

# 10 Mindful Minutes

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Giving Our Children—and Ourselves—the Social  
and Emotional Skills to Reduce Stress and Anxiety  
for Healthier, Happier Lives

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# The Flag

## *One Mother's Journey to Mindfulness*



It was an ordinary weekday morning like any other. The telephone rang and a girlfriend told me, "Turn on the news." I switched on the television and watched, openmouthed, as two New York skyscrapers crumbled. My immediate thoughts were for my kids. My fourteen-year-old, Wyatt, was getting ready for school. Kate and Oliver were both in Los Angeles. And Kurt, too. We were all safe.

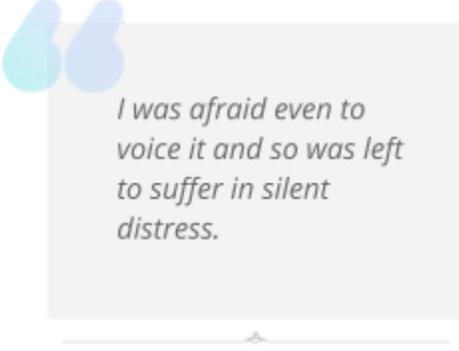
Like relatives at a deathbed, we gathered together in front of the TV - watching, waiting, and weeping. With each new image and every slow-motion replay, we mourned the passing of life as we had known it. This was real. This was a game changer. The world would never be the same after this. The events of 9/11 would polarize people of every country, religion, color, and creed. Reactions would ripple back and forth across oceans, creating a tidal wave of suspicion and fear. I saw the future unfolding before us, and it frightened me.

My mind flashed back to a day when I eleven years old. At school I'd excitedly skipped down the hallway to the classroom on Visual Aids day thinking we were going to see a movie on agriculture or the arts. To my surprise, the film started with a big clock counting down from nine to zero. Then a booming voice announced, "This is what will happen if there is an enemy attack!" Up on the screen appeared scenes of annihilation and death. This was a civil defense film on what would if an atom bomb hit America. We children were supposed to crouch under our desks, cover our heads, and turn away from the blinding light. "Duck and Cover" was the message.

The world as I thought I knew it changed in that instant. My young brain was forever imprinted with horrific images I couldn't begin to understand. My body began to shake uncontrollably and I started to cry. Panicked, I fled from the classroom and ran home. Sobbing, I telephoned my mother, who rushed home from work and eventually calmed me down.

That childhood experience never really left me. For a long time afterward, I'd have to stay home from school if the town sirens went off during a drill. The seed of fear the film planted grew into a deep-seated terror that blossomed into fully blown panic attacks well into my young adulthood. Physically affected by my secret anxiety, I was afraid even to voice it and so was left to suffer in silent distress.

As I watched the events of September 11 unfold some forty years later, I wept. I knew event would certainly traumatize the tender minds of children watching an American flag fluttering in the smoking ruins. How could they possibly understand? How would these images and the fear they carried inform their future?



*I was afraid even to voice it and so was left to suffer in silent distress.*

I went to my knitting basket and found some old threads of red, white, and blue. Knitting has always been a form of medication for me, and so I began to knit the American flag. As I sat there, tears falling onto my stitches. I came to a profound and deeply emotional decision. I felt compelled to do something, no matter how insignificant, that would be more meaningful and lasting than the joining of a few fragments of wool.

My kind of patriotism doesn't have to do with being red or being blue; it doesn't even have a label. It has to do with loving my country and its great potential and respecting our powers of resilience. No matter how small a gesture, I believe that we can all do something to make this world a better place.

If I could help just one little girl or boy move beyond those images that will haunt us all, that would be a gift. Remembering my own childhood anxiety, I longed to show children everywhere how to rediscover their natural joy, understand the value of their emotions, and learn to feel empathy for others. I had no idea how to set about achieving this, but I knew as I knitted that I had to figure something out. Maybe it wasn't happiness I could bring our children maybe it was hope. Either way, I felt compelled to try.