

MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN: GUIDELINES

Choose a time of day that suits the school as a whole. Remind the children that the intention is to sit in silence in God's presence - simply to be with Jesus. Note the importance of keeping their backs straight. Encourage them to honour the stillness of others. Ask them to observe what they become aware of in the silence and to let their thoughts go one by one. Remember that meditation is simple – all we need to do is repeat a sacred word from start to finish.

MA-RA-NA-THA (Come Lord). Say it quietly in your mind & lovingly in your heart. Children of other faiths use their own sacred word. When they realise they are thinking again, they just return gently to their prayer word, as often as they need to!

Use the Meditation Timer CD or one of the tracks downloaded from our website. Begin with one minute and over time work up to a timing suitable for your class - one minute per year of age. Each track begins with a short introduction followed by chimes and the appropriate period of silence. The final track on the CD plays the chimes immediately, enabling the teacher to finish more quickly if the need arises.

Ideally, the teacher will meditate with the class, but with eyes open, remaining alert to their responsibility for the health and safety of all in their care. If any child is causing a distraction to others, speak with the class about distractions afterwards. Let the pupils know that where anyone is causing a persistent distraction, you may gently touch them on the shoulder to help bring their attention back to their prayer-word. It helps to have the children facing in the same direction (not one another) with their chair pulled a little back from their desk.

WHAT THE PUPILS SAY

Noel Keating undertook doctoral research to explore the child's experience of the practice in schools. He found they loved the practice. Meditation helped them 'let go of all the drama' and made them 'calm and relaxed'. Meditation also helped them to be themselves, made them aware of the goodness deep within, brought them closer to God and made them kinder to others. Many children meditate at home as well as at school, sometimes with a friend or family members, and this is to be encouraged.

BENEFITS & FRUITS OF MEDITATION

You will see the benefits and fruits of meditation in the children over time. We distinguish between the benefits and the fruits of meditation. By benefits we mean those physical & psychological benefits that arise from meditation that we readily notice in ourselves. By fruits, we mean our way of being in the world, our disposition towards ourselves and one another, the spiritual fruits that others may notice in us before we see them in ourselves.

The benefits are experienced on many levels. Mentally, there is greater calm and clarity; meditation leads to improved attention and greater access to right-brain thinking. Emotionally, there is more integration and stability; meditation increases our sense of well-being and harmony, it cultivates acceptance of ourselves and others, and leads to improved coping strategies. It reduces stress, and boosts the immune system.

Meditation yields deep fruits on the spiritual domain also. It leads to a sense of personal wholeness, of connectedness to others and to the Divine. Meditation changes our way of seeing and being in the world. It nurtures us at a level far deeper than feelings or conscious experience. Meditation moves us towards compassionate action - we find that, more and more, we no longer react to situations in which we find ourselves, but instead, like the Good Samaritan, we respond as the situation calls for. We are no longer driven by our conditioning but instead our actions are guided by the question: "What is the most loving response I can make in this situation?"

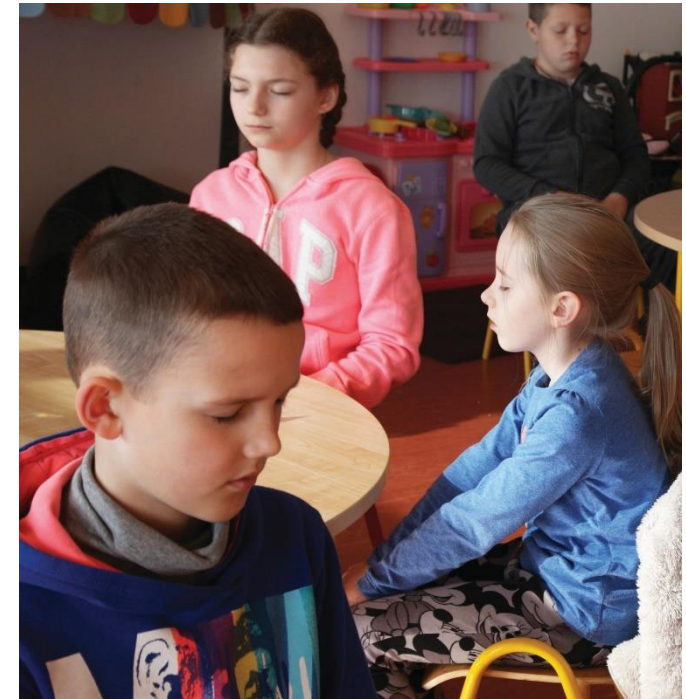
HOW TO JOIN THE MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN PROJECT

Email meditationandchildren@gmail.com

expressing your interest and we will contact you with further information and arrange a date for a two-hour staff in-service.

There is no charge for the in-service. However, schools are invited to make a voluntary donation to the project, purchase the Timer CD and a small starter pack, and reimburse minimal travel expenses.

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION IRELAND MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN



A GIFT FOR LIFE

Christian Meditation Ireland is promoting the practice of Christian Meditation with children across Ireland. We are currently focused on promoting the practice in primary schools on a whole-school basis. This means that every child in every class has the opportunity to meditate with their teacher at least once per week; preferably the whole school at the same time. Children from other faiths may participate using a sacred word from their own tradition. Christian Meditation Ireland will offer full training to the staff of schools who wish to consider participating in the project. The training normally takes place in a single two-hour staff in-service. We have developed a programme which explains what Christian meditation is about, gives staff a short experience of the practice and explores the benefits and fruits of meditation for children and adults. It offers practical advice to schools on how to introduce the practice.

PRAYER FOR STAFF INSERVICE:

Lord, we pray that whenever we sit in silence in your Presence, may we come to know our inner selves where You live in our hearts, and then, planted in love and built on love, may we have the strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; so that, knowing Your love for us, which is beyond knowledge, may we be filled with the utter fullness of God.

Lord, we thank you for the gift that is NOW. Make us ever more aware of your presence in our lives. Amen.

(based on Letter to Ephesians 3:14-20).

There is a long tradition of contemplative practice in the Christian churches, going back to the earliest days. The Benedictine monk, John Main, recovered the practice for lay people in our time and formed the World Community for Christian Meditation, to which Christian Meditation Ireland is affiliated.

Pope Francis has written that “we are all called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action” and reminds us that “trust-filled prayer is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where all is peaceful and the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard in the midst of silence.”

Speaking in Rome in March 2012, Pope Benedict said: “Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us.Inward and outward silence are necessary if we are to be able to hear this word.”

Saint Pope John Paul II spoke about the need to develop in children an attitude of attention which would nourish their inner amazement in the face of creation and noted that for all of us “a real and profound interior silence ... is the first prerequisite for listening.”

HOW CHRISTIAN MEDITATION DIFFERS FROM SECULAR MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness, as a secular practice, including meditation, has grown in popularity in recent years because of the practical benefits associated with it. The benefits, which are backed up by scientific research, are noted on the reverse of this leaflet.

However, from a Christian perspective, the practice of meditation goes much deeper. While the same physical and emotional benefits arise, the purpose and intention of the practice are very different, giving rise to deep spiritual fruits also. Instead of being self-centred, Christian meditation is centred not on the egoic-self but on the true-self; it is Christ-centred. It is not about wilfulness or personal achievement but about willingness and letting go of our ego-driven conditioning. It is about simply being rather than doing. It is not about ego-building but about the harmonious integration of body, mind and spirit; about appreciating the divine spark deep within us and living life from that changed perspective.

Be Still and Know that I am God (Psalms 46:10)

The discipline of meditation ... places that one demand on us absolutely: that we must leave self behind so completely, leave our thoughts, our analyses, our feelings behind so completely, as to be totally at the disposition of the Other.

(John Main)

We establish ourselves in an interior stance of neither clinging to nor rejecting whatever thoughts may arise as we meditate. We do not try to have no thoughts. We acknowledge but do not entertain the thoughts that come in to our mind. Rather, we sit, in sustained meditative awareness of each thought as it arises, endures and passes away..... we freely choose to offer the least resistance to a graced liberation from the tyranny of thought..... and we open ourselves to the mystery of knowing God in ways that utterly transcend what thought can grasp or contain.....

(Christian Meditation, James Finley)

For more information go to: www.christianmeditation.ie
It has a page on meditation and children which contains free resources, including lesson plans and sound files of different lengths. Each track has brief instructions for the children, before a gong marks the start of the meditation. The gong rings again when the chosen time has elapsed.

A WAY OF COMPASSION

In meditation we let go of our thoughts. Different traditions recommend different methods for achieving stillness. The Christian tradition of meditation, based on the writings of the Desert Fathers, recommends the use of a simple prayer word or phrase. Many use Abba or Jesus or Come Holy Spirit. John Main suggested the Aramaic word, Maranatha, which means ‘Come, Lord’. When we become aware that we are thinking, we return to our prayer word, gently, lovingly, without reprimand or judgement; as often as we need to, we simply return. Every day, we start anew.

Sitting down to meditate for the first time is a decisive moment in your spiritual path. It is similar to turning on the ignition at the beginning of a long car trip. What happens then? The journey simply begins. You pull away from the curb. Then like all journeys it proceeds by stages. There are delays, traffic jams, wrong turns, moments of exhaustion as well as the thrill of travel and the discovery of the new. These stages and their events could be described by means of a simple map of the levels of consciousness or as stages of self-knowledge unfolding through a gentle and steady discipline.

(Laurence Freeman)

In the experience of meditation we come to know ourselves as true, as real, not ourselves as acting a role, not ourselves fulfilling other people’s expectations of us, but the experience of being who we are.

(John Main)

MEDITATION WITH CHILDREN: GETTING READY

Meditate with the children - and remind them regularly that meditation is about sitting silently in God’s presence. Have some posters about meditation on display in your classroom and around the school at all times. Have a simple centre-piece with a candle, a Christian image or icon appropriate for their age, a bible to represent the Word of God and perhaps something from the natural world.