

What Is the “Breathing Butterfly” Project?

A Stress-Buster for the Young at Heart!

The ‘Breathing Butterfly’ project had an original aim to address some of the effects of high level and persistent stress among children in high-risk populations and in children facing illness. We’ve since learned the butterfly is useful to many other groups... anyone who is young at heart and open to reducing their stress.

By providing access to mindfulness meditation and other positive coping exercises, this project will provide the opportunity to decrease the negative psychological and physiological effects of acute and chronic stress in daily life. Stress-management strategies can translate into positive mental and physical health outcomes, as well as empowerment through successful participation in educational, social, and community networks.



Research focused on the effects of stress has shown that stress leads to the release of cortisol.ⁱ While a release of cortisol can be part of the body’s natural reaction to stress, long-term exposure to cortisol has many negative health outcomes, such as insulin resistance, cardiovascular disease, obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.^{iiiiiiv} In addition to these negative long-term health effects, cortisol release has also been shown to reduce some components of memory performance.^v

One effective method of addressing these stress-related increases in cortisol is through use of mindfulness meditation exercises, which can reduce both base-line cortisol levels and cortisol release during stressful events.^{vi} Meditative practices that focus on awareness within the present moment, acknowledging emotions and circumstances without judgment, and developing patience for one’s self and others may all be effective.^{vii}

It could be right for YOUR compassionate effort...

Free resources available at elfenworks.org/butterfly...

- Guided Butterfly meditation suitable for young children, medical patients and the young at heart, with soothing guitar soundtrack. Players learn an easy 3-second breathing technique, to the opening and closing of butterfly wings. Available in multiple languages, with more languages planned.
- Second meditation version with longer breaths (currently English only)
- Easy shadow play, hand-puppets, and instructions on how to draw a bird or butterfly from a child’s own hands
- A ‘color me’ manga entitled ‘Me and Hōp’ – the story of a young girl who ‘keeps hope’ with her little imaginary bird, Hōp. Hōp has hopped into her life during a time when things are pretty rough for her. This coloring book page in PDF format, available for free download

How Can We Help?

For Your Shelter, Daycare, School, After School Program, Office, or Clinic...

- DVD-R with a repeating butterfly meditation track, suitable for in-house closed-circuit television
- DVD-R with the butterfly meditations in multiple languages, for portable music players
- Free downloadable app (Apple or Android) to which you can point visitors

Explanation for Parents

Kids face new and different stress in the 21st century. And so often, the demands of academic, social, or family life can make it difficult to find time to cope with everyday emotional or stressful experiences. In especially difficult circumstances, greater stress can result, and this has been shown to have a long-term detrimental effect on physical health and their ability to learn and retain information. Our free app and resources are based on what’s known as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). They provide your kids with strong coping skills. They may not change the situation, but they can help kids change their response to it, and allow for some protection against the added harm that comes from the “fight or flight” chemicals the body releases in stressful situations. Because the mind and body are connected—and affect each other—it’s important not just for emotional help. It’s also important to physical health, as well, when we take the time to calm our minds and rid our bodies of unnecessary stress.

Although emotional reactions are not very common in simple breathing exercises such as ours, they can happen. If this happens, remind your child that he or she is not “bad” at the butterfly, it’s just a part of the normal range of experience. Such temporary hiccups are within the realm of common experience, and generally pass while helping the child also learn to cope with inner uncomfortable feelings. Finally, there is no right or wrong way to experience these exercises. By taking the time out to play with the butterfly app or use our resources, participants are taking positive action in caring for both mind and body, and the benefits will be both immediate and long term.

Contact Us

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PLEASE NOTE: This information is intended for the directors of compassionate efforts towards children and the young at heart, such as family shelters and hospital children’s wards. If you are a volunteer or staff member, it’s very important for you to check with your supervisor for permission before jumping in with these resources. With proper permissions and training, the greatest help and healing can be brought to the most people, over the long term.

ⁱ Hammerfald, K., C. Eberle, M. Grau, A. Kinsperger, A. Zimmermann, U. Ehlert, and J. Gaab. “Persistent effects of cognitive-behavioral stress management on cortisol responses to acute stress in health subjects – A randomized controlled trial.” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 33 (2006): 333-39.

ⁱⁱ Dimsdale, Joel E., Paul Mills, Thomas Patterson, Michael Ziegler, and Elaine Dillon. “Effects of Chronic Stress on Beta-Adrenergic Receptors in the Homeless.” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 56 (1994): 290-95.

ⁱⁱⁱ Hammerfald, K., C. Eberle, M. Grau, A. Kinsperger, A. Zimmermann, U. Ehlert, and J. Gaab. “Persistent effects of cognitive-behavioral stress management on cortisol responses to acute stress in health subjects – A randomized controlled trial.” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 33 (2006): 333-39.

^{iv} Ranjit, Nalini, Elizabeth A. Young, and George A. Kaplan. “Material hardship alters the diurnal rhythm of salivary cortisol.” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 34 (2005): 1138-143.

^v Newcomer, John W., Gregg Selke, Angela K. Melson, Tamara Hershey, Suzanne Craft, Katherine Richards, and Amy L. Alderson. “Decreased Memory Performance in Healthy Humans Induced by Stress-Level Cortisol Treatment.” *ARCH GEN PSYCHIATRY* 56 (1999): 527-33.

^{vi} MacLean, Christopher R.K., Kenneth G. Walton, Stig R. Wenneberg, Debra K. Levitsky, Joseph P. Mandarino, Rafiq Waziri, Stephen L. Hillis, and Robert H. Schneider. "Effects of the transcendental meditation program on adaptive mechanisms: Changes in hormone levels and responses to stress after 4 months of practice." *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 22 (1997): 277-95.

^{vii} Carlson, Linda E., Michael Speca, Kamala D. Patel, and Eileen Goodey. "Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Relation to Quality of Life, Mood, Symptoms of Stress, and Immune Parameters in Breast and Prostate Cancer Outpatients." *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65 (2003): 571-81.