

The Sallygate Parent Guide Series

Outdoor Mindfulness Activities

Helping children slow down, regulate their emotions and reconnect with nature
Understanding children. Supporting families.

Introduction

"My child can't sit still long enough to be mindful."

If you've ever tried mindfulness with your child and found it didn't work, you're certainly not alone.

Many mindfulness activities are designed for children who are already calm.

For children with SEMH, autism, ADHD or anxiety, that can feel impossible.

At Sallygate, we've learnt something different.

Mindfulness doesn't have to happen sitting cross-legged with your eyes closed. It can happen whilst walking through the woods.

Watching birds.

Listening to rain.

Feeling tree bark.

Watching a fire.

Throwing pebbles into water.

Mindfulness simply means paying attention to the present moment. Nature makes that much easier.

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the ability to notice what is happening around us and inside us without immediately trying to change it.

It helps children:

- recognise emotions
- slow racing thoughts
- notice body signals
- reduce stress
- improve concentration
- feel calmer

Mindfulness is not about stopping thoughts. It's about noticing them.

Why Nature Helps

Nature naturally slows us down.

It provides:

- gentle sounds
- natural movement

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- fresh air
- open spaces
- opportunities to explore

Unlike many indoor environments, nature rarely demands children's attention. Instead, it invites curiosity.

That makes it particularly helpful for many neurodivergent children.

Mindfulness Doesn't Always Look Quiet Many children regulate through movement.

Walking.

Climbing.

Digging.

Collecting.

Exploring.

These activities can be deeply mindful because they help children focus on one experience at a time.

For some children, moving is the first step towards feeling calm.

Outdoor Mindfulness Activities



Activity 1

Five Senses Walk

Go for a short walk together.

Can you find:



Five things you can see



Four things you can hear



Three things you can touch



Two things you can smell



One thing you're grateful for

Why it helps

Develops observation, grounding and emotional regulation.



Activity 2 Leaf

Detective

Choose one leaf.

Spend two minutes looking carefully.

Notice:

- shape
- colour
- texture
- smell

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- tiny details Ask:

"What do you notice now that you didn't notice at first?"



Activity 3

Cloud Watching

Lie on the grass.

Watch the clouds drift by.

There are no right answers.

Simply notice.

Talk about what you can see.



Activity 4

Texture Hunt

Find something:

Smooth.

Rough.

Soft.

Hard.

Cold.

Warm.

Discuss how each feels.



Activity 5

Listen to the Wind Stand quietly for one minute.

Can you hear:

Leaves?

Birds?

Branches?

Insects?

Distant sounds?

Nature is never silent.



Activity 6

Water Watching

If you're somewhere safe near water:

Watch ripples.

Notice reflections. Listen carefully.

Throw one pebble.

Watch the circles spread.

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Talk about how feelings sometimes spread too.

Activity 7

Bird Listening Can

you hear:

One bird?

Two?

Three?

Try closing your eyes for a moment.

Notice how many sounds appear.

Activity 8

Sit Spot

Find one favourite outdoor place.

Visit it regularly.

Spend five minutes simply noticing.

Watch how it changes through the seasons.

Activity 9

Colour Hunt

Can you find:

 Red

 Orange

 Yellow

 Green

 Blue

 Purple

 White

 Black

The challenge isn't speed. It's noticing.

Activity 10

Sunshine Breathing

Stand with your face towards the sun (without looking directly at it).

Feel its warmth.

Take five slow breaths.

Notice how your body feels afterwards.

Supporting Children with SEND

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Mindfulness looks different for every child.

Autism

Many autistic children enjoy predictable activities that involve observation, collecting and noticing patterns.

ADHD

Movement-based mindfulness often feels much more accessible than sitting still.

PDA

Offer invitations rather than instructions.

Instead of:

"Let's do mindfulness."

Try:

"I wonder how many birds we can hear."

Trauma

Nature provides opportunities to feel safe, connected and grounded. There is no expectation to perform.

Outdoor Mindfulness at Sallygate Mindfulness

isn't a lesson.

It's part of everyday school life.

Children might:

- regulate during Forest School
- walk with a trusted adult
- spend quiet time in nature
- reflect after a challenge
- notice seasonal changes
- pause before returning to learning

These moments help children develop awareness of themselves and the world around them.

Five Questions to Ask Afterwards

Instead of asking: "Did you enjoy it?" Try asking:

What did you notice?

What surprised you?

What made you smile?

How does your body feel now?

What would you like to explore next time?

These questions encourage reflection rather than evaluation.

What This Looks Like at Sallygate

You won't often see children sitting silently in perfect rows.

Instead, you might see:

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A child walking quietly with a Learning Mentor after feeling overwhelmed.
A class listening to birdsong before starting Forest School.
A group watching clouds drift overhead.
A child tracing the bark of a tree to help them regulate.
A moment of stillness around a campfire.
These experiences are small.
But over time they help children develop emotional awareness, resilience and self-regulation.

Final Reflection

One of the biggest lessons I've learnt is that children rarely tell us they need mindfulness.
What they often need is permission to slow down.
To notice.
To breathe.
To be curious.
To experience the world without feeling rushed.
Nature gives us that opportunity.
I've seen children who couldn't explain how they were feeling find calm by walking through the woods.
I've watched conversations happen side by side on a woodland path that would never have happened sitting across a table.
Sometimes the greatest gift we can give children isn't another strategy.
It's simply the time and space to notice the world around them.
At Sallygate, we believe those moments matter.
Because when children learn to notice nature, they often begin to notice themselves.
And understanding ourselves is where emotional regulation begins. **This is Sallygate.**