Creating Light in the “Dark Winter”

Mindfulness

The point is that we are surviving and some even have moments of thriving in this year of so much chaos. As you look back on the past nine months, ask yourself which served you more, worrying about what might happen or being mindfully present to the feelings, action, and potential of each moment. This is not to say that worry does not offer benefit. When we asked ourselves such questions as: What about my child’s development without access to school? What if my elderly parents become sick? How will I meet my work expectations while caring for a toddler? What if my depression overtakes me and I am not able to care for those who depend on me?—these questions helped us to prepare ourselves for various realities that we might need to face. If concern leads to healthy action the worry serves us. If concern persistently immobilizes us, it detracts from our wellbeing.

The practice of mindfulness brings us into the present with a clear mind to identify the priorities of each moment and the focus to apply ourselves to those. Mindful awareness helps us to see what we have to be grateful for and what we need to step away from to avoid any needless pull into stagnating negativity.

Take a moment right now to pause. What are you doing? Where are you? What can you hear? What do you feel? Get

Staying Present Amongst Uncertainty

At this stage of the pandemic and the other challenges of 2020, we have experienced some of the things we worried might happen and have escaped others. Individually we each have faced barriers to joy and satisfaction with wisdom and grace. And some days we were not the person we wanted to be and would like a chance to a redo. The past nine months are behind us now.

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in touch with the present moment and let yourself just pause. See how your body rises and falls as you breathe. Let yourself be present and mindful of yourself and your surroundings.

Being mindful allows us to focus on the here and now. We slow our bodies and minds down and get a break from thinking about the potential future impacts of the pandemic and other stressors. In this state we can find clarity for thoughts and action based in current reality.

These pause breaks are essential to surviving and thriving. Below are some simple practices from the Child Mind Institute that can help bring more mindfulness to your day. Practice them alone or with family members for just 3-5 minutes and gradually add to the time your mind can focus each day this winter.

- **Squeeze Muscles:** Start with one muscle in your body and squeeze it tight. Count to five and release. Notice how your body feels and the changes you experience. Try this on muscles throughout your body.

- **Belly Breathing:** Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly. Take a breath in (expand like a balloon) and slowly breathe out (release the air from the balloon).

- **Mindful Eating:** Focus on the food you are eating. What smells do you notice? What does it feel like in your mouth? What flavors can you detect?

- **Meditation:** Sit in a comfortable position and find one item to focus on—your breath, a candle, a rainbow of light on the wall. As your mind wanders, let the thoughts pass like clouds in the sky and bring your

- **Coloring:** Take time to draw something. Focus on the colors and shapes you are forming. How do the colors come together? What designs are you creating?

- **Listening to Music:** Give your full attention to the song, perhaps focusing just on one instrument or specific voice. See how these change over the course of the song.

Practicing mindfulness will help us learn how to tolerate the uncertainty of today’s world, free our mind to solve current challenges more creatively, and leave us feeling more physically and mentally well. Being as present and mindful as possible will help us navigate the winter months ahead.

Learn more ways to “Create Light in the Dark Winter” with our other new blogs: Boundaries; Compassionate Action Steps; Compassion Fatigue and Self-compassion; Expectations and Structure; and Stress Resilience.