



**JAMES BODDEY IS MANAGER OF BUSY BODIES CHILDCARE CENTRE IN LUDLOW.**

# Train your attention skills

I was recently introduced to the fascinating concept of 'mindfulness'. For the uninitiated, mindfulness is said to have originated in Buddhist thinking and meditation practice over two-and-a-half thousand years ago. In practice it means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally ([ow.ly/LOq9d](https://ow.ly/LOq9d)).

In my experience, we are trained as early years practitioners to focus a large part of our attention on either what has happened before (observations we have made, etc.) or on what the future holds (planning, next steps, school readiness, etc). Whilst we are wondering about the future or contemplating the past, however, we are not truly in the present.

Here is an example from my setting: when I go into the garden area, I might look around and think to myself, "The grass needs cutting there... We need to plan how to use that space better... Last Tuesday the children used that area as a space rocket." The children in the setting, on the other hand, will probably be calling over to me, "James, look at this ladybird! Let's run over there!" etc.

Mindfulness can simply be noticing what we don't normally notice, because our heads are too busy in the future or in the past, thinking about what we need to do, or going over what we have done. When we live in the present, without worry about past or the future, we are able to interact with the children in a more meaningful way and therefore we become better practitioners.

## Living in the moment

According to a study at Harvard University ([ow.ly/LOspO](https://ow.ly/LOspO)), people spend 46.9 per cent of their waking lives thinking about something other than what they're doing. In a profession where we are constantly thinking in the past or future, we find it even harder to be in the present. This is why we need to work hard to take a few minutes every so often, every day, to stop and refocus our minds.

By being mindful we can develop and train our attention skills. We can live and 'be' in the moment more and see what is actually going on around us. This will help us to observe and interact with the children and be able to fully immerse ourselves in their lives.

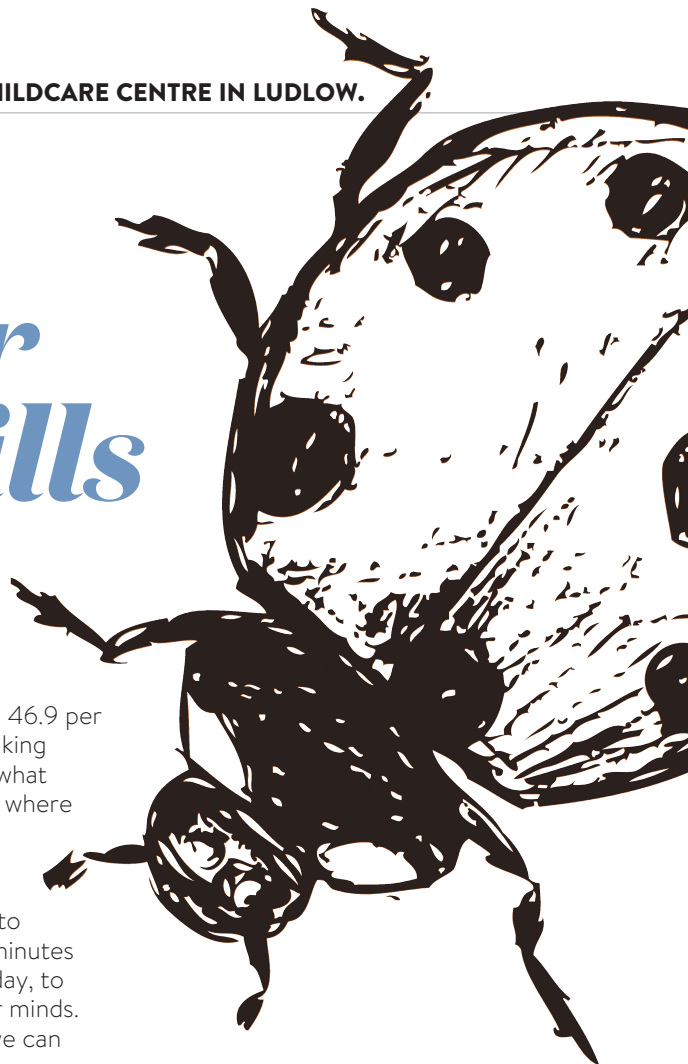
A key way in which we can develop sustained shared thinking is through being in the moment in this way. To connect with the children on a moment-by-moment basis, immersing ourselves in their play, world and



**46.9%**

*The time we spend thinking about something other than what we are doing.*

SOURCE: Harvard University



thinking requires mindfulness.

When we observe children, we see that they naturally live in the moment and direct their attention to what is happening as it unfolds. When we are mindful we can also act in the present with open-minded curiosity and acceptance. Perhaps we should learn from the young children in our care, in the way that they approach life, free from stress and living in the moment?

As well as helping us as professionals, mindfulness can also have a positive impact on our mental wellbeing (for example, see the NHS's guidance at [ow.ly/LOt2x](https://ow.ly/LOt2x)). Being present in the moment in this way means that we can enjoy the world around us more and understand ourselves better. It can relieve stress and anxiety, which comes from dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

So, I propose that as early years practitioners we should consider mindfulness and learn to direct our attention to our experiences as they happen, with the same open-minded curiosity and acceptance as the children in our care. By doing this we will improve our relationships with the children, our observation skills and our settings in general; we may even improve our own mental wellbeing and possibly our lives.

