

"A wonderful, fun, and engaging way to bring mindfulness into a child's life."

—Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*



mindful games

Includes **60** fun activities!

sharing mindfulness and meditation
with children, teens, and families

Susan Kaiser Greenland

Author of *The Mindful Child*

mindful games

PRAISE FOR *MINDFUL GAMES*

“The practical benefits of mindfulness are wide-ranging and undeniable. This wonderful book helps bring this transformative practice into the routines of those who will carry it into the future: our children.”

—Congressman Tim Ryan

“*Mindful Games* is a remarkable book. It interweaves engaging and practical mindfulness exercises for children with a sophisticated and nuanced exploration of the psychology and insight wisdoms underlying them. This book is an invaluable resource for anyone with children in their lives—indeed, for anyone at all. Highly recommended.”

—Joseph Goldstein, author of *Mindfulness: A Practical Guide to Awakening*

“In *Mindful Games*, Susan Kaiser Greenland offers a highly engaging and easy-to-understand set of activities to use with groups of children. All the games support understanding and empathy—and seem like fun! Susan draws on her own deep understanding of meditation and mindfulness practice, as well as her extensive knowledge of child development and research. Although written for adults working with groups of children, this book is certain to enrich the lives of any reader.”

—Sharon Salzberg, author of *Lovingkindness* and *Real Happiness*

“Susan Kaiser Greenland captures the essence of mindfulness in a way that very few people can. As an experienced practitioner and teacher, her insight shines through on every page, and *Mindful Games* will undoubtedly be a wonderful resource for every parent and child alike.”

—Andy Puddicombe, founder of Headspace

“We adults have a moral responsibility to do all we can to help young people develop the cognitive and emotional skills that will enable them not only to survive but to flourish in the world they have inherited from us. Susan Kaiser Greenland’s latest book, *Mindful Games*, is a very welcome and important companion volume to her groundbreaking earlier book, *The Mindful Child*. I recommend it highly for its bountiful wisdom and skillful means, based on many years of her pioneering work in this field.”

—B. Alan Wallace, author of *The Attention Revolution*

“Susan Kaiser Greenland, the pioneer in bringing mindfulness to young children, has done it again! *Mindful Games* is not only a fun way to teach and learn mindfulness but a truly wise way as well. Buy an extra copy because *Mindful Games* is destined to be one of the most beloved, well-worn references for parents, professionals, and kids alike.”

—Christopher Willard, PsyD, author of *Growing Up Mindful*

“Illuminating ancient contemplative principles and applying them for serious and playful everyday use in practical exercises for youth and their families, this magnificent book offers us a powerful means for utilizing science-proven ways to strengthen a child or teen’s mind by supporting the development of their brains and interpersonal relationships. You may even find, as I have, that these insightful ideas and games will enhance your own life as well. Soak in these words of wisdom, and enjoy the journey!”

—Daniel J. Siegel, MD, author of
Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human

“A wonderful, fun, and engaging way to bring mindfulness into a child’s life.”

—Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*

“Susan Kaiser Greenland has played a foundational role in making mindfulness practices developmentally appropriate for young people. In *Mindful Games*, she builds on her previous work by emphasizing *play* and *creativity* in teaching mindfulness skills. This is truly the way forward for making mindfulness a real exploration rather than just another chore or ‘to do’ for our kids.”

—Chris McKenna, Program Director, Mindful Schools
(www.mindfulschools.org)

“In her marvelous new book, Susan Kaiser Greenland provides a whole new alphabet for raising better children as well as our best selves.”

—Surya Das, author of *Awakening the Buddha Within*

“*Mindful Games* teaches mindfulness just as it should be taught—playfully. It’s about the curiosity, exploration, and discovery that unfold with mindfulness, but mostly it’s about the fun of it all!”

—Susan L. Smalley, PhD, Professor Emeritus, UCLA



mindful games

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Susan Kaiser Greenland

Games edited by Annaka Harris



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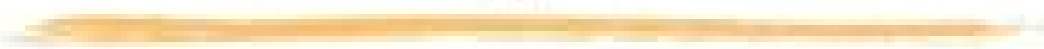
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To Seth, Allegra, and Gabe



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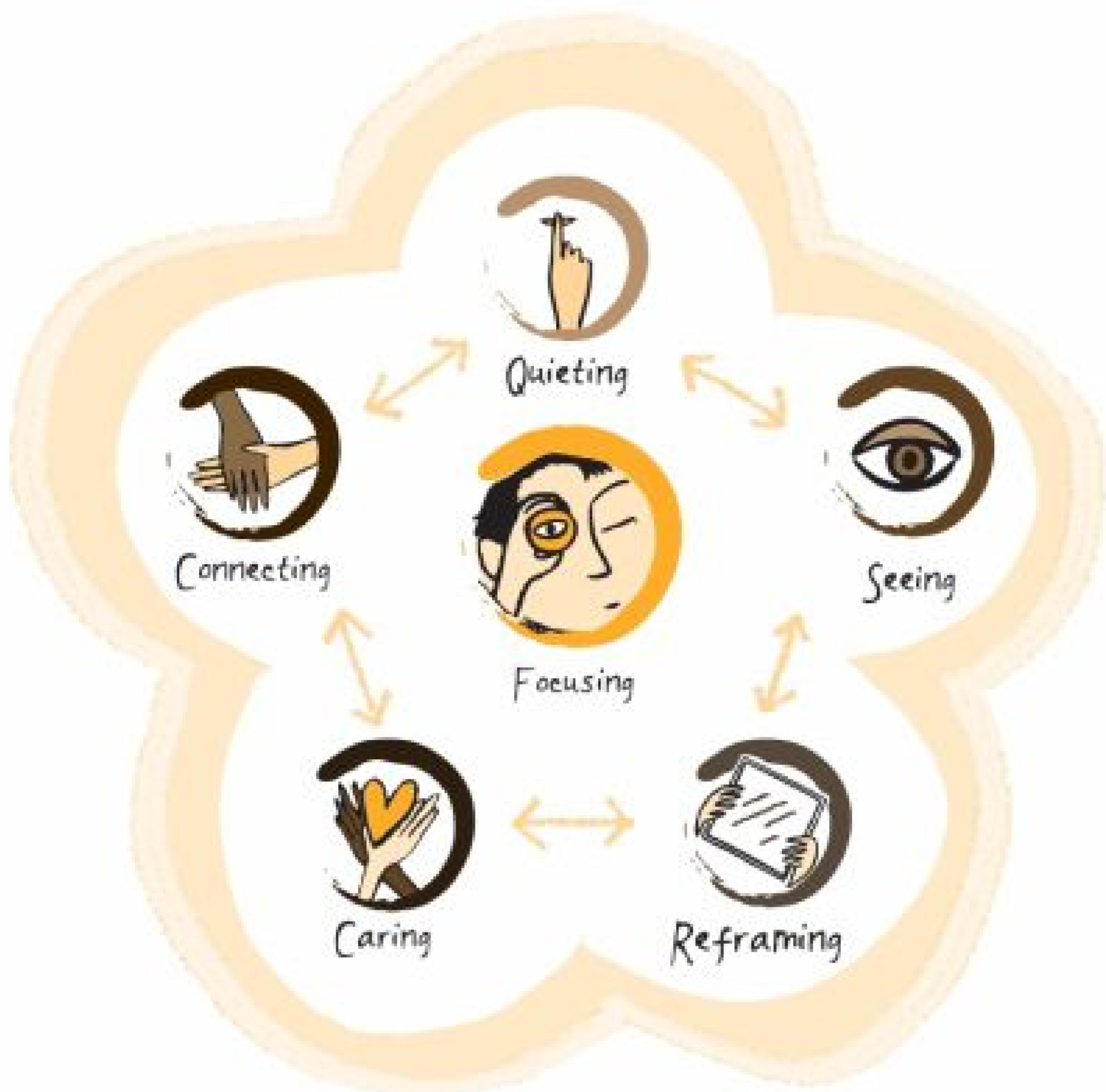
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INTRODUCTION

Meditation looks easy. How could sitting on a cushion and doing nothing be hard? Yet when I first learned to meditate, it reminded me of playing with a Russian nesting doll: open it and there's another just like it inside, only smaller, and then another, and several more, until the littlest doll is finally revealed. There seemed to be layers beneath layers of theory that I needed to understand before I could truly practice. Friends and colleagues had recommended several books, and I was having a hard time sorting through the different methods and terms; the progression of concepts and techniques seemed endless. But I stayed with it, and eventually meditation became a respite rather than a struggle. I finally had the littlest doll in hand. I wrote this book with the hope that it would make unpacking these ideas easier for other parents than it was for me and simple enough to share with their children.

A growing body of scientific research supports what contemplatives have known for centuries: mindfulness and meditation develop a set of *life skills* that allow children, teens, and parents to relate to what's happening within and around them with more wisdom and compassion. *Mindful Games* teaches six of these life skills—**Focusing**, **Quieting**, **Seeing**, **Reframing**, **Caring**, and **Connecting**. I present them in a circle with **Focusing** at the center because steady, flexible attention supports the other five.

Here's how they work together:



When children and teenagers focus on an experience in the present moment (the feeling of breathing, perhaps, or the sounds in a room), their minds tend to **quiet**, and a space opens up in their heads that allows them to see what's going on more clearly. As they become aware of what's happening in their minds and bodies, kids learn to use sense impressions ("I'm feeling restless," for instance, or "I have butterflies in my stomach") as cues to stop and reflect before speaking or acting. Through this process they become less reactive and more conscious of what's going on within and around them. Rather than focusing on the result, they **focus** on responding to the situation with wisdom and compassion. The qualities **caring** and **connecting** emerge naturally as children and teens see the web of relationships, causes, and conditions that lead up to each

moment. Then they have an opportunity to **reframe** how they view a situation and can choose to speak and act in a way that's aligned with those qualities. These six life skills are scaffolded so that transforming attention (**Quieting, Focusing**) leads to transforming emotion (**Seeing, Reframing**), which leads to transforming speech, actions, and relationships (**Caring, Connecting**), a progression that's drawn from classical meditation training.

Over thousands of years, contemplatives have compiled an extensive catalog that maps our inner and outer worlds. I narrowed the catalog down to two lists that I introduce to kids and their parents through games, stories, guided visualizations, and demonstrations. The circle of six life skills is the first of those lists. The second list is made up of universal *themes* that inform a wise and compassionate worldview. They are:

Acceptance	Discernment
An open mind	Empathy
Appreciation	Everything changes
Attention (the spotlight and the floodlight)	Interdependence
Attunement	Joy
Behavioral restraint	Kindness
Cause and effect	Motivation
Clarity	Patience
Compassion	Present moment
Contemplative restraint	Self-compassion
	Wise confidence

Inherent in mindfulness and meditation are qualities that are mysterious, and trying to crack the code by boiling these qualities down to a couple of lists might seem to be missing this point entirely. I'm emboldened by other mysterious creative codes, however, such as jazz, where musicians study a circle of fifths and practice scales to fuel artistic qualities inherent in improvisation that are beyond

description. Like jazz musicians, meditators study a set of themes and practice a set of life skills to fuel qualities inherent in mindfulness and meditation that are hard to pin down. In both creative disciplines, practitioners know these mysterious qualities when they see them, not because they're able to put them into words, but because they can



feel them. There's an old saying that wisdom and compassion are like two wings of a bird and we need both to fly. The *conceptual* themes and *practical* life skills learned through mindfulness and meditation develop wisdom and compassion.

Working together, they offer a degree of psychological freedom that, ideally, will help kids and their families to soar through life's difficulties, just as a bird takes flight and soars through the sky.

Perhaps what I like best about mindful games is that they offer parents and children a unique opportunity for coteaching and colearning. It's no surprise that many parents report that activities designed for kids offer them a way into meditation that they hadn't been able to access before. Which brings me to this important point: as parents, our own mindfulness has a powerful effect on everyone in our lives, especially on our children. They notice when we're calm, composed, and joyful, and they learn from our examples. How we steer our course through the world directly affects how secure they feel and how they move through the world. That's why I encourage parents to develop their own mindfulness first, by reflecting on the themes in this book and playing the games on their own, before sharing them with children.

Mindful games are written for youth, but don't let that fact fool you. They can be just as much fun and life changing for parents and for anyone who has a meaningful relationship with a child or teenager. Teachers, therapists, grandparents, aunts, uncles, troop leaders, and camp counselors, these games are for you, too. Ready to give one a try? Just relax and feel your feet.

feeling my feet

We pay attention to the feeling of the bottoms of our feet against the ground in order to relax, concentrate, and become aware of what's happening in this moment.

LIFE SKILLS Focusing, Caring

TARGET AGES All Ages

LEADING THE GAME

1. Sit or stand with your back straight and your body relaxed. Breathe naturally and notice what's happening in your body and mind right now.
2. Keep your body relaxed. If you're standing, keep your knees soft.
3. Now move your attention to the bottoms of your feet and notice how they feel against the ground. Let the thoughts and emotions that bubble up in your mind come and go.
4. Are you feeling your feet now? If not, don't worry. It's natural for your mind to wander. Just move your attention back to the bottoms of your feet to begin again.

TIPS

1. Focusing on a sensation like they do in *Feeling My Feet* helps children calm themselves when they feel overly excited or upset.
2. Vary the physical sensation that you ask kids to notice. For instance, ask children to feel the cool doorknob against the palm of their hands when they open the door, the warm water and soap-suds when they wash their hands, or the soft wool against their ankles and feet when they pull on their socks.
3. Consistency is more important than the length of time that children play mindful games, especially at first.

Part One



Quieting