

Mindfulness



Topics Covered

- What is Mindfulness
- What are the benefits
- Strategies and Practice
- Final Thoughts

Wellness Wednesdays

04/08/2020

Before finishing Monday's newsletter, I wrapped up two back-to-back zoom calls with my family. Both sides wanted to chat and check in with each other, a typical routine being built into families across the nation. One started at 4PM and the other started promptly at 5:15PM

Don't book back-to-back zoom calls with your family, I repeated, do not book back-to-back zoom calls with your family.

At a certain point during this pandemic, you may start to realize that you've added so much to your schedule that your overbooked scheduled has now become more stressful than the feeling of being cooped up inside all day.

It made me realize something important that may be overlooked during these uncertain times, and even in these newsletters. We can all be doing our best, we can all be doing exactly what we should be doing to take care of ourselves and our families, and it still may not be enough, especially when we fail to build in time for ourselves to just be in the moment.

This is for everyone who reads these newsletters, especially the parents. If there is one tip that will benefit you and your family the most it is to take time for yourself. Many of you are now working 2-3 jobs as parents, teachers, and workers all under the same roof. It is stressful and it is exhausting.

Even the longest lasting batteries need to be recharged at some point.

Catch that needed breath, give your mind some time off from managing your households, your work life, your health, etc. The benefits will be long lasting and will likely trickle into other aspects of your life.

With that said, take a breath before reading through today's newsletter. Give yourself some time, say 5 minutes, to just be in the moment. What do you notice, what do you hear, what do you feel, what do you see?

Once you're ready, please enjoy today's newsletter focused on discussing Mindfulness; what it is, where it came from, the benefits of it, and how you can begin and/or maintain your own mindful practices amidst this uncertain and stressful time.

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Mindfulness

- **A state of awareness and attention where we are actively focused on the present, the here and now.**
 - Our focus is directed at where we are and what we're doing while not becoming reactive and overwhelmed by what is occurring around us and inside of us
- **A non-judgmental awareness of our thoughts and feelings**
 - Thoughts and feelings are noticed and accepted, but we do not judge or interpret them
- **Roots based in Buddhist meditation practices founded about 2,600 years ago**
- **Brought into the mainstream by John Kabat-Zinn out of the University of Massachusetts Medical School while researching stress reduction interventions**
- **Mindfulness is a skill/trait that we all have, however, some of us can access it more easily than others**
 - Practice through mindful meditation improves our ability to enter a mindful state and reap its many benefits
 - Consider mindfulness as your golf game and meditation as the driving range
- **Mindfulness is a form of meditation, but not the form of meditation that typically comes to mind**
 - You don't have to sit to practice mindful meditation, you don't have to cross your legs and hold your hands up, and you don't have to "ohmmmm"
 - There are many ways to comfortably practice mindfulness as you will see below, and its likely you already engage in a mindful activity without even knowing it!
- **Living in the moment rather than dwelling in the past or anticipating the future**

Benefits of Mindfulness

- **The benefits of Mindfulness have been well-research with evidence indicating the following** (Davis and Hayes, 2011):
 - Lower stress levels
 - Reductions in harmful rumination (repetitive thinking patterns)
 - Protection from depressive and anxious thought patterns
 - Increased levels of focus and attention
 - Increased levels of happiness
 - Improved interpersonal/relationship communication
- **Research and imaging studies have also documented the affect mindfulness has on brain chemistry, functioning, and connectivity**
 - Findings suggest that mindfulness leads to brain activation in areas that related to positive affect (Davidson et al., 2003)
 - Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) interventions led to increase of gray matter (Hölzel et al., 2011)
 - Improved learning and memory
 - Improved emotion regulation
 - Increased perspective taking
 - Increased self-referential processing (relating things to one's self)

Memes for Distraction

New Easter Baskets coming soon



Day 4 of social distancing: Struck up a conversation with a spider today. Seems nice. He's a web designer.

Day 7 at home and the dog is looking at me like, "See? This is why I chew the furniture."

- Researchers have even found mindfulness leading to changes (decreased activity) in the amygdala (fear center of the brain) (Gotink, Meijboom, Vernooij, Smits, & Hunink, 2016).

Many people often doubt the benefit of mindfulness and/or meditation practices; however, it is important to consider the implication of imaging studies that highlight how mindfulness practices can change the way our brains work and function!

Strategies for Adults and Teens

- **Success in mindfulness practice will vary person to person, some people benefit from mindfulness meditation geared towards imagery, others towards breathing.**
- **These strategies are available to us at any time of the day and can be used without anyone knowing (use it at school, at work, etc.)**
- **Body Scan**
 - Focuses on physical sensations and discomfort in our bodies
 - Progressively bring your awareness to sensations in lower body to your head, or vice versa
 - Start with your toes and work your way up, or start with your head and work your way down
 - The focus here is to bring your attention and awareness to your body, if you get distracted that is okay, settle yourself and direct your focus back to the body part
- **Visualization**
 - Focuses on bringing one's attention to a specific calming/relaxing image in their mind
 - Choose an image that brings you comfort and calmness and focus on it
 - Again, if you get distracted, use the opportunity of distraction to bring your focus back to your selected image
- **Deep breathing/Breath Work**
 - Everyone always talks about deep breathing, and a lot of people say it never works. When it comes to mindfulness the intent is different as your focus is directed towards your breathing for the purpose of being present, not calming down.
 - Focus your attention on your breath and allow your breath to be an anchor in the present moment
 - Observe and feel your chest rise and fall as you inhale and exhale slowly
 - If you get distracted or find it hard to remain focused, GREAT, it just means you now have an opportunity to bring your focus back to your breath
- **Noting**
 - Unlike body scanning and breath work, noting focuses on bring our attention and awareness to particularly distracting thoughts and feelings during meditation
 - The intent here is to not judge the thought, but to recognize and accept, and then observe the way it interacts with your mind
 - The goal through this form of observation is to help create space between yourself and the distracting thought

turns out my top 3 hobbies are:

1. eating at restaurants
2. going to nonessential businesses
3. touching my face



Stay SAFE Everyone!!!

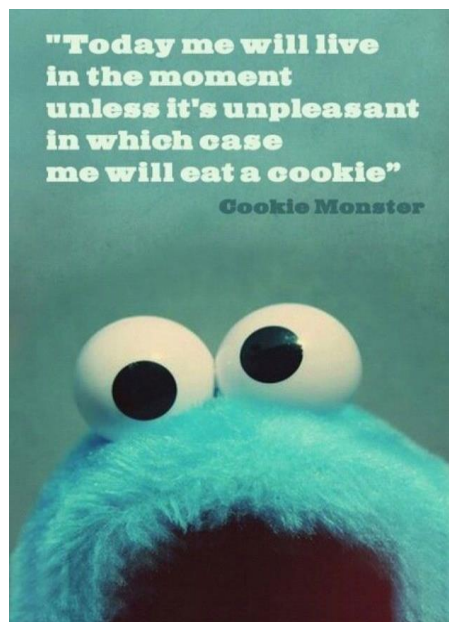


• Resting Awareness

- Rather than bringing one's focus to a specific sensation or thought, rested awareness takes a more passive approach while the mind is at rest
- The focus here is to allow thoughts and feelings to enter your mind and then let them leave your mental space
- Think of this as a paper boat flowing down a stream and you are sitting on the side of the stream observing the boat
 - There is a beginning (when the boat comes into your field of view), a middle (when the boat is directly in front of you) and an end (when the boat leaves your view)
- Resting awareness encourages the individual to view their thoughts and feelings as if they were the boat, comfortably allowing the thoughts to flow into and out of our minds

Strategies for Kids and Teens

- **In addition to the strategies above, children and teens can also use these strategies to practice mindfulness:**
 - Mindful posing/Yoga
 - Have your child or teen focus on holding specific poses like a superman pose or the wonder woman pose
 - Using "Spidey-Sense"/Heightened Sense
 - Have your child or teen focus on their sense and be like Spiderman using his superhuman senses
 - Encourage them to learn about and discuss their world to you through their senses (sight, touch, smell, sound, and taste)
 - Mindful Jar
 - Take an empty mason jar and fill it with water and glitter, close the jar to prevent any mess before proceeding
 - Shake the jar and discuss with your kids how the jar is like their thoughts when they are stressed, anxious, etc.
 - Highlight how hard it is to "see clearly" when stress is involved
 - Normalize this for adults and other kids
 - Then allow your child to sit for a few moments calmly observing the glitter fall back into place
 - When appropriate, highlight how our focus and calmness helps us see clearer



Final thoughts:

The use of these strategies and developing an overall stronger sense of mindfulness does not mean that our unpleasant emotions or stress will go away. If you need to, go eat the cookie, when you do enjoy it, practice fully enjoying the cookie, you'll be practicing mindfulness at the same time.

Improving our mindfulness improves our ability to manage and respond to emotions and stress rather than reacting to them.

It allows us to become more thoughtful and more aware of our emotions and behavior allowing us to be less judgmental, more empathic, and kinder to ourselves and others.

You can still be angry while being mindful; you can still be stressed while being mindful. The key point here is that you will likely have more of an opportunity to remain in control over those emotions rather than letting them control you.

Think back to the boat flowing down the river the next time you are experiencing stress and/or stressful thoughts. Let that feeling or those thoughts flow down the river and out of your mind. You ultimately have the choice as to how to respond to the stress, mindfulness is just one more tool you can use to help make that choice.

Give it a try, keep at it for the next couple of weeks, even if it is only for 5-10 minutes a day. I think you'll be surprised by how powerful being in the present can be.

Sources:

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