



BAREFOOT WALK

"Kiss the earth with your feet."

—Thich Nhat Hanh

OVERVIEW

Lead children in a mountain pose, invite them to simulate different animal movements—and to feel the sensations in their toes and feet as they walk.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily or weekly
- At the start of a school day, at the beginning or end of class, before doing a sitting practice or a loving-kindness practice
- When you or your students are experiencing tension, anger, restlessness, or anxiety

TIME REQUIRED

- <15 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- A safe place for barefoot walking, preferably on grass, soil, or sand

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice noticing the sensations in their toes, feet, and bodies as they stand and walk

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- How do you feel about walking to simply experience walking—rather than walking to get somewhere?
- Try this [mindful walking practice](#) for adults.
- What did you notice in yourself as you engaged in this practice? What was most memorable?
- What would happen if you practiced barefoot walking in this way one or more times a week?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

- Invite your students to take off their shoes and go outside for a walk in the grass, soil, or sand. (If you don't have a safe outdoor space for walking, remain indoors, or try a shoes-on version of this practice.)
- Tell your students: Walking [barefoot] outside is a wonderful way to use your sense of touch and to experience your body and your surroundings. Let's try different kinds of mindful movement together and notice what we see and feel.

THE PRACTICE

Lead your students through each of the activities below, concluding with the barefoot walk ("Take a hike").

STAND BAREFOOT WITH FULL BODY BREATH:

- Stand barefoot on the ground in [Mountain Pose](#). Firmly plant your feet into the ground, a foot's distance apart, arms slightly out from your sides, palms facing forward.
- Take a deep breath in, feeling the breath rise up your feet all the way to your head. Slowly breathe out, releasing the breath through your mouth. [Repeat the full body breath 3 times.]

- Have everyone describe the different sensations, temperatures and textures they're experiencing through their feet.

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, BUZZ LIKE A BEE:

- Warm up for your walk by moving like different animals and insects.
- Let the kids choose what they'd like to be, then follow their movements and sounds.

MAKE MONKEY FEET:

- Place your feet firmly on the ground, toes lifted. Now try placing each toe down slowly and separately starting with the pinkie.
- Is it easier to do on one foot versus the other?
- Try gripping the ground with your toes. What does it feel like?

TAKE A HIKE:

- Begin walking purposely. Use every surface of your foot, including your heel, instep, sole, ball of the foot, and each toe.
- Roll through each step, feeling the earth beneath your foot. Notice any shifts in energy.

CLOSURE

- Ask students: What is it like to notice your feet on the ground? How did it feel? What did you observe in your body as you slowed down each step?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Where might you try it again? When might it be most well-received?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Mindful walking is a foundational component of [Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction](#) for adults and many adapted mindfulness programs for youth. A [2014 meta-analysis](#) that focuses on 24 mindfulness studies with K-12 students demonstrated changes in students' attention and resilience to stress, including positive emotions, self-esteem, and self-concept.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Children face numerous daily stressors that can negatively affect their learning and development. Teaching students this practice may reduce their stress, bolster their personal well-being, and improve their [attention and executive functions](#) (e.g., self-control, planning, decision-making, etc.) as well as their [school functioning](#).

SOURCE

[Mindful Littles Barefoot Walking Activity](#). [Mindful Littles](#) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering mindful compassionate cultures in schools, homes and local communities through meaningful service learning experiences and creative educational programs that teach mindfulness and social-emotional skills, build inner resilience and spark courageous compassionate action.