Self-Care Sanctuary –Column 8 (April 2026)



Mindfulness – Being Peace

"*Life is both dreadful and wonderful. To practice meditation is to be in touch with both aspects.*" — **Thích Nhất Hạnh, Being Peace**

It is April! Spring has sprung forward and back and forward and back . . . The temps have been roller-coastering. On my walk this morning I saw stalwart crocuses reflected in puddles frozen at the end of driveways. I have been heartened by the clean canvas of my backyard. The overgrowth of last summer has been tamped down by the snow, weeds have not littered the landscape or the patio yet, hedges on my property's border are accessible to be freed from two-inch thick, furry, choking vines.

This month I have chosen to write about mindfulness. When I began practicing mindfulness in 2008, it wasn't the household word it is now. These days most people have at least heard of mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a mindfulness guru since his first book was published in 1990, defines mindfulness as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experiences moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, page 145). Mindfulness practice helps one to be with whatever is happening in the moment and stay at baseline. Staying at baseline is exactly where we want to be in a crisis so we can think calmly and clearly. The same is true when working in schools with youth and their families. The neuropsychological explanation for this phenomenon is that mindfulness has been found to increase cortical mass in the prefrontal cortex (PFC), which controls responsible decision-making and emotional regulation (among other things). In real time, a "stronger" PFC results in a 4-8 second window to pause and choose how to respond to a strong emotional trigger (i.e., crisis) vs. reacting with a fight-flight-freeze reflex.

Some of the other research benefits of practicing mindfulness include:

- Strengthened immune system
- Reduced stress
- Reduced depression
- Decreased effects of PTSD
- Increased compassion for self and others

• Greater resilience
• Improved parenting skills
• Enhanced relationships
• Better perspective-taking
https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/mindfulness/definition#why-practice-mindfulness

There are two types of mindfulness - formal and informal. Formal mindfulness occurs when time is set aside to meditate by focusing on the breath, body sensations, five senses, etc. My favorite way to practice formal mindfulness is through mindful movement with Yoga with Adriene on YouTube (www.yogawithadriene.com). On the other hand, informal mindfulness doesn't require any extra time. Informal mindfulness provides the benefits of mindfulness when focused attention is brought to any activity, including those things you have to do, like eating, showering, folding laundry, driving, brushing teeth, making the bed, gardening, walking the dog (my personal favorite), etc. One of the most encouraging findings in the empirical literature on mindfulness is that the benefits can be had by practicing informal mindfulness consistently for a 5-15 minutes multiple times a day. I make it a point to drive mindfully by bringing my full focused attention to the road without listening to the radio, podcasts, audio books, or talking on the phone. Twenty-five minutes to and from work is 50 minutes toward the rewards of mindfulness, doing something I have to do anyway.

When I initially started practicing mindfulness there weren't a lot of resources, but with the advent of research demonstrating its effectiveness, we now have an abundance of resources. All you have to do is Google "mindfulness practice" and YouTube videos, blogs, articles, books, apps, etc. pop up on the screen. I've listed some of my favorites below.

- **Science of the Greater Good** sponsors groundbreaking scientific discoveries—and turns them into stories, tips, and tools for a happier life and more compassionate society. Since 2001, the GGSC has been at the forefront of a new scientific movement to explore the roots of happy and compassionate individuals, strong social bonds, and altruistic behavior—the science of a meaningful life. It also offers free articles and a newsletter to spread information about emotional health and overall wellbeing. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/

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- **Smiling Mind:** Smiling Mind is considered one of the world's leaders in the free proactive mental health space and Australia's go-to expert for youth- and adult-based mindfulness programs. **https://www.smilingmind.com.au**

- **UCLA Health Website:** free guided meditations that offer mindfulness meditation to both English and Spanish speakers. Examples include loving kindness meditations, body scans, and Spanish meditations for eating with more mindfulness. **http://marc.ucla.edu/mindful-meditations**

- **Calm:** a mindfulness meditation company. Calm offers quiet music, relaxing sounds, and peaceful imagery to relax its users. Calm also has an app that can be downloaded on mobile devices. **https://www.calm.com/**
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- **Yoga with Adriene:** Adriene's mission is to reach as many people as possible with high-quality free yoga videos. She welcomes all levels, all bodies, all genders, all souls! Browse the library of free yoga videos to find a practice that suits your mood or start a journey toward healing. **https://www.youtube.com/user/yogawithadriene**

We are about to enter the season of RENEWAL. There is so much on which to anchor and focus your five senses in spring – smelling mulch and lilac; feeling dirt under your fingernails while potting plants in the warmth of the sun; hearing bird songs and mowers; seeing the supernatural blossoming of buds and leaves; tasting grilled burgers and chicken, watermelon, and home-grown tomato and basil salad. PAUSE and SAVOR and be grateful for all that mindfulness reveals.

If you're interested in learning more, here is a link to an under two-minute video that succinctly describes mindfulness and its benefits: **www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6T02g5hnT4**

William James, known as the father of American psychology, is quoted as saying, "*The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another*."

Mindfulness wires our brain for the freedom to choose. Give it a try!

BE well ~ paula