



**ESCAPE**  
**PLANET**  
**FEAR**

## **An Introduction to Parents**

Escape Planet Fear is a companion guide that explores the teachable moments from the film, Milton's Secret. This guide was created for parents to experience directly, and families to experience indirectly, through the guidance of their parents and grandparents. The guide is designed to augment Eckhart's filmed presentation of the teachable moments of the film by providing practical tips to reduce and manage stress through consciousness practices like breath, meditation, and awareness of thoughts. If you are a parent and wish to bring introductory consciousness practice into your household, then we recommend that you experience this resource as outlined below.

Watch the film, Milton's Secret, and then review the videos, picking out discussion points and activities that you feel would be appropriate for your family and their struggles and needs. Some teachings are related in a very general way to the entire film. Others are specific to the scenes and sequences that Eckhart discusses in his presentation. As a parent, you will have to decide which scenes are appropriate for your family.

To begin the process, find a free afternoon or evening on the calendar. Set a family date for movie night. Make popcorn. Make it a special event. Watch the movie and after you are done, discuss a scene or two. From there, you will be on your way to escaping planet fear!

## **Introduction to the Companion Guide**

Based on the book by Eckhart Tolle and Robert Friedman, Milton's Secret is now a family feature film starring Donald Sutherland, William Ainscough and Michelle Rodriguez.

Twelve-year-old Milton Adams feels his world is in crisis. With his parents stressing about their careers and finances, and the neighborhood bully tormenting him, he is constantly anxious. But when Milton's optimistic Grandpa comes to visit, he learns the secret to finding true happiness from a man who has seen the world and who has committed to living life in the 'now'.

Written in response to numerous requests from Eckhart's readers, Milton's Secret creates models of Presence and Stillness, for a family audience.

In the pages ahead, Eckhart Tolle discusses many of the scenes in the film, and explores the teachable moments in a way that will help you bring consciousness into your family.

As you watch his teachings, follow along in the attached PDF workbook. At the end of each chapter you will be given a series of questions and practical exercises that you and your family can work through together. Only through focused practice will you be empowered to Escape Planet Fear!

## **Chapter 1 - Dysfunctional Human Consciousness**

You can learn a lot from observing the dysfunctional behaviour of people around you. When you can recognize the dysfunction, your awareness increases and you can become aware of your own dysfunction. This is an essential first step in your path to greater consciousness.

*This teachable moment refers to 0:39 to 1:44 from the film, "Milton's Secret."*

### **About This Lesson**

The movie shows the possibility of living in a different state of consciousness embodied by the main character, the grandfather, played by Donald Sutherland. Watching Milton's Secret allows you to observe the dysfunctional state of consciousness without having to participate in it, without getting drawn into it. This can be a positive experience for the viewer, because observing dysfunction, or suffering-generating behaviour in others, allows us to become more aware of our own dysfunction. Once we build this self awareness, we can enter what Eckhart calls, the Witnessing state of consciousness. In this state, you become aware of what your mind is doing. Building this type of awareness of your thoughts is a step towards greater consciousness. Next time you find yourself in a dysfunctional situation, you can ask yourself, is there another way I can respond to this situation? Does this situation have to cause me so much suffering?

### **Discussion Questions**

When you are watching TV or a movie, pick a character that you believe is suffering, unhappy or obviously struggling. Can you see what is causing that individual stress and unhappiness?

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Can you observe how that character is generating his or her own suffering?

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Can you relate any experiences in your own life recently in which you struggled or suffered through? Could you have responded differently without as much suffering?

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### **Family Activity**

As a family, discuss the first scene in the movie where everyone in Milton's family appears to be upset or stressed. Identify what each character is stressed about and brainstorm strategies the characters could have used to help them alleviate their stress.

For example, Milton's father is on his phone talking about his work when the family is sitting down to dinner. Ask your family members how they would feel about this and brainstorm ways Milton's father could notice his behaviour and choose to behave in a different way – a way in which he is more conscious about being present in the moment with his family. (eg. He could excuse himself from the conversation on the phone, put it away and be present for dinner with his family).

When you are aware of a dysfunctional situation, you can choose to respond to it in a way that helps alleviate the stress you feel.

## **Chapter 2 - Fear & Worry**

We've all visited Planet Fear. Worry, stress and fear can be overcome if we begin to understand that when we worry about the future, our mind generates fear and our body feels anxiety and stress. When you become aware of this process you can begin to avoid regular visits to Planet Fear.

*This teachable moment refers generally to the film.*

### **About This Lesson**

Milton created that expression "Planet Fear" due to his observation of his parents and his self observation. He realized that most humans live in a state of fear. and he called this place, Planet Fear. To live on Planet Fear is to live in the dysfunctional state of consciousness in which the stream of compulsive and incessant thinking manifests as worry, stress and fear. Fear is the emotional response to a certain type of thinking and it's usually future oriented thinking such as worry. Most of us are familiar with waking up in the middle of the night and start to think about your problems. When you you're worrying and thinking fearful thoughts, your body believes that you are in a dangerous situation, and as a result, the body produces the emotion of fear and that is very unpleasant feeling. People can be so identified with their minds and their thoughts that they don't even realize that they have created an imaginary situation in their minds which is not reality here and now.

### **Discussion Questions**

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night and started worrying about something?

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What does worrying feel like in your body?

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Do you think that it is helpful or unhelpful to worry?

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**Family Activity**

Discuss that when we are learning how to navigate our thoughts it is important to understand the difference between helpful thoughts and unhelpful thoughts.

Helpful thoughts are those thoughts that in some way lead to a beneficial outcome for us and/or others around us. Unhelpful thoughts move us further away from where we would like to be.

When we are experiencing thoughts that evoke feelings of worry or fear it is helpful to ask ourselves the question: “Is this a helpful thought?”

Have each family member think of a time when he or she has been worried about something. (eg. an upcoming test; getting homework done,etc). Ask each person to talk about the thoughts they were having and identify them as helpful or unhelpful. Make a list of unhelpful thoughts and as a family work together to reframe them into helpful thoughts for each scenario.

Remind everyone that when you’re worrying and thinking fearful thoughts, your body believes that you are in a dangerous situation when in fact you are not. Your thoughts are just your thoughts.

### **Chapter 3 - One Conscious Breath**

Focusing on your breath puts your mind at ease. It is not possible to focus on your breath AND think obsessively. We can all practice one conscious breath to take a break from negative thought patterns, and in doing so, reduce anxiety and stress.

*This teachable moment refers to 11:58 to 12:54 from the film.*

#### **About This Lesson**

One worry-filled evening, Milton discovers a spiritual teacher on the internet. The teacher talks about taking your attention to your breathing, which is a simple meditation technique called One Conscious Breath. To practice this, you don't need to sit in a particular posture, you can do it wherever you are. One conscious breath means as you breath in, your attention focuses on the air that flows into your body. You sense it, your attention is there. There's a tiny pause and then your attention is on on the the air as it flows out of your body. What happens inside you while you are taking one conscious breath? If you are alert, you will notice that you are not thinking. That is because you cannot be conscious of your breathe and think at the same time. This scene is very important, and it points to the main theme of the movie: to wake up out of the stream of compulsive, incessant thinking that generates an enormous amount of suffering.

#### **Discussion Questions**

Have you experienced times when you have unhelpful thoughts?

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Were you able to stop them on your own or reframe them into helpful thoughts?

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If so, how were you able to stop the unhelpful thoughts?

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Have you ever experienced using your breath to give your mind a break from the unhelpful thoughts?

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**Family Activity**

As a family, engage in a simple breathing activity. Discuss that this is only one way to practice focused breathing, but a very helpful one to detach from the unhelpful thoughts you may be having. Lead the family by saying:

- Inhale deeply through your nose
- Notice the belly go out, the expanding of the chest cavity and raising of the rib cage
- Bring the breath to the top of the lungs by raising the collarbones and the shoulder blades
- Exhale through your mouth



If your mind wanders away from your breath, just notice your thought and come back to focusing on your breath. Try practicing this for one minute. Depending on the ages of the family members, this may only last for 30 seconds. Discuss that the more you practice this technique, the better you will become at it you will be able to use it when faced with a stressful situation.

#### **Chapter 4 - Practicing One Conscious Breath**

Studies have shown that a daily breath and meditation practice can have a profound and positive impact on mental and physical health. A few breaths can return you to a state of calm. Learning this skill has never been more important.

*This teachable moment refers to 27:21 to 29:07 from the film.*

#### **About This Lesson**

Milton is upset as he comes home from school, he goes upstairs to his bedroom and lies on his bed. He remembers the meditation teaching from the other night and he hears his voice in his head and he connects with and becomes aware of his breath. As he lies in his bed, he closes his eyes and he practices and this is how he begins to realize that there is another way to meet life. Everybody breathes all the time. When you breath consciously, it's a totally different matter. Conscious breathing doesn't necessarily mean that you change your breathing, you just become aware that you are breathing. As you become conscious that it is happening your attention goes out of your head and into your body.

#### **Discussion Questions**

Can you relate to what Milton is going through where you may have felt overwhelmed, worried, and overcome with unhelpful thoughts?

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What does it feel like when you are aware of your own breathing? What do you notice when you take a conscious breath?

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Have you practiced taking a conscious breath when you begin to feel overwhelmed, worried, or when your unhelpful thoughts seem to be taking over?

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What does it feel like when you are being aware of your own breathing? What do you notice when you take a conscious breath?

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Is it possible for you to take a conscious breath when you begin to feel overwhelmed, worried, angry, when your thoughts seem to be taking over?

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**Family Activity**

As a family, review the focused breathing activity learned in Chapter 3:

- Inhale deeply through your nose.
- Notice the belly go out, the expanding of the chest cavity and raising of the rib cage.
- Bring the breath to the top of the lungs by raising the collarbones and the shoulder blades.
- Exhale through your mouth.

If your mind wanders, focus back on your breath. If possible, practice this technique for 1-3 minutes, three times a day. This is so that the practice of focused breathing can become easier to go do when faced with stressful situations and thoughts.

Once your family feels comfortable practicing this focused breathing exercise, explore these additional breathing exercises:

**Rhythmic breathing:** This breathing exercise involves inhaling and exhaling to a steady equal rhythm. Example: Inhale for a count of two and then exhale for a count of two. Repeat for a minimum of ten breaths each time.

**Ratio Breathing:** This breathing exercise involves breathing in and then exhaling to the count of a pre-determined ratio. There are two possible scenarios for this:

- The inhale is longer than the exhale.
- The exhale is longer than the inhale.

In general, it is better to start with shorter counts and then gradually increase the lengths of the ratios as you become more proficient at breathing. Example: Inhale for a count of one, and then exhale to a count of two. Repeat for a minimum of ten breaths each time.

**5 to 1 breathing:** This breathing exercise involves nine breaths in total. Inhale to a count of one and then exhale to a count of one. Inhale to a count of two and then exhale to a count of two. Repeat this process increasing the length of the count by one each time until you reach five. Then count back down to one reducing the length of the breath count by one each time. Example: Inhale for four, exhale for four; inhale for three, exhale for three, etc.

**Sigh with Exhalation:** This breathing exercise involves inhaling deeply and then exhaling while outwardly “sighing” to release tension. With each breath the sound of the sigh on the exhale should be audible. Repeat for a minimum of five breaths each time.

## **Chapter 5 - Loving Kindness & Stillness**

Sharing presence and stillness is a wonderful way to really connect with friends, loved ones and family. Relationships can be repaired and loving kindness can grow.

*This scene refers to 30:19 to 35:51 from the film.*

### **About This Lesson**

The family has dinner and it does not go well. The parents are not present and the family has a disagreement. Grandpa excuses himself to the patio and begins his tea ceremony. His daughter Jane joins him shortly after. As she participates in the ceremony, she is able to join grandpa not only physically, but also in a state of presence. In presence, they share a beautiful interaction and a loving kindness grows between them. Eckhart explains that “one of the effects of being present is that you begin to emanate loving kindness between humans. As they share in the tea ceremony, you can notice Grandpa’s stillness. When you put your full attention on something that you are doing in the moment, a stillness arises in you. As your mind becomes still, another intelligence arises. This is a state of presence that is above thinking. In this state, you can be so alert and present that you don’t have to think.

### **Discussion Questions**

When have you experienced moments of stillness? Can you describe it? What did it feel like?

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What benefits have you noticed from having your full attention on what you are doing in that moment?

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Can you recall the feeling you get when you are falling asleep and you are too tired to think? How does that feeling differ from your experience of stillness?

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### **Family Activity**

Creating an opportunity to be present with one or more family members can lead to a meaningful interaction that can strengthen relationships both with yourself and others. The Rainbow Visualization can be shared with family members in any setting and can be done sitting or laying down. Parents can read the following script slowly, allowing a few seconds for each 'colour' and what it represents...

"Close your eyes, focus your mind and imagine a beautiful rainbow in the sky. We believe that the colours of the rainbow are in each and every one of us. Be still, breathing calmly and picture the colour red. (pause) You are strong.  
Now picture the colour orange. (pause) You are happy.  
Now picture yellow. (pause) You are proud and confident!  
Remain still and imagine the colour green. (pause) You are kind.  
Now picture the colour blue. (pause) You are honest.  
Imagine the colour indigo. Indigo is the colour of the deep midnight sky. (pause) You are clever and creative.  
And the final colour to picture is violet. (pause) You are a good friend to yourself and others.  
Take a few deep breaths and then slowly, gently open your eyes."

\* Parents please note that this should take approximately 1 – 2 minutes to complete.

## **Chapter 6 - Sharing Presence**

If we can stop thinking and become still we are able to rise above thinking. This brings a great sense of peace and well being and medical research shows that stillness is a great way to find balance and reduce stress.

*This teachable moment refers to 35:51 to 38:49 from the film.*

### **About This Lesson**

As Jane and Grandpa share in the tea ceremony, Milton is upstairs in his room. The voice in his head goes on and on with fearful thoughts. Milton is aware of what his mind is doing and he focuses on his breath. This allows him to escape his fearful stream of thinking and come into the present moment. Milton's mother enters his room and they share a beautiful moment of presence. This is an example of how parents can give pure attention, a form of attention that does not bring conditions, does not bring wanting anything, does not bring up problems or issues. Jane is able to give her son, pure attention and a stillness arises, the scene becomes peaceful. They emanate peace as they both share this moment of presence. Jane is able to maintain this state of consciousness in a later scene, outside the fire, when she is able to remain compassionate and present with Milton. At that moment, she gives him a hug and she's totally there for him. Jane's transformation is well underway. Previously she was frequently burdened by fearful thoughts about the future. As Milton says, she was living on Planet Fear. Now she is able to share presence, loving kindness, stillness and peacefulness with the members of her family. These scenes demonstrate how the family is gradually learning how to live in a different way, in a state of presence.

### **Discussion Questions**

Have there been times when you felt fully present with a member of your family? How did that look/sound/feel?

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Did you notice that your own mood or quality of being changed when someone was fully present with you? Did you notice yourself being more kind or loving?

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How do you think Milton benefited by his mother showing him compassion (after the fire) and being more present with him?

**Family Activity**

Revisit the Rainbow Visualization from Chapter 5 with your family member/members by taking 2 minutes to lead it again.

Following that, suggest that you engage in the preparation of a family meal together. Suggest that being fully present and bringing all your attention to a sometimes mundane/boring activity can create a fun, positive experience for everyone.

Sit together and brainstorm what you could prepare and lay out the jobs that need to happen to create the meal (chopping, peeling, cooking, setting the table, etc). Allow your children to choose which job or jobs they will do and set about preparing the meal. When the meal is ready, sit down as a family to enjoy and savour it. Make a conscious effort to express gratitude for everyone's role in the meal and express how the process was more fun and satisfying with everyone being present for it.

This could also be done by simply passing a “gratitude stone” around the table before beginning the meal. Each person can be invited to hold the gratitude stone and say “I am grateful for \_\_\_\_\_.”

Each person could express someone or something they are grateful for while holding the stone. (eg. I am grateful for (name) peeling the carrots; I am grateful we created a meal together; I am grateful for our home; I am grateful for family, etc.

Please note that expressing gratitude is always an invitation and not a forced activity!

### **Chapter 7 - Escape Planet Fear**

When facing fear and anxiety, a present moment reminder can bring the mind to center and overcome stressful situations.

*This teachable moment refers to 1:10:12 to 1:20:15.*

#### **About This Lesson**

The day of the speeches, Milton is fearful as he arrives at school. Before entering, he is able to become present, observe the sky and the spaciousness that surrounds him. Returning to a moment of presence and stillness helps him get on with his day.

A bit later Milton and Carter have an altercation in the bathroom. At that moment, Milton realizes that Carter is also full of fear and this realization leads Milton’s fear of Carter to almost evaporate as he becomes aware that his reality is the same as Carter’s reality. This realization frees Milton as he’s able to see that what motivates the bully is also a dysfunctional state of consciousness, also fear. The animosity between them subsides and another dimension enters their relationship.

Next we see that Carter, just before he gives his speech, is very vulnerable, almost loving, which is something that his excessive anger has previously covered up. We understand that this tenderness has been totally obscured by his conditioning of being brought up in his household environment. In many ways, more consciousness has come in, has affected all the characters in the movie, including Carter. By the end of the movie the flowering of consciousness has taken root in the family and their surrounding community. Once an awakening like this has started, it will go on, presence will arise more strongly, and at the end, this all looks quite promising.



**Discussion Questions**

When talking about spaciousness, what does Eckhart mean when he says that “sometimes you need to start on the outside and then realize it is also within you?”

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How do you think Milton was triggered to have a compassionate response to Carter when he was giving his speech? (Milton was off stage saying, “Just breathe.”)

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How did Milton’s compassionate response help him overcome his own fear?

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