



THOUGHT JAR

Taking a pause.

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| Duration | 10 minutes |
| Material | Jar filled with water and coloured glitter |
| General workshop objectives | Learn to take a pause; Understand the concept of thoughts; Live in the present moment. |

Explanation to teachers

There's no "off" switch for our thoughts. Surprising, right? Even when we're practising mindfulness, we never stop thinking. Our thoughts are constantly swirling, and they all have value. It's a question of learning to sit with them without clinging to them and, above all, without identifying with them (Keng *et al.*, 2011). Taking a pause helps with this. Pausing simply means taking the time to notice what's happening in the present moment. This can be hard at first, because of the myth that we're supposed to achieve a state of mental "radio silence" during mindfulness and meditation. At first, the students will probably tell you: "I can't stop thinking." Reassure them that this is completely normal. They can't be good or bad at it, but there's a lot to learn.

The glitter jar activity is an easy way to explain mindfulness to all age groups because it represents a clear, tangible image of the concepts of mind and thoughts.

Why take a pause?

- To learn to observe your surroundings and control your attention;
- To take a step back from a situation;
- To give yourself time to reflect and calm down.



Good to know...

Mindfulness helps you to be more aware of what's going on around you and inside you, while detaching yourself from your thoughts by simply observing them. Ultimately, it allows you to identify thoughts, sensations and emotions as being harmless, even when they are uncomfortable, by considering them with openness and understanding that they are only temporary. It helps you to take a step back from situations and accept them for what they are, by suppressing automatic reactions.

(Dutton, 2008)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Make sure all students are sitting close enough to see the jar.
2. Hold it up in front of them and shake it. Ask them: What do they see? Can they see through the jar? What do the contents remind them of?
3. Tell them to imagine that the glitter is like their thoughts when they're feeling angry, upset, worried, lost or preoccupied.
4. Now, hold the jar still and ask them to pause for a moment and watch what happens as the swirl of glitter slows down and settles on the bottom.
5. Explain that their thoughts do the same thing: They eventually settle, making it possible to see them more clearly and observe them in detail, one by one, in order to better understand them. Taking a moment to simply settle down and check in can slow down the flow of their thoughts, which are often influenced by everyday stressors.
6. Also remind them that their thoughts, like the glitter, do not disappear. They settle, and we learn to live with them, without judging them or labelling them as good or bad, without thinking that we "are" them or that they represent us. They all have value. And we decide how much importance we want to give them.
7. Finally, lead a discussion by asking the following questions:
 - How did you feel when you couldn't see through the jar?
 - How did you feel when the glitter settled to the bottom?
 - Did the exercise help you to refocus? How?

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Have the students make their own glitter jar to keep at home. Not only can they use it in their mindfulness practice outside of school, but it's also a great tool to help them explain mindfulness to their family members.
2. Tell the students about the [.b movement](https://mindfulnessinschools.org/teach-dot-b/dot-b-curriculum/) (pronounced dot-be; <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/teach-dot-b/dot-b-curriculum/>). This movement is gaining momentum in schools in the U.K., where students are encouraged to "stop and be" as a way to connect with the present moment.

Tip for facilitators

Pausing is only helpful if you take the time to observe. To help the students pause, direct their attention to their sensations, their breathing, or details in the surrounding environment.