

A SPIRITUALITY & HEALTH E-BOOK

the
mindfulness
toolbox

PRACTICES, TIPS, AND INSPIRATION



Spirituality
& Health

"Realize deeply that the present moment is all you ever have."

—ECKHART TOLLE

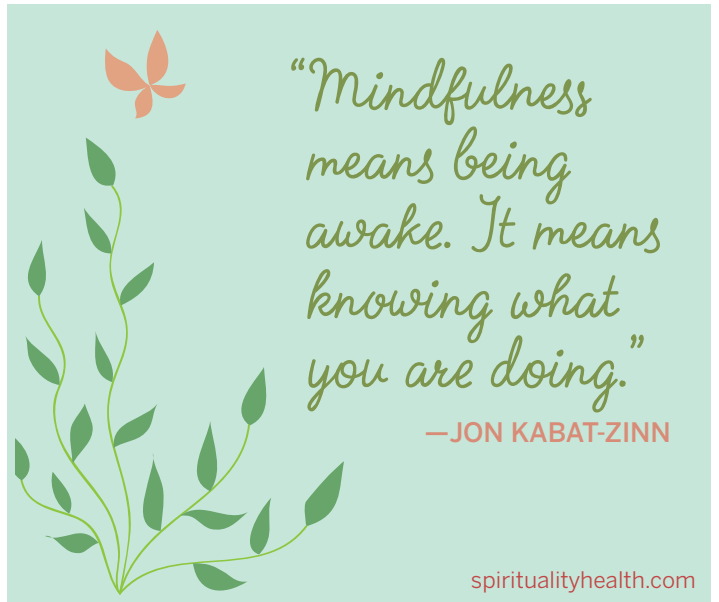
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"Mindfulness means being awake. It means knowing what you are doing."

—JON KABAT-ZINN

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"When hungry, eat your rice; when tired, close your eyes. Fools may laugh at me, but wise men know what I mean."

—LIN-CHI

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"Forever is composed of nows."

—EMILY DICKINSON

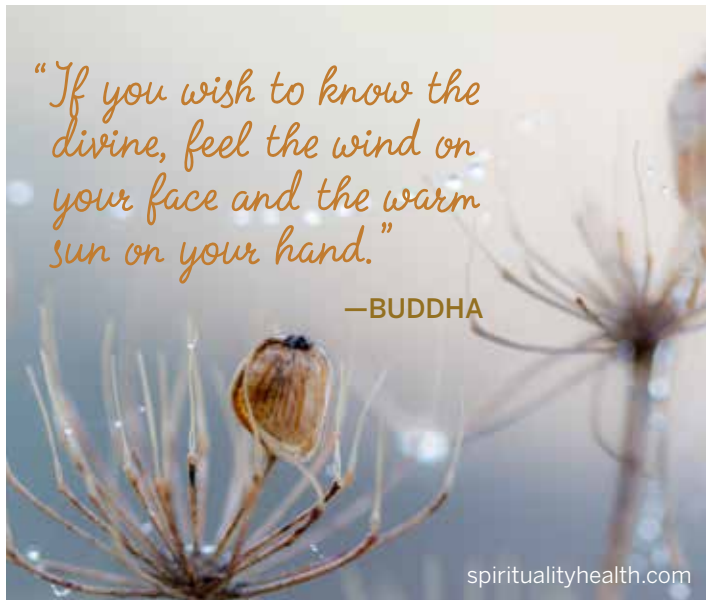
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"If you wish to know the divine, feel the wind on your face and the warm sun on your hand."

—BUDDHA

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"That's life: starting over, one breath at a time."

—SHARON SALZBERG

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“Your task is not to seek for love, but to seek and find the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”

—RUMI

HOW TO

CATCH A THOUGHT:

3 Tools for Mindfulness

BY JULIE PETERS

As humans, we are creatures of habit. We not only stick to the same brand of shampoo, but we also have many mental, emotional, and behavioral patterns that we fall back on day to day. This isn't always a bad thing: Mindlessly getting the same brand of shampoo every time saves us probably 20 minutes of careful comparison. We can't be mindful all the time.

The problem is that some of our habits are coping mechanisms for stress that have negative consequences. Have you ever found yourself looking down into an empty bag of chips and wondered how you got there? You probably had a stressful thought or emotion, and the brain went right to the quickest comfort it knew.

In yoga, these patterns are called *samskaras*. Taking the same path to the river each day wears down the grass, making it easier to walk on. We forget that there are other, more overgrown, but perhaps more useful paths. Mindfulness means catching the stressor earlier, so you can carefully

choose your actions. You might still eat the bag of chips, but at least you chose to do so.

The holiday season can be an excellent opportunity for some thought hunting. With family stress and the abundance of food and booze in a dark, cold season, we will have neon signs pointing us down our well-traveled, feel-better-fast paths. Here are some tools:

1. CATCH YOUR ACTIONS

It's hard to catch a thought, but a little easier to catch an action. When you notice the empty bag of chips, ask yourself what you are feeling and thinking. The thought is usually lurking just behind the action, and the emotion just behind that.

2. JOURNALING

Freewriting is a practice of writing whatever is going through your mind without stopping, editing, or deleting. Even if it starts out with “I don't know what to write, I have nothing to say . . .” follow that and eventually it will shift. Spend five or 10 minutes doing this. When you reread what you wrote, imagine it was

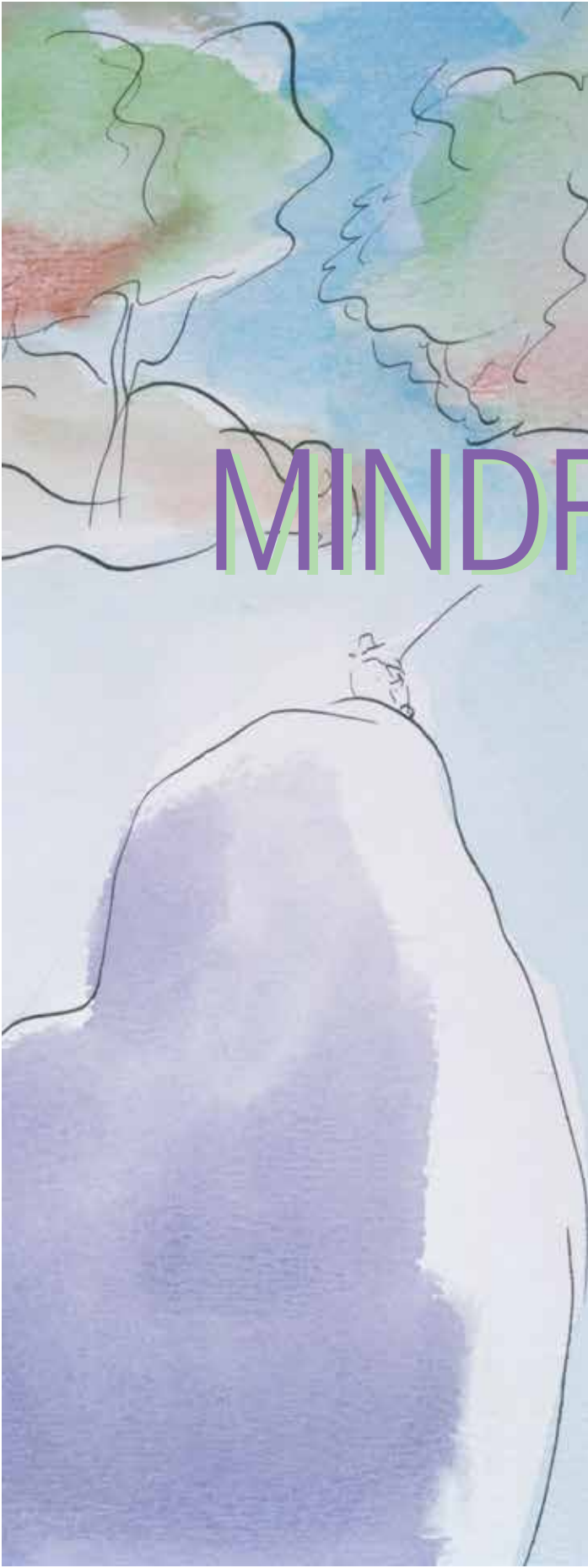
written by a good friend. You'll create enough distance from your thoughts to observe them, and we tend to judge our friends with much more compassion than when we judge ourselves.

3. TIME FOR REFLECTION

Whether you sit and meditate for 45 minutes, go to a yoga class, take a long walk, or stare out the window for a while, you are creating time for reflection.

Busyness is a major culprit in mindlessness. We jam pack our schedules so full that we avoid ourselves all day, and then wonder why we are lying awake at night barraged with thoughts. In quiet time, try repeating your thoughts to yourself as they come up. This will help make them a bit more visible.

Being able to see your *samskaras* is the first and most important tool for changing your patterns, but it's not the only tool. There are many techniques that can come next. It's not easy, and it won't happen in an instant. Know that every attempt to take a new path to the river wears down the grass just a little bit, and makes that different path just a little bit easier to find next time. **S&H**



MINDFULNESS:

A Gentle Approach to Healing

BY WILL DONNELLY

There's an interesting story about a woman being chased by a tiger. She is running for her life and comes to the edge of a cliff. Here, she notices a sturdy vine, and climbs down the vine to escape her tormentor, only to realize there is another tiger down at the bottom of the mountain waiting for her.

She then sees two mice scurry out and start gnawing on the vine. At this moment, she notices a luscious, wild strawberry growing from an outcrop inches away. She looks up. She looks down. She looks at the mice. Then, she eats the strawberry.

Succulent juices burst in her mouth, and she feels the seeds crunch between her teeth. She notices a gentle breeze flow across her skin and through her hair, as she gazes out at the expansive vista.

Stories such as this, as often taught by Eastern practitioners, offer an experience for the listener, not advice. This old and well-known Buddhist story surely has several interpretations. But if this story is anything, it is most certainly a story about mindfulness.

Mindfulness is a “*moment-to-moment awareness of one’s experience without judgment.*” Our protagonist in the story pulled her attention from the tiger above (the past?) and from the tiger below (the future?) and from the mice on the vine (time?) and simply gave the strawberry her full, undivided attention.

Mindfulness is a 2,600-year-old Buddhist concept that is only recently being used in many clinical settings, to many positive outcomes. In spiritual practice, it is said to be the antidote to delusion. It turns out that when we are paying attention to “what is” in this moment and not judging it, we are not obsessing about all the bad things that could happen to us in our current situation (rumination) or worrying about the future potential disasters.

We are simply here, now, noticing what *is* and not judging it. Its effects have many implications.

*Cliff notes:
Breathe.
Relax. Pay
attention.*

Our minds tend to obsess about problems, and at times it’s almost comforting to fall into old ruts—at least it’s familiar. But as we awaken through our practice, we gently nudge ourselves out of the ruts because even though it is familiar, we want more out of life. Our natural state is to expand, to explore, to open up to the new.

With a distracted mind, we miss much of what is right in front of us, and can stay stuck in a suffering pattern. With a mind in the present, we finally find our true power—that of our awareness. We learn contentment with the present—called in yoga *santosa*. In this space of mindfulness, something magical happens: The ordinary comes alive for us. Our senses are reawakened and life becomes richer—right now—and we lessen

BENEFITS OF MINDFULNESS

- Reduced rumination
- Stress reduction
- Boosts to working memory
- Focus
- Less emotional reactivity
- More cognitive flexibility
- Relationship satisfaction
- Increased immune function
- Reduced psychological distress
- Increased information processing speed
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Counseling skills
- Decreased stress and anxiety
- Better quality of life

our desire to grasp at life.

There may be days when we don’t want to “focus” on mindfulness. We’re too busy. There’s way too much to do. But the good news is that the more one practices simple acts of mindfulness, the more embedded it gets into one’s psyche. It may help to think of it as putting pennies into a spiritual bank account.

Then, as life heats up and we get busy, we still contain the elements of mindfulness in our flurry of activities. We have fundamentally shifted, even if we can’t see it. A sailing vessel that has changed its course by one degree will surely reach a different port. Likewise, when we shift our awareness, however subtly, just as surely we will attain a different outcome for our lives.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, the pioneer of mindfulness training, introduced a wonderful practice as part of a healing regime. He has students (people suffering from severe stress, cancer, and the like) eat one raisin very slowly, very mindfully. Well, if you don’t happen to have a raisin with you right now, then I have the perfect way to start your mindfulness personal program.

Curious about turning the ordinary into the extraordinary? Try this mindfulness

focus-builder for the next 30 seconds—assuming you are in some space where you can be relatively undisturbed (though even a coffee house or office can be great for this exercise!).

Plant your feet on the ground, and feel the earth. Sit up straight, hands on your lap. Close your eyes. Begin to inhale and exhale, slowly and deeply, through the nostrils. Pay attention to the feeling this makes at the area around your nostrils and the top of your upper lip. Also notice how it feels at your belly. With each consecutive exhale, soften your muscles, and allow yourself to go deeper and deeper within. (*Cliff notes: Breathe. Relax. Pay attention.*)

Take at least 5 steady breaths (if you are in a distracting environment) or practice this for 5 minutes as a mindfulness meditation at home. Voilà! You have started a mindfulness personal program!

May we all learn to not require more than we have to achieve contentment. The renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has said, “When our mindfulness embraces those we love, they bloom like flowers.”

May you become mindful of your own current reality, and may you watch your life bloom like a flower. **S&H**



GIFT OF THE PRESENT:

HOW MINDFULNESS STRENGTHENS RELATIONSHIPS

BY EVE HOGAN

This morning, I made a decision to eat mindfully. Later, halfway through my lunch, I suddenly realized that my conscious mind missed the first half of my sandwich. I was typing, unmindful that I was eating. So with the next bite, I ate more mindfully, paying attention to the different tastes as they passed over my tongue.

Then, since I was simultaneously typing this article (multitasking is surely against the mindfulness “rules”), I decided to type with mindfulness. Normally when I type, my fingers fly across the keyboard and I pay no attention to them whatsoever. In fact, that is one of the things I like about typing—it’s as if my hands know a foreign language, and they’re so fluent that I don’t have to even think about what they are trying to say. I just allow them to say it. But today, I decided to put my awareness in my fingertips, mindfully. I felt the smoothness of my keyboard;

it was almost soft, because it was so smooth. I noticed each movement of my hand.

With all my attention in my fingers, I started thinking about where the letters were and suddenly I made typo after typo, as if it was *unconsciousness* that allows my fingers to type, not consciousness. I took another bite and realized how hard it is to be truly mindful of two things at once. I wondered if my extremely multitasking life could really handle mindful living on an ongoing basis. How would I drive, talk on my cell phone, navigate, drink water, plan the next day, and make my “to-do” list if I paid true and mindful attention to everything I did? And then the thought crossed my mind: How do I truly live, if I do *not*? Just like the first half of the sandwich that my mind fully missed while I thought about other things, how much of our lives are we missing while we unmindfully do so much? I realized it isn’t the mindfulness I should sacrifice for the multitasking; it is the other way around.

I can't help but wonder how a multitasking lifestyle affects relationships. What if we were really present with each and every person we spoke to? I have few regrets in life, but the thing I will always regret is not being more mindful when my mom called to talk. I remember that I was always happy to hear from her, but I also remember doing a lot of other things while I talked with her, not giving her my full attention *nor giving myself hers*. That is the one thing I am not sure I will ever forgive myself for, now that I can no longer have phone conversations with my mom. But I am still guilty of doing the same thing with other people whom I love! I have been known to be talking to my husband while simultaneously opening email, instant messaging with at least two other people, and watching TV at the same time.

Do we "multitask" because we have so much to do, or because we are consciously or unconsciously avoiding being truly present and mindful with someone else?

Love Tip: Give the present moment, whatever it holds, your full attention for even just a few minutes each day. There you will discover peace, joy, love, and connection.

Do we "multitask" because we have so much to do, or because we are consciously or unconsciously avoiding being truly present and mindful with someone else? What is so important that we don't have the time to be truly present to love and fully communicate?

While I may be mindful in one area of my life, simultaneously there are many areas where I am not; the same is likely true for you. My mindfulness seems to work more like a roving spotlight, shining on one thing then the next, seldom illuminating the whole of me and my life at once. For some, that spotlight hasn't even been turned on; no self-observation has ever taken place. The beauty, power, and peacefulness of the present moment has never been experienced at all.

While it may not be possible to be mindful all day long, the power of a mindful moment each day shared with someone you love can make a relationship strong and loving. A mindful moment with *yourself* can keep you peaceful and capable of being both strong and loving. **S&H**



STRUGGLING WITH FOOD CRAVINGS?

MINDFULNESS CAN HELP

BY TRACI PEDERSEN

Do you struggle with intense food cravings? If so, you understand that powerless feeling—when the craving takes control and you begin to feel like a passenger in Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride. But take heart, many people are finding new hope through the practice of mindfulness.

New research published in the journal *Appetite* shows that mindfulness can drastically lower a person’s cravings for sweets. For the study, participants with a sweet tooth were trained in mindfulness techniques—to observe their thoughts and cravings from a distance and to not pass any judgment on those desires.

The results were significant. Participants who were able to view the craving-related thoughts as separate from themselves

experienced a far weaker desire for sweets and a much stronger willpower to say no. In other words, the cravings eventually lost their power.

The current findings build on previous research on mindfulness and cravings. For the new study, however, researchers (from McGill University in Quebec) wanted to know which specific mindfulness techniques were most effective for cravings, and why.

To begin, they recruited 196 participants with a self-reported sweet tooth. The participants were divided into five groups—four groups were taught various mindfulness techniques, and the rest were placed in a control group (the controls were asked to “distract” themselves from their cravings).

Participants in the four mindfulness groups were taught one or a combination of the following three techniques:

Awareness: Observing and being aware of one’s thoughts

Acceptance: Not passing judgment on their thoughts and feelings

Disidentification: Viewing the craving-related thoughts as separate from themselves

Two weeks later, participants were given a piece of chocolate to unwrap and hold for one minute. When the chocolate was taken away, they were asked to rate the intensity of their cravings. Participants who had become skillful at disidentification—viewing the cravings as separate from themselves—reported craving the chocolate far less than participants who had not mastered this skill.

When a person truly believes that “we are not our thoughts,” there is a strong, positive impact on how he or she is able to deal with unwanted thoughts, feelings, and desires. Mindfulness techniques are now being used successfully by psychotherapists in a variety of cases: substance abuse, depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and eating disorders, among others.

When it comes to overcoming food addictions and cravings, if we learn to observe and view our craving-related thoughts and feelings as something separate from ourselves, they lose their power over us. And we can begin to take back our rightful place in the driver’s seat. **S&H**





MINDFULNESS FOR THE

WALLFLOWER

Meditation is at the core of a new generation of treatments for social anxiety.

BY JASON DRWAL PHD

Kevin Schjerning, a 48-year-old film and video editor, doesn't simply dislike social gatherings; he finds them overwhelming. "I basically feel claustrophobic," he says. "I have to get out of there."

An estimated 22 million people in the U.S. have social anxiety disorder, an intense and disabling fear of being judged or humiliated in social situations. Living with this disorder can make day-to-day social interactions a painful challenge. Even the prospect of meeting a friend for lunch might be daunting.

The most common treatment for this problem has been cognitive-behavioral therapy, which teaches the socially anxious to challenge and question their own negative thinking. But a new generation of researchers is finding that mindfulness training can also help people like Kevin overcome this debilitating condition.

"Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose, without trying to get to some goal or escape anything," explains Steve Flowers, the author of *The Mindful Path through Shyness*.

Growing in popularity and use, mindfulness is often learned through meditation practice, in which one observes an experience—starting with something simple, like breathing—without trying to change, control, or judge it. That mindful attitude, once mastered, can then be brought to any activity, whether making small talk at the post office or giving a major presentation at work.

But for those with social anxiety disorder, everyday life is anything but mindful. Daniel Giavedoni, 26, says his fears about how people might perceive him would cause him to delay replying to important emails for weeks at a time—and of course, the longer he waited, the more self-conscious and anxious he became.

"I'm worried what people are wondering," he says. "It snowballs."

Learning to work through fears, rather than avoid them, is one of the core skills of a group therapy program developed by Jan Fleming and Nancy Kocovski, the authors of *The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Social Anxiety*

and Shyness. For example, says Kocovski, instead of ending a conversation as soon as they feel themselves breaking into a nervous sweat, group members learn to “notice the sweating, be more accepting of it, and finish the conversation.” A 2009 study conducted by the authors found the treatment reduced both social anxiety and depression. Other studies have found that mindfulness training activates areas of the brain that help to manage emotions.

The power of a mindfulness practice, however, may come in the realization that one can live a meaningful life even with social anxiety. Schjerning, who participated in Fleming and Kocovski’s group, says that he still feels nervous in social situations but now feels compassion—not judgment—for himself, and sees that “I can be more the person I want to be.” **S&H**

“Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose, without trying to get to some goal or escape anything.”
—STEVE FLOWERS



MANAGE SHYNESS MINDFULLY

Try these five tips for coping with social anxiety:

- Accept your shyness instead of fighting it. You may get nervous in social situations, but that’s OK. Learn to appreciate this as a part of yourself.
- Focus on your whole experience. Instead of just scrutinizing your own behavior, pay attention to your surroundings, the conversation at hand, or whatever you’re doing.
- Recognize that you are not alone: Over 22 million people in the U.S. live with this challenge.
- Cultivate self-compassion: Experiencing social anxiety doesn’t lessen your worth or value as a person.
- Remember that this moment is just one moment: Anxieties and fears, especially in social situations, will come and go. They won’t last forever.





HOW MINDFULNESS HELPS CAREGIVERS

MORE THAN POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

When success is “The first time I have not cried all the way to the mailbox...”

BY JASON DRWAL PHD

“**W**hen you have a child with a disability the worry is twofold: managing the issues in the moment—and what the future will bring,” explains Karen Pilkerton, who knows these worries personally. Her oldest daughter, Ali, has Down syndrome. Caring for a developmentally disabled child, like any parenting experience, is filled with joyful moments and unexpected challenges. But parents of the developmentally disabled, unlike other parents, never stop being caretakers, even when their children are grown. For Karen, mindfulness was the perspective-changing experience that allowed her to renegotiate her role.

The benefits of mindfulness for physical and mental health have been well documented, but much less is known about whether it is helpful to caretakers, especially parents of

developmentally disabled children (e.g., children with autism or Down syndrome). Professor Elisabeth Dykens, director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center at Vanderbilt University, and colleagues attempted to study this overlooked population. Dr. Dykens says that there are many techniques she could have chosen to help parents but she chose mindfulness because it is “more accessible, quite frankly, doesn’t cost that much—and one can learn mindfulness practice in all kinds of ways.” Another way she tried to make these techniques more accessible was to have parents like Karen lead support groups. Peers may even have an advantage over professionals, explains Dr. Dykens, because “parents often feel when they discover that you’re a parent, you know what it’s like. You’ve walked in my shoes.”

In this study, published in *Pediatrics*, peers led one of two kinds of support groups: a mindfulness group or a positive adult development group. In the mindfulness intervention, parents learned about self-observation without self-evaluation, Qigong (a gentle movement technique), and

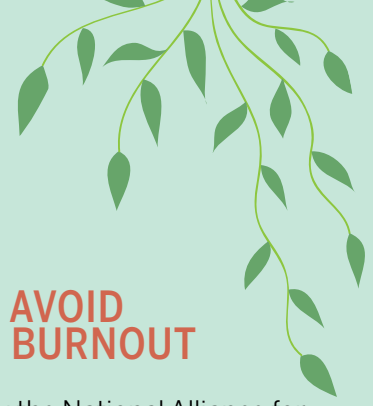
several meditations. In the positive adult development group, participants learned techniques based on positive psychology, including ways to soften negative emotions by recognizing personal strengths and practicing gratitude, forgiveness, and other positive attitudes. Members of both groups discussed how to apply their respective techniques to coping with the day-to-day challenges of being a caregiver.

Six months after the study, participants in both groups said they felt less worried, had more positive moods, and slept better, but the improvements occurred faster for participants in the mindfulness intervention compared to those in the positive adult development group.

“We had one mother who had lots of sadness and anger,” Karen confides. “By the end of the six weeks, she said it was the first time she had not cried on the way to the mailbox. The class had given her a way to process a lot of her sadness, to be with it in a skillful way that she could metabolize it.”

“When you raise a child with a developmental disability,” says Dr. Dykens, “it is a lifelong process—it happens from day one or early childhood.” Group members learned to practice a brief mindfulness-grounding technique several times a day, the goal being to live in the present moment rather than just get through the day. In a more mindful state, parents are less reactive to everyday stresses, more patient, and better able to think and respond effectively to various challenges.

As Dr. Dykens explains, mindfulness isn’t just a technique to cope with the stress; it’s a way to fully embrace one’s role as a caretaker, living in the present moment with joy and appreciation, no matter what that moment may bring. **S&H**



5 STEPS TO AVOID CAREGIVER BURNOUT

A recent survey by the National Alliance for Caregiving found that one-third of caregivers don’t have any additional support, often perform tasks once carried out by medical professionals, and often work outside the home, so it’s no wonder that so many caregivers experience burnout. Here are tested ways to help.

1. Develop a mindfulness practice, whether it’s yoga, meditation, or Qigong.
2. Incorporate mini-mindfulness moments. Set aside some minutes several times a day to ground yourself and to be in the present moment.
3. Learn to accept your emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant, rather than wishing them away.
4. Recognize the need for self-care in caregiving. Taking time for yourself may be an old piece of advice but it’s essential.
5. Find a support network that can help you build a mindfulness practice, whether it is your friend, the YMCA, or a meditation group.





USING MINDFULNESS TO **TACKLE CLUTTER**

Just as mindfulness helps us clear our minds, it can also help us clear a path through the house.

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

When my house gets really out of control—as it often does, because I have two small children—my husband will say, “We have a bad case of The Heaps.” It’s a dreaded disease, The Heaps, involving mountains of clean laundry, piles of toys, and hills of papers. The rolling home landscape starts to feel insurmountable, and I find myself becoming cranky and sluggish.

According to mindfulness experts, that makes sense. “When we operate on autopilot in our lives, we cease to be aware of what is happening right now,” writes Erin Dolan, on the blog *Unclutterer*. “A significant amount of clutter in our homes could be eliminated simply by being more mindful in the present.” Mindfulness can help us have awareness of our issues, our emotional “stuff,” but it can also help us become aware of our literal stuff and our surroundings.

So start with the big picture. “Where are you going? Why are you on this planet? Why do you live and breathe? . . . Create your space to support that,” advised professional organizer Star Hansen, during an appearance on OWN TV. “What do you want to fill your life with? The other stuff falls away.”

When you touch an object, ask, “Does it lift me up, or bring me down?” It’s a lot like the company we keep: You want to surround yourself with people who make you feel good, rather than people who complain or enable bad habits, so surround yourself with belongings that you need and love. Here’s a room-by-room guide for using mindfulness to streamline your home.

KITCHEN

Practice honesty. Holidays only come once a year, so move anything seasonal (turkey baster, Fourth of July cake mold) out of the kitchen into deeper storage. Those items can be brought out when the time is right, rather than lurking around all year. Next, let go of any objects that relate to fantasies you may

be harboring. “I should use this waffle maker/try the kimchi starter set/make jelly.” If you don’t make your own preserves, that is fine. Relish—pardon the pun—the self you are now, not whom you may or may not become.

Practice compassion. Pare down your drawers and crock jar, saving only the kitchen tools that you really use. Take the rest to a woman’s shelter. People who are starting their whole lives over need basic supplies, so donate the kitchenware to them, and thereby send tidings of safety and nourishment.

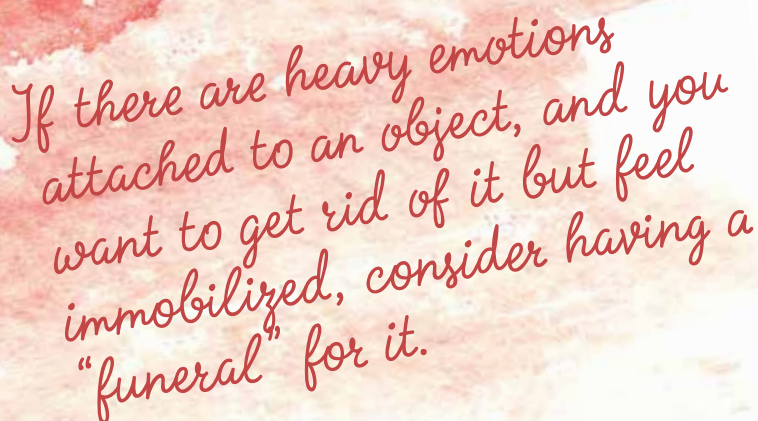
LIVING ROOM

Practice releasing emotion. Living rooms tend to accumulate sentimental clutter—Grandma’s teacup, a vase from Mom. Ask yourself if you really, truly love an object, or the person. Perhaps you can take a photo or write a story about the object, then release it. Maybe there’s another family member who would enjoy it and who has more space. You can also sell an item and donate the funds to Grandma’s favorite charity.

If there are heavy emotions attached to an object—let’s say it was a wedding gift for a marriage that has since soured—and you want to get rid of it but feel immobilized, consider having a “funeral” for it. Gather a few friends, say a poem, and let them take it from your home for you.

BEDROOM

Practice daily. Bedrooms are notorious for two types of clutter: papers and clothing. For clothing, spend a few minutes at the end of the day to put away your outfit. Think about how much more relaxed you’ll be in a bedroom humming with subtle energy, rather than “stuck” with clots of jeans and socks.



If there are heavy emotions attached to an object, and you want to get rid of it but feel immobilized, consider having a “funeral” for it.

Professional organizers note that one reason clothing piles up is that our drawers and closets are too full to put clean laundry in. We need to either get rid of some clothes or invest in more storage, such as another dresser.

For paper, create a system of paper management that suits your lifestyle. Perhaps you have a lot of receipts for work, so get a scanner. Kids’ artwork? A bin, labeled with each child’s name, that can now live in their closet, not on your desk. Bills and financial papers will be happy in a filing cabinet or even inside a vintage trunk.

Bedrooms can easily get overwhelming, because we tend to clean “public” areas of the home, like the kitchen, more often and shove everything we don’t want to deal with into our bedrooms. If you’re feeling completely paralyzed by a room, try this: Every time you enter the room, stop, take a deep breath, put one object away, then get on with whatever it was you were doing.

CLOSETS

Practice discipline. Use the mantra, “One In, Two Out.” Anything that comes into your home needs to be balanced by two objects leaving. Does this mean you have to throw things out? Of course not. Recycle whatever you can. Earth 911 has a handy guide to recycling just about everything, even the tricky stuff, like paint, medications, and CFL light bulbs.

BATHROOM

Practice acceptance. Take everything out of the cramped, stuffed cabinets; wipe the shelves clean; and then as you place each object back, examine it and think about whether you really need it in your life. Expired sunscreen? Lipstick that is slightly the wrong shade? Bath salts from 2003? Let them go, and save room for what is either a necessity or a thing of true beauty.

THE PRESENT MOMENT

Decluttering takes a little energy to get started, but once you begin flowing, you’ll find it’s a form of moving meditation. Mindfulness teaches us to be in the present moment—not the past and not the future—so as you clean, move steadily from one small area to another, giving each your complete attention. You might even choose a mantra, like, “As I declutter, I free myself up to live in the present.”

Heap free. **S&H**



MINDFULNESS IN MESSAGING

BY EVE HOGAN

In the span of my lifetime (and possibly yours) communication in relationships has moved from long, handwritten letters, telephone calls, and answering machines, to email, video and audio messaging, FaceTime, Skype, and texting. Public displays of affection have gone from fondling in public to announcing in social media that you are “in a relationship.” The world of communication has changed dramatically, and unless we apply our mindfulness practice to the device or method we choose, our relationships may become as defunct as eight-track tapes.

While I would love to tell you “all communication is good communication,” it simply isn’t true. And, what works well for communicating with one person just doesn’t with another.

Consequently, the more conscious, mindful awareness we bring to whether our methods are working or not, the better. How do we know? Watch for the results. Relationships leave signs of disease.

Years ago when I worked as a counselor in the school system, I found certain teachers were horrible communicators with the rest of the staff. The band teacher in particular could never quite manage to let us know about performances and practices that affected the students’ schedules or that called for our support. When the day came that an email system was installed school-wide, I watched in awe at how that changed. All of a sudden, emails were being sent from that same teacher letting us all know what was going on, and when and where the students needed to be. Clearly, the message medium made all the difference.

This reinforced my awareness that different people gravitate to different communication styles and, when known, this can add a new dimension to your relationships. If you or your partner doesn’t talk, try texting. If text doesn’t work, try emailing, or voice messaging, or Post-it notes or video. You may find non-verbal people are happy to spell it out in writing or vice versa.

I met my husband on vacation and then we were apart for several months during which we had long phone conversations. I fell in love with his ability to communicate about deep,

meaningful subjects. But when I moved in with him, I found our hours-long conversations quickly diminished to mundane minutes of daily details when face-to-face and often considered finding a phone booth to call him as I yearned for that deeper/longer level of connection again. (Yes, there were phone booths back then and no, there were not cell phones!)

Now, years later, I'm an avid "texter." I find texting to be a blessing in its ability to send a quick message, send a heart-shaped emoticon to someone I'm thinking about when I don't have time for a full conversation, send pictures for sharing a moment or for handling the small stuff. Texting has allowed me to run my businesses from destinations far and wide, and for that I am so grateful. But texting can equally destroy relationships both by disrespecting the person actually in front of you and by misinterpretation and expectation on both sides of the messaging.

In person, there was understanding, explanation, compassion, and kindness. I found myself loving them.

Texting definitely has a time and place, but this week I was reminded repeatedly about how quickly a misread (or mis-sent) text can damage a relationship. In two different business relationships I realized that my feelings for the person I was working with were completely different in person vs. through a device. When they texted me, and I them, there was confusion, frustration, defensiveness, blame, and misunderstanding. I found myself not liking them. In person, there was understanding, explanation, compassion, and kindness. I found myself loving them. In both cases, we had to agree that texting was doing the relationship in and that what we thought was time saving was actually destructive.

Often when someone chooses to text there is an implied urgency to the message. Email says, "Get back to me when you can." Texting says, "Get back to me NOW." This isn't always safe, reasonable, possible, or desirable, but even the time span between communication can be relationship-devastating due to made-up stories about what is causing the delay.

Of course, there are some things that simply out of respect are best communicated face-to-face or, at minimum, voice-to-voice—telling someone something serious, that someone is sick or has died, that there has been infidelity or dishonesty, proposing or breaking up, to name a few. It helps to remember that rather than a cold, hard device, you are really holding someone's heart in your hands. Choose your method wisely; your relationships depend on it. **S&H**



10 AFFIRMATIONS FOR MINDFUL PARENTING

BY KATHRYN DRURY WAGNER

“Egg whites only!” demanded my daughter. “On a fresh plate! This one had oranges on it and the juice will make it taste yucky.” So I lovingly scrambled those egg whites, only to have her reject them immediately because she was “full”—which translates to “I want to go play handball now.”

Parenting is filled with these moments. You offer up the best you can give, sometimes begrudgingly, usually in a half stupor, turning yourself inside out with effort and overwhelming love. As the mindfulness teacher and social worker Lisa Kring so eloquently wrote in “The 5 Main Tenets of Mindful Parenting” for her blog on *HuffPost*, “Nothing is more humbling, more challenging and more heartbreaking than parenting. There is no quitting and no hiding and no ‘finish line.’”

Due to this stress, and that of our daily lives, we are often with our children, without really being *with* our children. We are in the same room, the same car, but our minds are racing ahead to the office, or distracted by what’s on the TV, or wishing we were on some tropical island sipping a daiquiri. Yet when we fully connect with our children, it’s far easier to find joy and peace. Things become a little less harried, a little less about the darn egg whites that she didn’t eat. **S&H**

Here are 10 affirmations to help us be in the present moment when we are parenting.

The gift I’m giving them is my full attention.

My children are not me; they are their own separate and beautiful beings.

I am here in the present moment, with kindness and curiosity.

Rather than simply reacting, I will choose my next behavior.

This moment will not last forever.

As everything swirls by me, I tune in and listen to my breath.

My child is the perfect teacher for me, and I’m learning so much.

My children are strong, safe, and supported.

I let my children learn and grow in their own way.

I am tranquil; nothing can disturb my peace of mind.



MINDING YOUR MOODS

BY JULIE PETERS

Sometimes, in the yoga community, it seems that what we are always trying to do is feel good and happy and positive. Smile at all costs!

Of course we all want to feel good, but if we gloss over the moments when we have “negative” emotions, we can miss out on a lot of learning. Loneliness can move us, anger can light a fire toward action, and sadness has its own unique richness. These uncomfortable emotions are an important part of our internal compass, and can teach us a lot about our choices. The most rewarding things in life—building a career, raising kids, having a long-term partnership—must involve some moments of emotional difficulty. If they were easy and sweet all the time, they wouldn’t be nearly as valuable to us. Plus, they’d be a bit boring.

Mindfulness practice doesn’t give you the superpower of instantly turning your dial from stressed out to elated. Rather, yoga and mindfulness can teach you to step back and notice the emotions you are experiencing. When I’m in a bad mood, for example, I don’t scramble in my yoga toolbox for some quick way to make it stop. I pause to ask myself what’s going on. Am I hungry? (It’s usually that I’m hungry.) Am I upset about a certain interaction with a friend? Perhaps I need to acknowledge a mistake that I’ve made and apologize. Am I grieving something? Let me grieve. The bad mood teaches me to ask myself what I need, what I have control over, and what I need to let go.

In French, if you are in a certain kind of bad mood, you say, “*J’ai faim*,” which translates as “I have hunger.” In English, we say “I AM hungry.” The French way describes the state as something that is happening in passing. In English, we talk about it as if we are completely embodying that state of mind. This also happens

with other mind states: When we say, “I am angry,” we are telling ourselves that we are completely inside of that state, and nothing else exists for us. A simple syntax switch—“I am having some feelings of anger”—implies that anger is one of the many aspects of our complex experience, and that it will eventually pass. Our brains do respond to the stories we tell ourselves about our experience, and it’s amazing what a difference changing our language can make, even if we don’t say anything out loud.

I’ve been practicing this syntax switch, and it not only makes uncomfortable emotions feel more manageable, it also creates enough distance between the emotion and me. I can look at what I’m feeling and ask it questions. It’s much harder to slip into completely embodying the emotion Incredible-Hulk style. This allows me to see myself more clearly and create a path toward appropriate action rather than mindless reaction.

The whole purpose of yoga is not to try to escape the ups and downs of life and maintain a calm sense of equanimity about everything. Rather, the purpose of it and other practices is to learn tools to have a complete and full experience of our lives—good, bad, and ugly. When we learn to apply this work to our everyday lives, we can learn to delight in our ugly moments, and make the complex experience of our lives richer and much more interesting. **S&H**



10 AFFIRMATIONS FOR STAYING CENTERED

BY BESS O'CONNOR

Staying centered is key in life. When you're centered, you can avoid getting easily led astray, becoming out of balance, and being swept up in the whirlwind that is life.

When we are not centered, it causes distress and unnecessary chaos in our life. Being centered is not always as easy as it sounds. It takes a heightened awareness of one's self. Even asking ourselves open-ended questions, like the below examples, can be a powerful way to consciously affect change. **S&H**

Am I breathing fully?

How am I feeling right now, and why?

Where's my center?

Am I centered right now?

Am I making the best choice for me right now?

When you're done asking yourself these questions, try these affirmations to harness the power of awareness and stay centered:

I am never moved or shaken by the outside environment.

I stay centered, no matter the circumstance.

I am calm in the eye of the storm.

No one can "make" me act out of my character.

I breathe in stillness and breathe out peace.

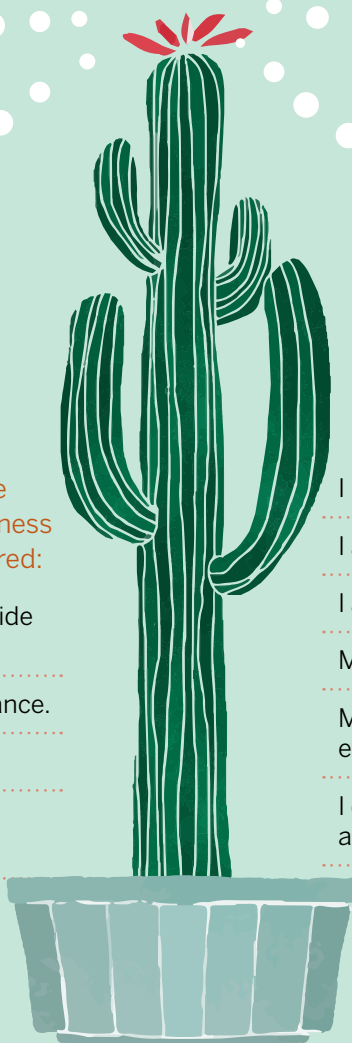
I am non-reactive.

I am rooted, grounded, and stable.

My chakras are aligned.

My centeredness creates harmony with everyone around me.

I check in with my body to remain centered and balanced.





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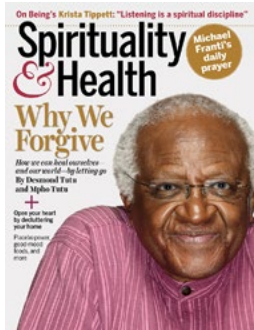
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A close-up photograph of several white, bell-shaped flowers, possibly snowdrops, covered in numerous clear water droplets. The flowers are set against a soft, out-of-focus green background. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the petals and the glistening water droplets.

*"The most precious gift
we can offer others
is our presence. When
mindfulness embraces
those we love, they will
bloom like flowers."*

—THICH NHAT HANH

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