



PRESENCE

— IN THE FAMILY —

An Introduction to Parents

Presence in the Family 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 help families explore the teachable moments of the film and it provides 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 bring Presence into your family!

Chapter 1 - Situations & Suffering

By learning to recognize that your emotional reaction to negative situations are unnecessary, you can then begin to reduce levels of frustration, anger and unhappiness.

This teachable moment refers to 0:39 to 1:44 from the film

About This Lesson

Many people believe that the situations encountered in their daily lives are the source of their negative feelings, their anger, fear, and unhappiness. In most cases, this is not true. If you look closely at your own mind you may realize that your negative feelings are not caused by the situation itself, but are actually caused by your reaction to that situation, to the way your mind complains about the situation and creates emotional unhappiness for you.

Discussion Questions

Can you think of a stressful situation in which you became angry and frustrated?

Can you think of a stressful situation in which other people found stressful but you did not?

Why do you think people react differently to stressful situations?

Do you think you have a choice in how you react? (yes!)

Family Activity

OBSERVING THE BODY WHEN ENGAGED IN WORRY: When we are in a stressful situation it may feel like we can't breathe. We might feel like we have no choice but to fight, freeze or run away. We might not be able to calm ourselves down because we are unable to access the thinking part of our brains. We may even believe we are in some kind of danger when we are not.

But there is a way to help shut down our fight, flight or freeze response when we are in a stressful situation. The secret lies in using your breath. When faced with a stressful situation, practice using your breath to create space between what is happening to you and how you respond to it. If you practice using your breath in a conscious way, you can make a better choice on responding to what is happening at that moment.

Take a moment with your family members and practice the following:

- 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

As a family, commit to practicing this breathing activity every day and see if this strategy can be applied to stressful situations that arise during day to day living. (egs: taking a test, bad traffic, homework, etc)

Chapter 2 - Consumed by Thoughts

Eckhart asks, “Could we live in a different way that does not generate this continuous stress? This continuous unease? This continuous fear that arises? Does it have to be like that?”

This teachable moment refers to 0:39 to 1:44 from the film

About This Lesson

Bill and Jane are so absorbed in their own thought processes that they do not acknowledge Milton. He is not being heard when he mentions his speech. This problem is reinforced by the parents’ constantly being ‘plugged in’ to their smart phones. Unconscious Living happens when all of your consciousness, all of your awareness is absorbed by your thought processes. When you are completely identified with your thought processes, you are living unconsciously.

Discussion Questions

When you walk through your day, do you find that there are times when you are only partially paying attention to what is going on around you?

Are you distracted by thoughts you are having instead of being fully present in the moment?

How much time are you spending on your device each day?

Family Activity - Practicing Empathic Listening

Gather as a family and take a few moments to reflect on your day. Begin with the breathing activity from Chapter 2.

Then invite each family member to choose one experience they had during the day to share with the group. (Devices should be put away for this activity)

While each person is sharing, encourage the other members of the family to really pay attention to the speaker and practice “whole body listening”. This means turning your whole body to face the speaker, putting your eyes on their face, and maybe even leaning in a bit. When they are done speaking, if you are curious about some aspect of the story they told, feel free to ask about it.

When each person has shared, open a discussion around what you heard and any connections you made with the experience they shared.

As a family, commit to really stopping and empathically listening to each other without distractions as much as possible throughout the day.

Chapter 3 - Presence

By observing a model of presence, we can begin to recognize what consciousness looks like and through this process, we ourselves can become more present.

This teachable moment refers to 12:54 to 14:10 from the film.

About This Lesson

Grandpa Howard arrives and we can watch him to see how he embodies the state of consciousness that is at ease and aligned with the present moment. He lives in that state of presence. Watch how he behaves in every situation. You can sense the general energy emanation that comes from him. He listens very attentively to Jane, Milton and Bill. At times, when Jane refers to negative, unconscious experiences from the past, and the situation becomes very challenging, he removes himself from the situation. He is non reactive to situations but also very accepting of those around him. This is the state of Presence that Grandpa Howard embodies.

Discussion Questions

Are there times when you feel fully present with members of your family? How does that look / sound / feel?

Have you ever been distracted by your thoughts when someone is trying to talk to you? In other words not fully present for the conversation or interaction? How does that look / sound / feel?

What can you do to be more fully present with your family members when they engage you in an activity or conversation?

Family Activity

Mindful presence involves bringing our full attention to our present experience. When we do this, we experience our activities differently. Routine activities can become new and more interesting and we often feel more connected to what we are doing. Approaching activities with a “beginner’s mind” or as if one has never done it before is one way of putting one’s self into this kind of highly conscious state.

One way to experience this conscious state, is to invite each person in the family to engage in a mindful tasting activity. Pass around a dish of seedless grapes and invite each person to choose one. When everyone has a grape, encourage each person to slowly, mindfully eat it, savouring each small bite and really noticing how their grape looks, feels and tastes. Encourage everyone to really slow down the eating process and be fully present for every bite. When everyone is done, discuss how slowing down and really being present changes the way they felt eating the grape. How was it different from the usual way we eat?

As each person shares their experience, have each family member really practice being fully present to what they are saying.

This activity can be done with a variety of food and even during an entire meal. Being fully present and conscious could also be applied to other activities like a family walk, bike ride, etc. Even a chore like folding laundry can be done in a mindful way that allows you to be fully present – slowly taking each garment, feeling the texture, smelling it, remembering seeing it on someone, before folding it and putting it away.

Chapter 4 - Ceremonies

By bringing mindful practices into your daily life, you can help create more positive experiences and help re-focus your thoughts and emotions into a more optimistic state of being. Establishing family ceremonies or rituals brings you all into a state of presence and creates special moments that become family traditions that leave a legacy of conscious living.

This teachable moment refers to 12:54 to 14:10 from the film

About This Lesson

After eating breakfast at the diner, Grandpa does his tea ceremony. This ceremony is one way he anchors himself in the present moment, remaining conscious of every movement. Like clouds moving in on a sunny day, Jane brings up some of her concerns and worries. Grandpa is not drawn into those negative emotions. He is accepting of his daughter's state of consciousness and all those around him and instead remains present in his ceremony. This is something to watch throughout Milton's Secret: the grandpa's normal state of consciousness is being at ease with himself, with other people and with his surroundings.

Discussion Questions

Take a moment and discuss what family rituals you have. (eg. Saying grace, family meetings, preparing a certain meal, game night, movie night, etc).

What is the purpose of these ceremonies or rituals?

How do you feel when you are participating in them?

Family Activity

As a family, brainstorm rituals/activities that are unique to your family. Have your children describe what is special about the family rituals and why they think they are meaningful.

Now, invite ideas that family members may have around creating a new ritual that encourages a positive experience for all family members. For example, having a family meeting over a fondue meal, or simply having a movie night where everyone agrees on a movie title and watches it as a family. By encouraging everyone to be fully present for the ceremony or ritual, you can create a more relaxed and positive environment for all.

Chapter 5 - Transformational Entertainment

By watching films that create positive models, we can experience a transformative shift through entertainment. This is the power of transformational entertainment. As our favorite characters change, we too can change.

This teachable moment refers generally to the film.

About This Lesson

If you identify with a character that is conscious, you can change your own state of consciousness. How? By identifying with the conscious character in the movie, you yourself become more conscious than you would otherwise be. To see consciousness, you yourself must be conscious. A great teaching in the movie is to just be very aware of how Grandpa Howard lives, how he deals with situations, how he interacts with people. It is joyful to see how easy a non-resistant life can be. In contrast the other members of the family that struggle and suffer at the beginning of the movie, Grandpa lives with a sense of ease and stillness. You can watch the

movie several times and still derive benefit because there are many layers to Donald Sutherland's performance. We invite you to join Donald in a state of presence.

Discussion Questions

Which character in the movie did you identify with the most? Why?

What did you learn as a result of watching that character face various challenges in the film?

In what way did watching that character evolve in the film inspire you?

Family Activity

Engage in a family discussion around specific examples where conflict may have occurred and a character in the movie was triggered and reacted. How did they react? Did the reaction help the situation or cause more upset and frustration?

Now engage in a conversation about the ways Grandpa Howard responded to the same conflicts. Did he become upset or frustrated with the situation? What strategies did he use to respond in a calm, empathic way? What strategies could you use to respond versus react?

Brainstorm a list of situations that caused the characters stress in the movie (eg. work, past negative experiences, bad traffic, etc). Write each situation down on a paper and put them into a bowl. Have each family member take a turn drawing one out of the bowl and read it aloud. Discuss how Grandpa Howard would respond to that situation and what strategies he might use.

Following this activity, invite family members to write down their own stressful situations, put them into the bowl and play the game again.

Some suggested strategies:

- pause, take a breath, and walk away until you calm down
- be aware that you have been triggered and practice deep breathing to remain calm
- ask questions to clarify the real issue before reacting to the situation
- respectfully communicating your feelings to the other person(s)

Explain that we all experience times when we want to react to something or someone. It's important to note that it's normal and okay to feel frustration or even anger as a response to what has happened. However instead of letting the frustration drive your actions, you can notice it and respond in a calm way.

It's empowering to know that you have a choice in how you respond when you are triggered. Pausing, taking a breath and creating space between you and what triggered you allows you time to make a better choice and respond without anger and frustration.

Chapter 6 - Gardening & Presence

If you are able to stop focusing excessively on future desired outcomes, you can align with the present moment, honour it, give it your fullest attention. In doing this, you can begin to derive great satisfaction from your achievements in the present moment.

This teachable moment refers generally to the film

About This Lesson

Grandpa Howard enters the neglected garden, not judging, just watching. In a state of alert presence he sees what is needed to bring the garden back to a state of beauty. Shortly after, he gets to work, demonstrating how you can be present in action as well as contemplation. For Grandpa Howard, there is as much enjoyment in the doing as there is in the final outcome. He does not project a future outcome that prevents him from enjoying the present moment. He does not focus excessively on the future state he wishes to achieve. Instead, he works to transform the garden and as he does this, he enjoys each present moment.

Discussion Questions

Can you think of moments or things in your current daily life that bring you joy?

Can you think of something new you would like to learn?

Do you have a specific goal you might like to work towards?

Family Activity

Consider the idea that true happiness often comes from being aware of all you have and being happy with what already exists in your life versus looking outside of yourself to find it. Invite each family member to work together to create a family vision board. On a large sheet of paper or bulletin board, encourage each person to contribute visual representations of the following:

- things that currently bring them joy
- what they would like to do for fun
- something they would love to learn
- places they would love to visit
- something they would like to get better at

(These are simply suggestions to get the activity started and can be altered to best suit your family)

Images can be found in magazines or online and actual objects could also be used to create the vision board (eg. feather, button, special note, photograph, etc)

Once the vision board is complete have each family member explain their choices to the group. This activity not only helps individuals become more aware of what brings them happiness and what they visualize for themselves, but also helps others to get to know their family members better.

Chapter 7 - Forgiveness

Unless you learn to forgive yourself and others, the past determines who you are in the present. You will not only carry the burden of the past into the present, but also build an identity around the things that have happened. This will prevent you from living in the present moment and bringing a fresh outlook to each situation.

This teachable moment refers to 42:45 to 44:27 & 57:27 to 58:23 from the film.

About This Lesson

While shopping at the garden centre, Milton asks, “Grandpa have you ever killed someone?” This leads the grandfather to explain forgiveness to his grandson. “When you cause a hurt to someone, it takes away a piece of you. And if you can’t forgive yourself, the past determines who you are in the present.” Milton then asks, “Did you grandpa, did you forgive yourself” to which his Grandfather replies, “I’m a work in progress.” Without forgiveness and allowing yourself to let go of the past, you carry the burden of the past into the future and it can cause unnecessary suffering. This is why it’s so important to forgive yourself and others.

The second teachable moment occurs when Grandpa has a conversation with Carter’s father Mr.Crane. While visiting Mr.Crane, Grandpa shows us how he is able to leave the past in the past and be completely present with him. He is not thinking about the bullying that has occurred but rather speaks to him in a respectful, kind way. This is a form of forgiveness.

Discussion Questions

Can you think of a time when you’ve had a difficult time forgiving the actions/words of someone?

Have you ever done or said something that you have had a hard time forgiving yourself for?

If you focus on the negative actions/words that upset you in the past, can you see the unnecessary suffering that you experience? Do you feel you have to harbour the bad feelings and memories or do you think you have a choice to forgive that person and let it go?

Family Activity

As a family watch the news paying attention to current events taking place in the world. Choose an event that has created suffering for someone and notice the reaction each of you have to that event. Often the immediate reaction to this kind of event is to blame and feel anger and resentment towards the person causing the suffering.

This is a natural response. However hanging onto the anger and resentment for extended periods of time (the burden of the past) can cause unnecessary suffering to continue. Discuss how choosing to forgive can be a very empowering and liberating experience for everyone and can allow us to live in the present moment instead of being burdened by the past.

Another activity is to practice fully present with people you meet in everyday situations at the store or in your neighbourhood. These people can be strangers or people you have met casually before. Try to connect with them by smiling and making eye contact. Really make an effort to notice, observe and welcome whatever conversation happens, without judgement.

Chapter 8 - Practicing Presence

Bringing presence into your family requires practice. As Ram Dass said, "If you think you're so enlightened, go and spend a weekend with your family." This will give you an indication of how well you are able to leave the past in the past and remain present with your family.

This teachable moment refers generally to the film, Milton's Secret.

About This Lesson

As you practice bringing more presence into your interactions with people, start with people that you meet briefly in the street or in the line up or check out at the market. That moment of interaction with a stranger, you can sense and acknowledge the presence of that person and that's relatively easy because you don't know anything about them. The next step will be to practice with somebody that you have a past with. Next, practice with your family. This is the most difficult as you will get a reflection of who you are whether you still carry the past in you when you interact with family members such as your parents. It's important that you invite presence into your life. In everyday situations so that when you're really challenged, by visiting your parents or meeting your ex wife or ex husband, that's a good test.

Discussion Questions

Think of a time when you reacted very strongly to something and had a hard time letting it go. What was it about that situation that really bothered you? Do you believe past experience influenced the strength of your reaction?

Being fully present with someone you have known for a long time is most challenging when we are interacting with those with whom we have a strained relationship and/or we perceive to have wronged us in some way. Letting go of the past, requires us to forgive and to have compassion. It is only when we are able to forgive that we are truly able to free ourselves from the past so that we can live in the present moment. Where in the film do we see examples of this?

What do the examples of compassion and forgiveness in the films teach us about ways of addressing problems with bullying?

Family Activity

It's important that you invite presence into your life, in everyday situations. Practice brings presence. Try this activity. First, practice being present with a stranger. Perhaps it is someone you have an interaction with at the grocery store or at a park. Ask questions. Be attentive to his or her words and actions. Take a moment to share presence without judgement. Are you able to suspend your natural tendency to judge? Next, do the same exercise with a friend that you have known for a few months. Then a friend that you've known for a few years. As you are able to remain present with people that you share more and more history with, you may be ready to attempt this activity with your own family. Can you leave the past in the past with so much shared experience between you?

Chapter 9 - Respond vs. React

If you are able to remain present with the people and situations that you find upsetting, you can stop reacting and start responding. Responding is to be present, to observe your feelings and be 'with' what is happening. To respond is to accept what is happening instead of fighting against it.

This teachable moment refers to scenes throughout the film.

About This Lesson

Examine your life and see how reactive you are to the situations and people that upset you. Compare your reactions to how Grandpa Howard deals with situations. He does not react to his daughter's criticisms, he simply listens, remains present and if things get too uncomfortable, he excuses himself. He does not react to the neglected garden by complaining, he simply responds by working towards restoring the garden to a state of beauty. He does not react to the neighbour's violence and unconsciousness. Instead, he responds by having a present conversation and giving Brutus a bone. Reaction comes when you bring the past into the present. Response flows from presence. If you remain in the present moment, you can stop reacting and start responding. In this state, you don't make anything or anybody into an enemy, you just accept and respond.

Discussion Questions

Can you remember a time when you were triggered by something someone said or did and reacted in a negative way? How did you react? What did you say and/or do?

Can you think of another way you could have responded to that person in a calm way?

Family Activity

Engage in a family discussion around specific examples where conflict may have occurred and someone was triggered and reacted. Did the reaction help the situation or cause more upset and frustration?

Have a conversation about other ways one could respond to the same event without anger, upset or frustration. What strategies could you use to respond versus react?

Some suggested strategies:

- pause, take a breath, and walk away until you calm down
- be aware that you have been triggered and practice deep breathing to remain calm
- ask questions to clarify the real issue before reacting to the situation
- respectfully communicate your feelings to the other person(s)

Explain that we all experience times when we want to react to something or someone. It's important to note that it's normal and okay to feel anger as a response to what has happened. However instead of letting the anger drive your actions, you can notice it and respond in a calm way.

It's empowering to know that you have a choice in how you respond when you are triggered. Pausing, taking a breath and creating space between you and what triggered you allows you time to make a better choice and respond without anger and frustration.

Chapter 10 - Presence in the Family

Grandpa demonstrates how bringing presence into your family can create a significant shift in the energy and awareness in your family.

This teachable moment refers to 1:05:28 to 1:07:06 & 1:20:46 to 1:24:48.

About This Lesson

After the fire, the father also becomes more present and apologizes to Milton for not being fully present with him. This signifies the shift in consciousness within the family and signifies that Grandpa Howard has fulfilled his function within the family, for now at least. The movie can be seen more than once and you can benefit from it by watching and participating in the shift of consciousness that we see within the family.

Now that you have reviewed all of the chapters in the course, can you think of a few ways that you can be more present with your children? Your spouse? Your parents? What are those strategies. Write them down and try to use them in the various situations you find yourself in. You may be surprised once you have started bringing more presence and comfort to situations that once created stress, anxiety and worry.