are sometimes surprised to find that after meditation they have more energy and confidence. When we meditate, it's as if we wipe the slate clean and then we have space for something new and that gives us the energy to start again.
- Children also found that it made them more confident, more able to take on something new. more confident about doing putting their hand up to answer questions; they are not as worried about getting it wrong. They realised it wasn't about getting the right answer every time but being willing to look for it.
- Many children find that they get more work done in the lesson after meditation than they did in the lesson before meditation. It helps them to pay attention, to concentrate.
- Some teachers allow the children meditate before they do their spelling test on a Friday morning, because as well as getting them calm and relaxed about the test, it also gives them more confidence.

3d. *You Make Better Decisions:*

- Children also say that meditation helps them to make better decisions. They don't rush into things as quickly as they used to. Meditation makes them more aware of their feelings and they are able to decide to hold back and let things calm down where before they might have rushed in and made things worse.
- And, even where they did over-react to something, meditation seemed to have given them the skill to be able to see more readily the mistake they had made and they learned to apologise and start again.

It may be helpful at the end of this lesson to go back to the diagram and recall the four benefits of meditation as children describe them. It might be interesting to invite the children to share their understanding of the benefits of meditation through a drawing, a poster or a poem as part of classwork or voluntary homework.