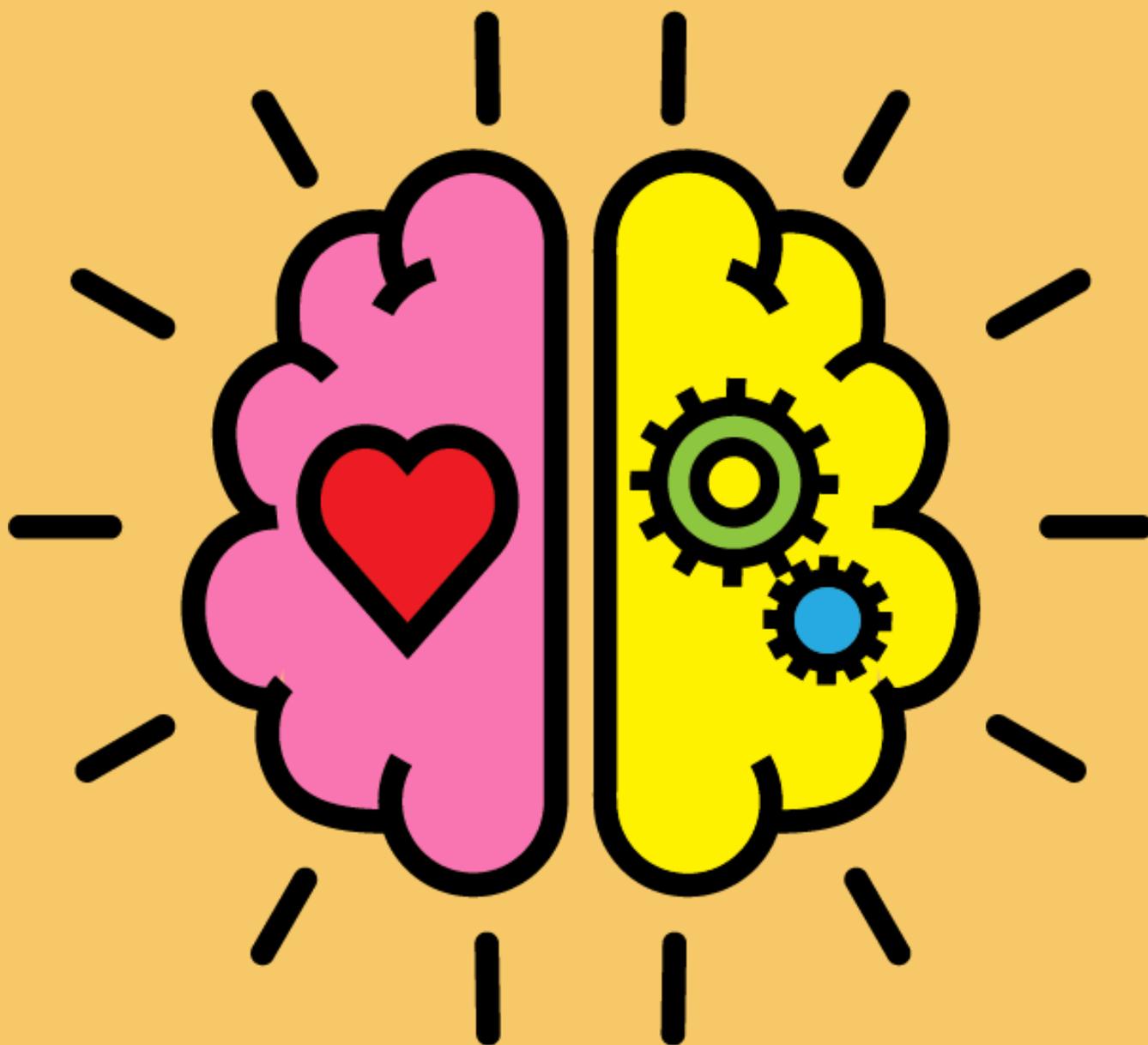


TOOLS FOR *Resiliency*



CONTENTS

What is Mindful Awareness?	2
Three Deep Breaths	3
Chair Yoga (Stretching)	5
Reflective Writing	11
Three Good Things.....	12
References	14

What is Mindful Awareness?

Mindful awareness, or mindfulness, is the practice of paying attention to the present moment on purpose with an attitude of kindness and non-judgment. It involves intentionally attending to the present experience with inquisitiveness. As we pay attention in this way, we increase our ability to notice all that is happening within and around us. The very practice of noticing gives us the opportunity to cultivate acceptance, and the ability to pause between action and reaction in order to choose our response.

Mindfulness practices are an invitation to:

- Become familiar with our own mind and mental state as it changes throughout the day
- Recognize thoughts for what they are, just thoughts, which we can choose to follow or not
- Become more aware of the connections between our mind and body
- Practice engaging in our experience without having to change or influence it in a specific direction
- Learn to experience and to manage stress effectively with the ability to escalate or de-escalate our experience

The practice of mindfulness has beneficial effects on physical and mental health.¹⁻⁵ Mindfulness has been shown to reduce symptoms of stress and to increase emotional well-being,¹⁻⁴ with research showing regular practice to be associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, anger, and chronic pain.⁵ There is also suggestive evidence that mindfulness can be therapeutic for medical conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, low back pain, sleep disturbance, hypertension, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).¹ Mindfulness has been associated with more positive health behavior choices (e.g. eating,⁶⁻¹⁰ exercise,¹¹ sleep¹² and substance use¹³), as well as supporting our adaptive responses to difficult emotions and stressful life situations, or resiliency.^{1,5}

When it comes to youth, more specifically, research suggests that mindfulness leads to cognitive benefits for attention and focus¹⁴⁻¹⁷ and grades.¹⁸ With respect to social-emotional skills, mindfulness is has been associated with emotional regulation,^{18,19} behavior in school,^{16,18,20} empathy and perspective-taking,¹⁸ and social-skills.^{15,18} Lastly, mindfulness has been associated with improved indicators of well-being, such as test anxiety,¹⁵ stress,^{18,20-24} posttraumatic symptoms,^{22,24} and depression.^{22,24,25}

There are formal and informal techniques for practicing mindfulness. Formal mindfulness practices involve setting aside time (from a few minutes to an hour or more) for daily practice. During this time, we should be free from other activities or distractions so we can devote our full attention to our practice. Informal practice is simply being aware during the tasks and experiences of daily life — paying attention on purpose. At any time during the day we can turn our full attention to what is present in a task or experience that may be considered mundane, such as washing the dishes, eating a meal, brushing our teeth, or walking the dog. In an informal practice, we may choose to bring our full attention to such a task or experience. As with learning any new skill, mindfulness takes patience and a commitment to consistent practice for the full benefits to be experienced.

Three Deep Breaths

DESCRIPTION

Breathing can be a powerful tool for influencing individual health and well-being. Our breath provides us with the ability to balance and calm ourselves in the moments of our everyday lives. Consciously slowing down and deepening our breath is one of the most effective ways to reverse the stress response.

Most of us routinely and unconsciously breathe quite shallowly, using only a small part of our full lung capacity. With only a few deep breaths, we can increase oxygen to the brain and body and stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, inducing the relaxation response. As a result, our heart rate lowers, our mind calms, and we create a pause of choice between a situation and our response to it.

IMPACT and SUPPORT

Our body's stress response (fight or flight) prepares us to confront or avoid danger. When appropriately invoked, the stress response prepares us to effectively meet and rise to challenges by increasing heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, muscle tension, cortisol and adrenaline. When evoked on a consistently chronic basis, however, the stress response can affect our health in negative ways – leading to a suppressed immune system, high blood pressure and increased risk for heart disease, anxiety and depression.²⁶ To counteract the toxic effects of chronic stress, we can utilize our breath to elicit a relaxation response.

Research has shown that breathing exercises can have immediate effects by lowering blood pressure and heart rate, which in turn results in less wear and tear on blood vessels. Deep breathing has been scientifically proven to benefit the heart, the brain, digestion and the immune system. Many studies document the beneficial effects of deep breathing in treating depression,²⁷ anxiety,²⁸ PTSD (posttraumatic stress disorder),²⁹ COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)^{30,31} and asthma.³²

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

Three deep breaths can be used any time, in any location, with your body still or moving, seated, standing or lying down. This is a skill you may want to practice throughout your day, at the start of a meeting, before making an important phone call, after working with a complex interpersonal dynamic, as you ready yourself for sleep, etc.

You can practice with your eyes closed or open. Closing your eyes can help to reduce distractions and make it easier to focus. If your eyes are kept open, your gaze should be soft and directed downward, without focusing on anything in particular.

Once a regular practice is established, you can add a phrase that you silently repeat with each exhale. The phrase can be something that brings you a feeling of support and relaxation. Some people have used phrases such as “I am safe and supported” or “I am resilient and capable.”

SCRIPT

When first practicing this exercise, you may begin by placing one hand on your chest and the other on your abdomen. You might choose to close your eyes or keep them open with a soft, unfocused gaze that is directed downward. After the practice is familiar to you, you may simply focus on the 3 breaths while keeping your hands in a comfortable position. (PAUSE)

Take a few moments to notice your breath without changing anything. (PAUSE)

As you become aware of your breath, it may begin to deepen naturally. As you consciously relax the muscles of the abdomen, allow it to rise with the in-breath and fall with the out-breath. Without forcing anything, allow your breath to slow down, lengthen and deepen. (PAUSE)

You may notice that as you complete your inhale, there is a pause before exhaling. Allow yourself to experience the changing sensations of your breath. (PAUSE)

Slowly take a deep in-breath through your nose, hold it for a pause, and then slowly exhale through your nose or mouth. On the exhale, you may gently contract your abdominal muscles to release the last bit of air from your lungs. (PAUSE)

Complete two more cycles of a deep in-breath, a pause and then a long, complete exhale. (PAUSE)

As you complete this practice, shift your focus back to your surroundings, opening your eyes if they were closed, and gently move the body. (PAUSE)

Chair Yoga (Stretching)

DESCRIPTION

There are many types of yoga practices. The most common yoga practices in this country involve a series of stretching and strengthening body movements, accompanied by relaxed breathing exercises. Yoga movements can be practiced for just a few minutes per day in the office, school, or at home, or for more extended 30-90 minute practices. Shorter practices (like the chair stretching described here) are an accessible way to infuse mental breaks and movement into your day.

IMPACT and SUPPORT

Studies have shown yoga to be effective in reducing stress, anxiety, heart disease, and back pain.^{33,34} Yoga has also been associated with improved blood sugar control in those with diabetes,³⁵ improved lung function in those with asthma,³⁶ and improved behavior function in children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).^{37,38} Though research is relatively limited thus far, a 2016 review of 47 studies suggests promise for school-based yoga interventions for improving physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health.³⁹

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

Yoga can be practiced in various settings – the home, office, school, fitness center, yoga studio, outdoors – with the only real need being an appropriately comfortable surface from which to hold poses. Typically, a yoga mat is used to provide a soft and non-slip surface on which to do the movements. For chair yoga, a stationary chair (no wheels or rockers) serves as the prop and surface from which the poses are performed.

Prior to beginning any yoga or stretching exercises it is important to remember that everyone has a unique range of motion and flexibility. You should pay close attention to your own body – moving and stretching only as far as you feel comfortable.

SCRIPT

See the “Chair Yoga (Stretching) Series” handout following below, which includes images and descriptions for each yoga pose/stretch.

CHAIR YOGA (STRETCHING) SERIES

Begin by performing this series of 12 poses 3-4 times during your day. If possible, gradually increase the frequency until you are incorporating some stretching every hour. Begin each pose by taking a deep breath in, moving into the stretch as you breathe out, and then holding the stretch at your comfort level for 10-60 seconds.



Pose #1: Neck

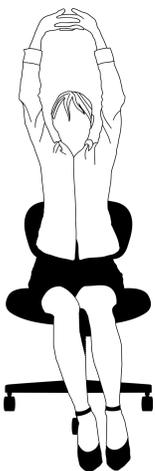
From a seated position, lengthen your spine by sitting tall and long. Gaze forward and then allow your left ear to drift toward your left shoulder. Pause where you feel a comfortable stretch. If you would prefer a bit more stretch, you can reach up and let your left hand gently rest, without pulling, on your head. *[Repeat on the opposite side]*



Pose #2: Shoulder Shrugs

From a seated position, lengthen your spine by sitting tall. Place your arms either along your sides or with your hands in your lap. Gaze forward and then lift your shoulders upwards toward your ears. Pause where you feel a comfortable stretch, then release and let your shoulders drift down toward your hips.

[Repeat 2 to 4 times]



Pose #3: Overhead Side Bend

From a seated position, lengthen your spine by sitting tall. Next, inhale as you raise your arms overhead. You may opt to let your palms touch one another, or interlace your hands with your palms facing downward. Keeping your hips in your seat, exhale and slowly begin to lean toward your left, stopping where you feel a comfortable stretch. Inhale as you return to center and exhale as you lower your arms and hands back to your sides. *[Repeat on the right side]*

CHAIR YOGA (STRETCHING) SERIES



Pose #4: Shoulder Expansion

From a seated position, lengthen your spine by sitting tall. Bring your arms behind you and place your hands gently on the lower back at (or just below) the waistline. Next, inhale as you slowly begin to pull your shoulders back and open the chest. Pause where you feel a comfortable stretch. When ready, bring your arms and hands back to your sides.



Pose #5: Hamstrings

From a seated position, allow your feet to gently rest on the floor. Lengthen your spine by sitting tall. Tighten the muscles of your thighs to lift your feet off the floor. Pause where you feel a comfortable stretch. Then, gently flex your feet to pull your toes toward you. Pause again where you feel a comfortable stretch. When ready, relax your legs and let your feet return to the floor.



Pose #6: Spinal Twist

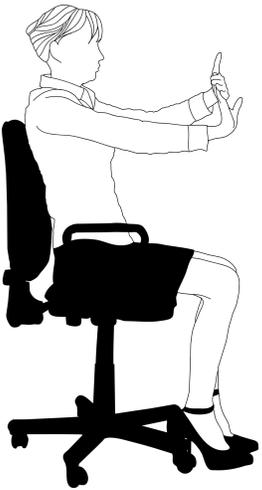
From a seated position, lengthen your spine by sitting tall. Cross your right leg over your left (Note: you do not have to cross your legs if it is uncomfortable). Pause here to again lengthen your spine. Begin to twist from your mid-line so that your head, shoulders, arms and hands twist toward your right. You may find it helpful to place your hands on the outside of your right thigh or on the right side of the chair. Twist only as far as you feel comfortable and then pause. When you are ready, let your spine return to center. *[Repeat on the left side]*

CHAIR YOGA (STRETCHING) SERIES



Pose #7: Chest

Begin by sitting slightly forward on your seat so that your hands have space to reach the chair back behind you. Bringing your arms behind you, lightly grasping the back of the chair from each side (Note: if this is too uncomfortable or not in your range of motion, you may grasp each side of the seat behind you). Next, lengthen your spine by sitting tall and pull your shoulders back as if holding a pencil between your shoulder blades. Slowly turn your gaze and chin upward, pausing where you feel a comfortable stretch. When you are ready, let your gaze and chin return forward. Relax the shoulders, letting them return to a neutral position.



Pose #8: Wrists

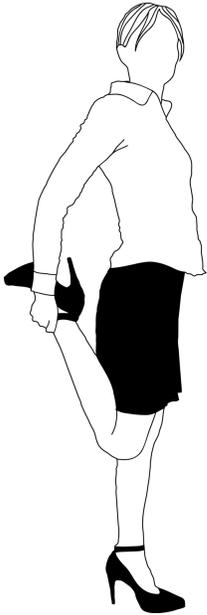
From a seated position, lengthen your spine by sitting tall. Bring your right arm upward to chest height, extended forward. With your left hand, gently pull your upward facing right hand back towards you, pausing where you feel a comfortable stretch. Next, flip your right hand downwards and again gently pull your hand towards you, pausing where you feel a comfortable stretch. When you are ready, lower your arms back to your sides. *[Repeat with the opposite hand]*



Pose #9: Inner Thighs

Begin by sitting toward the front edge of your chair. Let your feet rest on the floor, approximately the width of your hips. Exhale and lean forward from your hips, bringing your arms and hands toward the floor between your legs. If comfortable, you may continue until your hands rest on the floor. Pause when you reach a comfortable stretch. When you are ready, inhale and return to a seated position.

CHAIR YOGA (STRETCHING) SERIES



Pose #10: Front of the Thighs

Begin by standing next to a table edge or behind a chair (for safety, chairs with wheels should only be used if the wheels can be locked). Lengthen your spine by standing as tall as you can and let your hands rest on the table or chair back for support. Bend your right knee, raising your foot behind you. Reach back with your right hand and grasp the raised leg just above the ankle (Note: some may find it more comfortable to use the opposite hand to reach back - i.e. using the left hand to reach back for the right leg). You may pause here, if you like. Or, if you prefer a deeper stretch, you can use your hand to lift your foot further upward and then pause. When ready, release your leg and return to a standing position.

[Repeat with the opposite leg]

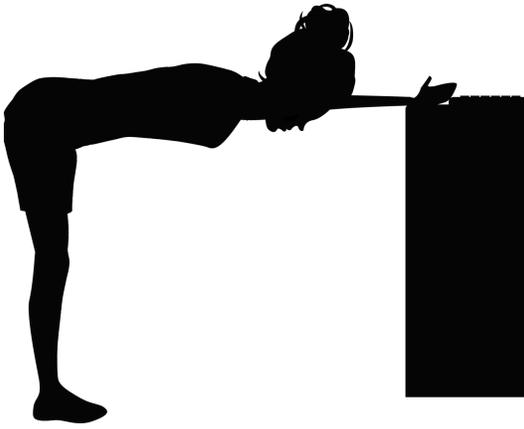


Pose #11: Standing Calf Stretch

Begin by standing 1-2 steps behind a table or chair (for safety, chairs with wheels should only be used if the wheels can be locked). Place your hands on the edge of the table or back of the chair for support. Slightly bend your left knee as you lift your right foot from the ground and step it behind you until your toes reach the ground. Pause for a moment to ensure your upper body/spine is upright, not leaning forward over your front knee. Next, focus on your right foot behind you and allow the heel to slowly begin pressing down toward the ground. Pause where you reach a comfortable stretch. When ready, slowly and carefully step forward with the right foot and return to a standing position.

[Repeat on the opposite side]

CHAIR YOGA (STRETCHING) SERIES



Pose #12: Standing Forward Bend

Begin by standing 3-4 steps behind a table or chair (for safety, chairs with wheels should only be used if the wheels can be locked). Lengthen your spine and bend your knees slightly. Then, exhale as you begin to bend forward from your hips. Depending on your flexibility and range of motion, you may support your bend by placing your hands on the table/back of the chair or on your thighs. Pause where you feel a comfortable stretch. When ready, inhale as you return to a standing position.

Reflective Writing

DESCRIPTION

Many people use reflective (or expressive) writing and journaling to allow their inner thoughts to be expressed. Often we are moving so quickly in our lives that we do not take the time to truly listen to ourselves. Instead, we revisit stressful circumstances over and over again without a deeper connection to our deepest thoughts and feelings. Setting aside a period of time each day to write or journal, without editing our thoughts and feelings in any way, can be a positive contribution in our health and resiliency.

IMPACT and SUPPORT

Expressive writing, developed in the 1980's by Dr. James Pennebaker, has been shown to help in coping and may also have a positive impact on stress and anxiety. Research has shown that reflective writing or journaling can actually reduce physical symptoms and, in some instances, reduce the need for medication.⁴⁰⁻⁴² Writing about painful situations can create an “off-loading” effect that boosts immune function, improves mood, and lowers stress.⁴³ Journaling for just 20 minutes daily can increase creative problem solving.

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

Be sure to have paper and something with which to write. You can use pens, pencils, markers, or crayons. Paper can be in single sheets, a notebook, or a journal. Some people may prefer to write or journal electronically.

There are no limits to the topic. You may find it useful to journal about stressful life and work events or what satisfies or fulfills you. It is not necessary to write in grammatically correct sentences. You can let go of sentence structure and spelling. It is often useful to write “stream of consciousness” or whatever comes into your mind rather than directing or editing it.

SCRIPT

Reflect and write on the following questions with respect to your personal resiliency:

1. What is happening when you are your most resilient self?
2. What circumstances and behaviors are either occurring or missing when you are your least resilient self?

Three Good Things

DESCRIPTION

As human beings, we are hardwired to remember negative experiences, thoughts, and feelings. In large part, this negativity bias is due to evolutionary reasons.⁴⁴ We have the greatest chance of survival if we can avoid those things that can harm us physically, mentally, or emotionally. Negativity bias then has its place in keeping us safe and alive, yet it can lead us to greater anxiety about the past or future. In other words, we tend to worry at the expense of the present moment.

One way to minimize this time spent in the past and the future is to retrain our brains to intentionally remember the positive things that happen in our lives and our roles in making them happen. Positive psychologist and researcher Martin Seligman has said that “people who believe they cause good things tend to like themselves better than people who believe good things come from other people or circumstances.” Therefore, it is not only holding on to the good things that happen to us that is important, but noticing and honoring our personal agency in bringing them to fruition.

IMPACT and SUPPORT

The “Three Good Things” exercise is a powerful positive psychology technique. Research has shown that practicing three good things at the end of the day, within 2 hours of going to sleep and ideally just before hitting the pillow, is associated with increased happiness, decreased depressive symptoms and improved sleep quality immediately afterward, as well as one week, one month, three months, and six months later.^{45,46} When performed every night for 2 weeks, the effects are not significantly different from Prozac. Clinical trials have also demonstrated lower burn out and depression, better work-life balance, and less conflict at work in medical residents and other health system staff with this practice.⁴⁷

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

Three Good Things should ideally be performed within 2 hours of bedtime, as it is during our sleep that memories are most effectively consolidated.⁴⁸ It can be led with instruction at any time, however, to guide participants their first time through the practice. Though no special equipment is required, writing down the responses each night for at least 2 weeks is ideal for best and lasting results.

SCRIPT

Each day, just before sleep, ask yourself: ‘What are three things that went well today and what was my role in making them happen?’

Write down your responses to these questions; it is not as effective to simply do this exercise in your head.

When you first begin this practice, you might find it challenging to come up with three good things from your day. Note that the items you choose can be relatively simple (e.g. I brought my co-worker a piece of chocolate or I

took a walk with a friend) or they might be more grand (e.g. my boss gave me a great review or I ran a marathon).

For each good thing you note, write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including who was involved and how this event made you feel. Explain what you think your role was in making each thing happen.

If you find yourself focusing on negative feelings, refocus your mind on the good event and the positive feelings that came with it; this can take effort but gets easier with practice and can make a real difference in how you feel.

As you do the practice more, you will likely find yourself noting good things that happen throughout your day that you want to remember to write down before bedtime.

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