

General Information Sheet

Children's Courses and Teenagers' Courses as taught by S. N. Goenka

In a time of worldwide social transition and upheaval, more and more people throughout the world are seeking concentration, purification and peace of mind through the practice of Vipassana meditation. Vipassana means "to see things as they really are" and is a logical process of mental purification through self-observation. Many come to Vipassana later in their lives, wishing they had found this technique sooner because it is so effective in learning the art of living peacefully and harmoniously.

The ideal time to begin the first steps of this mental training is in childhood when children as young as eight years old can easily learn the technique of Anapana meditation. Anapana is the first step in the practice of Vipassana meditation. It is the observation of natural, normal respiration, as it comes in and as it goes out. Anapana is a simple technique that helps develop concentration of the mind. It is easy to learn, objective and scientific. Observation of the breath is the ideal object for meditation because it is always available, and it is completely non-sectarian. Anapana is very different from techniques that are based on artificial regulation of the breath. There are no rites or rituals involved in the practice or presentation of Anapana and it is presented in a non-sectarian format. This approach is traced back to the Buddha, who rediscovered and taught this technique 2500 years ago. The Buddha never taught a sectarian religion; he taught Dhamma—the way to liberation—which is universal. Following this tradition, this technique is presented in a totally non-sectarian approach. For this reason, it has had a profound appeal to people of all backgrounds, of every religion or no religion, from every part of the world.

Besides helping them to calm and concentrate their minds, Anapana helps children to better understand themselves and how their minds work. As they learn to calm and concentrate their minds, they gain mastery over their impulses and actions. They develop an inner strength that helps them to choose right and appropriate actions over wrong actions. This is a natural byproduct of the technique. For this reason, Anapana provides them with a tool to deal with the fears, anxieties, and pressures of childhood and adolescence. Because of its simplicity, they find the technique easy to practice and understand and they appreciate its scientific and universal nature.

Over the past 15 years, hundreds of Anapana courses have been conducted exclusively for children around the world. These courses have yielded substantial benefits for the thousands of children who have attended them. Many of them have experienced a positive change in their outlook, behavior and attitude. Many have found their ability to concentrate has improved and that their memory has strengthened. And above all, these children have acquired a tool that is of immense value to them for the rest of their lives.

Children are, by nature, active and enthusiastic, with an eagerness to learn and explore. For this reason, it is appropriate to offer them an opportunity to explore themselves and their mind with all its hidden faculties, latent abilities and subtle complexities. Learning Anapana plants a wholesome interest in self-introspection and meditation, which may open an entirely new dimension of life for them later on.

There are two courses offered, grouped by ages. The children's course is for children ages 8 to 12 years old. The teenagers' course is for teens ages 13 to 16 years old. Courses are generally two to three days in length. One-day courses may also be offered. Parents or guardians who have completed a ten-day course with S. N. Goenka or his assistant teachers are welcome to stay at the center till the course is over. They will be following a different schedule of meditation than the children and will have opportunities for Dhamma service. Other parents and guardians who are dropping off their children are welcome to stay during the registration time but will then leave the center until the course is over.

During the course, meditation instructions are given by S. N. Goenka via audio and videocassette. In addition, there may be other activities such as art, story telling, games, journal writing and service activities. On teenagers' courses there are longer periods of meditation and of noble silence. On all these courses, children are assigned counselors who support and guide them and make sure that they are comfortable and well taken care of during the course.