



30

DAYS OF

letting go

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# 30 DAYS OF *letting go*

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## EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS TOOLBOX

### Practical tools to quickly recenter and increase happiness.

Join the online resource for practical tools to quickly recenter and increase happiness in your day-to-day life. With tips, tools, articles, videos, worksheets and more, you will find everything you need to incorporate your mindfulness into your busy lifestyle. The resources range from quick, two-minute to longer 30-minute practices that you can do at work, home or anywhere in between. You will have unlimited access to the complete toolbox of resources seven days per week, fifty-two weeks per year. We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness everyday.

DAY ONE

# Let go of perfection

The pursuit of perfection is insidious in our culture. I could write volumes on its negative effect on our lives. But in keeping with the spirit of the letting go project, I want to offer you a short meditation on letting go of perfection.

In my therapy practice, letting go presents itself in this way: “This paper won’t be done until I get an A.” “What’s the use of taking this dead-end job!” “This diet won’t give me the perfect body.” Do you see a theme here? The pursuit of perfection makes us freeze or run away, denying us and those in our world the experience of our best self – not our perfect self – our authentic self. And worst of all, the pursuit of perfection steals the joy from our accomplishments.

Here’s today’s practice – It’s based on the ancient Japanese philosophy of wabi sabi. Wabi sabi is hard to translate, but it is often described as ‘humble beauty’ or ‘imperfect beauty.’ Four main ideas of wabi sabi are:

1. Nothing lasts forever
2. Nothing is perfect
3. Nothing is finished
4. Everything is connected

As usual, take a few breaths before you contemplate the following questions. Make sure you download our free one-page, easy-to-tape-to-your-bathroom-mirror instructions on breathing for letting go.

How does the idea of nothing lasting forever make you feel? Allow it to help you appreciate what you have now in all its imperfection.

How does the idea of nothing being finished make you feel? Allow it to help you see yourself as a work-in-progress, moving toward your best self, not your perfect self.

Let your sense of connection to nature, including your imperfect fellow humans, help you feel a sense of belonging.

How do you let go of perfection and enjoy the present moment? Share your ideas with us at [mindfulhub.com](http://mindfulhub.com). Have an imperfect, unfinished day!

## MUST READ BOOKS

*Wabi Sabi: Timeless Wisdom for a Stress-Free Life* by Agneta Nyholm Winqvist

*The Wabi-Sabi House: The Japanese Art of Imperfect Beauty* by Robyn Griggs Lawrence

*Wabi Sabi: The Art of Everyday Life* by Diane Durston

*Living Wabi Sabi: The True Beauty of Your Life* by Taro Gold



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DAY TWO

# Want what you have

Want what you have?! What a thing to ask you to do at the start of the school year! How will you function without the latest iPhone, backpack, fall fashions, new car to cart the family around?

I once read a quote from the founder of a legendary department store that went something like this: “Our job is to make you want what you don’t have.”

It takes a lot of self-awareness to avoid internalizing the message of “I’m not okay unless I have... .. (fill in the blank).”

Studies have shown that it’s not so much having limited material possessions that makes us unhappy, but having limited material possessions in a culture that constantly screaming “you need more!”

This 30-day Letting go project is about increasing your sense of comfort, ease, and freedom, right here, right now, no gadgetry required.

## HOW DO WE GO ABOUT THE BUSINESS OF WANTING WHAT WE HAVE?

Take ten or twenty minutes over the next few days to try this mindfulness exercise.

Start by taking five deep breaths, making sure your exhale is slightly longer than your inhale. Join the Everyday Mindfulness Toolbox at [Mindfulhub.com](http://Mindfulhub.com) and download our free worksheet that includes a simple breathing exercise.

Clear your mind of thoughts of past or future. Turn your attention to the quality of light or color in the space you are currently inhabiting.

Stand up now, wherever you are – this might be your office, your small apartment, or your grand house. Slowly take a walk around your space, noticing right foot, then left foot hitting the floor. Use this attention to your steps to help you get grounded, noticing the things that please you: Perhaps a vase on a bookshelf that you have had for 20 years, a blanket on a bed, your cat – anything that makes you feel comforted, at peace, whole.

You can do this in a car or the subway, too, noticing some aspect of your commute that is giving you comfort.

Continue walking (or watching) slowly and mindfully around your space appreciating the things you have that bring you peace.

Was this challenging for you? It is for most people, for we are so conditioned to want what we don’t have, and we are biologically wired to notice what is missing. You may want to try this exercise a few times until you get the hang of it. If you do only this one exercise over the next month, you will have come a long way in developing your letting go practice. Try it a couple of times a day, maybe every time you see an advertisement that lures you into want-thinking.

Keep reminding yourself of your intention to take part in this 40-day letting go challenge. Look forward to increasing a sense of freedom, ease, and comfort with who you are, every day, right here, right now.



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## DAY THREE

# Let go of shame

What do you feel when you hear the word shame? How about guilt? Shame is usually a toxic emotion that keeps us frozen in time. Guilt on the other hand, can be instructive, and can spur us on to be our best selves. Your mindfulness practice can help you develop your best, loving, calm, abiding self. So first, some definitions:

Guilt says: “I’ve made a mistake. I own it. How can I make it right, do better next time, restore anything I’ve damaged, make amends to anyone I’ve hurt?”

Shame says: “I am a mistake. I was born this way. I am flawed to the core. I’ll never be able to make it right. I am damaged and undeserving of anything good. Because of this, what is the use of aspiring toward anything, of helping myself, and others?”

See the difference? Many of us have been conditioned, in sometimes abusive ways, to feel shame. It can take years of daily work to silence the voice of shame. But your mindfulness practice can help.

### TODAY’S LETTING GO EXERCISE

As always, start with a few deep breaths. If you need a review of the best way to breathe to calm your nervous system, check out this video on breathing basics.

1. Grab your “letting go” journal and a writing start.
2. Ask yourself, how would I act in my daily life if I believed I was a good person, if I accepted my “mistakes” as important learning experiences.
3. How would that be different from the way I live now?

This exercise can bring up some strong emotions for the harsh way we have been treated and the harsh way we treat ourselves, but letting go of shame is an essential component of making more room for our highest aspirations. Don’t forget to end the exercise with the same deep breathing we started with. This exercise is even better when paired with some self-compassion.



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DAY FOUR

## Be silly, not serious

Uninhibited, care-free, silly...when was the last time you let yourself feel one of these sensations? Think toddler's dancing, teenagers skateboarding, young adults running in the rain, a karaoke performance at a wedding reception that has you laughing so hard you start crying...

Today's letting go practice is about cultivating your care-free spirit.

### CHEERFUL SENIOR COUPLE WITH PADDLEBOARD IN SEA

Start with a few deep breaths, stretch out any soreness in your body with the most goofy yoga pose or dance move you know

Think back to a time when you felt unfettered, energetic, joyful, with no self-consciousness holding you back. For many of us, this will be before puberty, before our brains started putting the brakes on feeling care-free in favor of safety. What were you doing? Can you recall a specific activity, friend, or family member that you were with?

Use your journal to describe this scene, or share it with your letting-go buddy.

How can you recreate this experience as an adult?

As an example let me share one of my care-free memories. I am five years old, camping with my parents and my sister. I wander into a moss-covered field just a short distance from our campsite. I take my shoes and socks off and danced around the squishy, cool, velvety moss, enjoying the different shades of green. This weekend, I might be able to recreate some of this care-free feeling by going for a walk in the woods at our nearby Audubon Center, making sure that part of my walk is barefoot, maybe even sharing the experience with one of my children.

Wow ...I can't wait! How will you trade in serious for care-free this week? After your trade, I bet you will feel energized and refreshed – like we often do after reuniting a dear old friend.



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# Let go of the outcome, embrace uncertainty

Sometimes life leaves us hanging in limbo. Maybe waiting for an acceptance letter, a return call from a loved one, or news of a promotion. You might feel some frantic energy around something even more anxiety provoking, like the results of a medical test, or waiting for a family member to heal from an addiction or make better life choices. Your mindfulness/letting-go practice can be tremendously helpful when you feel like you are waiting for the results of an important decision or outcome.

## HERE'S HOW TO USE MINDFULNESS TO EMBRACE UNCERTAINTY:

1. When your future feels really uncertain and anxiety is exceptionally high, it can be counterproductive to try a sitting meditation. In these times you may want to experiment with a moving meditation, walking, jogging, gentle yoga, or an alternate breathing exercise to help balance the nervous system.
2. After using one of your mindfulness tools to release the tension from your body, ask yourself what your true intention is for the situation. Instead of getting the perfect job, you might see that your true intention is it to take care of your family. Of course we all wish for good health but since some health issues are chronic or long-term, maybe our true intention is to make sure a sick loved one feels deeply cared for. Instead of getting accepted to a first choice college, we can see our deepest intention is to training for a career that helps others, or fulfills some other deeply held value. When we focus on our intention and values, instead of a specific outcome, anxiety automatically decreases, and many times, creativity and wonderful alternative plans come to mind.
3. Take a few minutes to write about you most deeply held values. Need help identifying values? Take a look at the VIA Signature Strengths survey at the UPenn Authentic Happiness project. This survey will help you clarify your strengths and move toward action that creates more happiness and less need to control outcomes.
4. Next, create an values-based intention statement. Here's an example:

"I'm never truly in control of a given outcome but my intention is to .....

By keeping this intention in mind, I will be following my highest values, including .....

By following my highest values, I feel more centered and calm. I am better able to let go and trust the outcome"

Are you waiting for an outcome? How has mindfulness helped you wait with less anxiety?



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DAY SIX

## Let Go of Expecting Your Life to Be hassle-free

Find small ways during the day to discharge accumulated stress...I think this is why they have those big red balls in front of Target.

Here's the scenario: You have your shopping list and you're out the door, prepared to be an efficiency king or queen. Then, oops, you need gas. Long line number one. You get through the gas line, but now you need to merge on to the interstate on the other side of the street. Aggressive drivers do not slow down for you, but instead lay on their horns. You make it on to the interstate but you're slightly annoyed and your heart is pounding. All the while your twelve year-old is in the back seat adding items to your to-do list "I need index cards for Spanish class..."

...You make it to your destination, one half-hour behind schedule with a hefty dose of adrenaline coursing through your system but you're determined to make it through your list. First stop, the Apple Store to get your computer fixed, and oh you've got to be kidding me...the apple geniuses are all busy and your number 15 in the cue...and oh -sh!t you forgot your 20 percent off coupon at home!

Perhaps your heart starting beating faster just reading the above paragraph.

### LET GO OF EXPECTING YOUR LIFE TO BE HASSLE-FREE. HERE'S HOW TO PRACTICE THIS.

1. Make fun of your sense of entitlement – Do you ever catch yourself experiencing annoyance at completely ridiculous things? For instance, "We've been sitting at this table for 3 minutes and nobody has waited on us yet." "I can't believe how slow the internet is today!" Counter your entitlement by practicing gratitude: "I'm so glad my car is running well and it doesn't need any repairs this month." "I'm so thankful that I can Skype with my daughter while she's away at college." Gratitude neutralizes small daily annoyances and lightens your mood.

Never underestimate the effects of cumulative stress -it drives bad habits, and disease – find small ways to discharge this stress several times a day. The mindful hub archives are full of short practices to help you discharge stress in healthy ways.

2. Think of your to-do list as an ever-evolving adventure – at the very least, it is faulty thinking to expect that all the lights will be green upon your demand, and a parking spot will magically appear right at the entrance of your destination. If you don't get everything done on your list, ask yourself, "what is the worst thing that will happen?" It's usually nothing life-threatening.

Use waiting time to connect with the human race, express compassion, and gratitude

3. Put a new cognitive spin on waiting in line – What is waiting in line all about anyway? an annoyance, or a chance to be mindful and de-stress? Use time in cues to focus on your breath. When it's your turn up at the counter, express compassion and respect for the person waiting on you. This will give you and the person serving you an instant sense of well-being.
4. Add mindful movement into your trip – At every stop, get out of your car and stretch your arms overhead. While waiting in line circle your neck. Never underestimate the effects of cumulative stress -it drives bad habits, and disease – find small ways to discharge this stress several times a day. Notice how you feel at the end of the day. Is your body sore? If you are too shy to do a full-out sun salutation or jumping jacks in a public place, promise yourself 10 minutes of gentle stretching every night this month.



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## DAY SEVEN

# Let go of resentment

I've heard it said that resentment is like giving yourself poison, expecting to kill your enemy. I like this analogy, as it really does sum up the effect of resentment on your mind, your nervous system and even your loved ones who may be in the line of fire of your resentment and anger meant for someone else.

Logically, most of us know that stewing over a past injustice is a waste of time. We are told "move on" and "get over it." Even though the logical brain may know that we should let go of old slights and betrayals, letting go emotionally is a different story.

Letting go of resentment is usually not a one-shot deal, but by taking "resentment breaks" you will begin to retrain your mind and body to focus on the good in your life, creating a sense of release and well-being.

### LET GO OF RESENTMENT

1. Your centering exercise will depend on how fresh the resentment is. If you are burning up with anger, go for a brisk walk or practice some vigorous yoga – just make sure to bring your mind back to your breath over and over. Do not dwell on the object of your resentment. This will only reinforce the neuropathways in your brain dedicated to this resentment. If this is difficult, tell yourself you are taking a twenty minute break from thinking about the situation. It will be there when you return if you want to go back to it.
2. After centering, think of a resentment of the distant past – something that no longer bothers you. Can you see that holding on to this resentment may have been a waste of your time?
3. Now come back to your present resentment. You have two choices here. Again, if the resentment is fairly fresh, practice self-compassion. Don't try to force forgiveness or resolution if it feels unnatural. Rather focus on your own healing. Read about loving kindness and self-compassion exercises here. Incorporate them in to your life for the next month.

Don't try to force forgiveness or resolution if it feels unnatural. Rather, focus on your own healing.

4. If the time feels right and you have enough distance from the object of your resentment, extend loving kindness and self-compassion to loved ones, neutral parties, and only if you are ready, to the person or situation that you feel resentful toward. Forgiveness is not a one-shot deal, but practicing moments of forgiveness will give you more freedom and well-being. By taking resentment breaks, you will begin to retrain your mind and body to focus on the good in your life.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Don't Bite the Hook: Finding Freedom from Anger, Resentment, and Other Destructive Emotions Audio CD* by Pema Chodron

*Self-Compassion Step by Step: The Proven Power of Being Kind to Yourself 1st Edition* by Kristin Neff PhD



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## DAY EIGHT

# Letting go of fear (Part 1)

Like so many of our letting go suggestions, letting go of fear is not a quick-fix, or a one-shot deal, but it's worth loosening the grip of anxiety even a little by shining light on it from time to time. If you really think about it, all "letting go" practices involve letting go of fear and anxiety.

I have a friend who would often use the phrase "I'm terrified," mostly in reference to something that had to do with her young children. She would say "I'm terrified of sending my kids to school in this town," or "I'm terrified of what the pesticides in that food will do to my kids."

*Anxiety is a natural, unavoidable part of life, and when it's adaptive, it helps us plan, and stay out of harm's way. But often we slip out of a helpful, productive alert state into an unproductive state of stress, anxiety, fear, and yes, even terror.*

I can remember thinking that "I'm terrified" was strong language, maybe even dramatic, but at the same time, I understood what she was talking about. She was talking about anxiety and the fear that her children might also experience anxiety. Anxiety is a natural, unavoidable part of life, and when it's adaptive, it helps us plan, and stay out of harm's way. However, so often we slip out of a helpful, productive, alert state into an unproductive state of stress, anxiety, fear, and yes, even terror.

*Anxiety is available in many flavors. There's general anxiety, social anxiety, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and PTSD. What label we give to our fear is not as important as what keeps our fear alive, and what that fear keeps us from accomplishing – not to mention the toll fear takes on our nervous system.*

In the short-term fear keeps us from enjoying daily life by keeping us on high alert. Longer term fear wears out our nervous system. It can make getting through every day experience seem like a colossal effort, and keep us from reaching our full potential by avoiding what we value, and sharing our gifts with the world.

This is why I didn't like my friend's choice of the word "terror." I was worried about what daily parenting was doing to her nervous system, her relationships, and her ability to enjoy being a mom.

How do we stay out of the fear zone and in the place where we are using anxious energy in a productive way? Mindfully keeping track of bodily sensations that accompany fear can help us break out of the fear zone, and experience calm, clear energy more often.

## LET GO OF FEAR

Practice this five-minute exercise daily to increase your sense of safety, and to bring more joy and ease into daily tasks. After practicing, check out the links to our free worksheets related to anxiety, and some of our favorite books listed below.

Check in with your body's reaction to a very simple daily task, like getting ready to get out the door in the morning (many people who struggle with anxiety report that it is worse in the morning.) Is your heart beating fast, do you have aches and pains, muscle tension, a dry mouth?

Notice what thoughts accompany these physical sensations. They might sound like "I'll never get out the door in time," or "I've got so much to do today." They may be more specific, "I'm really nervous about the budget meeting."

Lie on the floor or sit in a chair, with your arms over your head, take five deep breaths, making sure to that your lower belly is rising and falling. By keeping your arms over your head, you will be helping your breaths to become long and deep, triggering the relaxation response.

While you're breathing, gently talk back to that part of you that is experiencing terror. For example, counter the negative thought, "I know I'm going to make a typo in this post and people are going to think I'm an idiot" with "I'll proofread before I print. Most people will see the value of the content over an occasional typo."

Let your arms fall to your sides and let go. Come up with your own short terror-melting mantra, like "I let go of unhelpful fear, I accept calm, clear energy."



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

DAY NINE

## Let go of your big ego (Letting go of fear part II)

Young handsome bearded hipster man selfie Yesterday we talked about letting go of fear. Today we look at fear again disguised as a too-tight hold on our self-image.

The concept of the ego is often misunderstood. Freud defined the super ego as that part of us that keeps us from acting on our more primitive urges (the Id), and the ego as the more logical, in-control part of our personality.

Typically, when we say someone has a 'big ego' we aren't talking about Freud's super-ego – the weigh station between acting on animal urges and acting in a socially sanctioned way. We are usually talking about someone who is very wrapped up in themselves.

It's true that a wrong-sized ego can make things difficult. But why? The bottom line is that the big ego part of us is afraid of rejection – our greatest fear of all. After all, We are intensely social creatures. So much so that the same part of the brain associated with physical pain is activated when we feel socially rejected. It feels like we are in mortal danger when we experience rejection, especially when that rejection comes from care givers, and later on, peers and colleagues. So the big ego actually develops through our attempts to feel safe, but it can keep us from self-acceptance, and truly feeling like we belong. images

However, if we come from a place of self-acceptance, we can let go of many of the complications that our big ego brings to our lives. Mindfulness fosters greater self-acceptance.

### LET GO OF YOUR BIG EGO

Take a few minutes to ground yourself physically and mentally by breathing, or breathing with gentle stretching. Grab your letting go journal.

Think about your big ego by examining where you make your life especially difficult. Is there an area in your life where you have to be right, even at the expense of hurting someone close to you ...an area where you spend too much of your physical, financial, or emotional resources so that you can "fit in?" Perhaps there are several aspects of your life that seem overcomplicated by your efforts to maintain self-image.

*"You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!"*  
– Paul Tillich

Now think of a time when you have felt accepted. Did this come as a result of planning and scheming of the big ego? or was it a more simple, natural moment?

See if you can let go of your big ego for a few moments today. Take a 20-minute break where you turn off planning and scheming. Trust that mindfulness will shrink your trouble-making ego, and grow your self-acceptance.



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## DAY TEN

# Let go of time stress

It's interesting to note that before the coming of white settlers, some Native American tribes had no word for time – at least not time as we understand it today.

The concepts of time and time stress are central to our ability to be in the present moment. Of course we have to have some sense of time in our modern culture, how else would we be able to pick up our kids on time? keep an appointment? make a deadline? However, we can be learn to let go of time ruling our lives by living “off the clock” for short periods each day. A really helpful tool to use when you are overwhelmed by time stress is to ask yourself “what is the best thing to do in this moment.”

### LET GO OF TIME STRESS.

1. Contradiction alert! Soften your relationship with time today by setting a timer before you take a mindful time-out. This sounds contradictory, but it is a good strategy for beginners. Knowing a timer is set will free you from watching the clock. There are many great inexpensive apps for your smart phone, the peace alarm clock, that can help you keep track of your meditation time.
2. Today while you practice letting go use the mantra, “there is plenty of time.”
3. Another really helpful tool to use when you are overwhelmed by time stress is to ask yourself “what is the best thing to do in this moment.” This magic phrase will help you move forward when you become overwhelmed by too many choices.
4. Have a schedule but be flexible. Using tip number three above will help you to determine when you need to flex your plans.

Make time your friend by taking time every day to be nowhere else but in the present moment.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

*Full Catastrophe Living (Revised Edition): Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* by Jon Kabat-Zinn



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# Let go of self-loathing

One of the benefits of your mindfulness practice is that you will build an awareness of the negative self-talk that proliferates your mind. At first, this may not seem like a benefit. Who wants to hear that voice more clearly? That voice that's telling you you're an idiot, a phony, a horrible ..... (fill in the blank.) Wouldn't be better if we just shoved it down...stuffed that voice? That is usually our natural defense to this kind of self-talk. Unfortunately, shoving these messages may shape our behavior in undesirable ways.

When we allow those negative messages to surface, we are taking the first step in getting them to quiet down. We can then start replacing these negative messages with more positive self-talk. Like all mindfulness exercises, challenging your self-talk takes some effort, so let self-compassion be your best buddy and personal trainer with this exercise.

If you have the idea that self-compassion is somehow selfish, think again. How do you react to others when you are feeling calm and loving toward yourself, as opposed to feeling unsafe and threatened? Ultimately, self-compassion is an act of great loving-kindness to everyone you come in contact with.

## LET GO OF NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

1. Start with a few deep breaths, bring yourself back to the present moment by naming three of the prominent colors that are closest to you.
2. Sit for a moment and notice any negative self-talk that arises. Notice the bodily sensations that arise with these thoughts. Is there a sense of wanting to run away? Maybe a sense of wanting to crawl out of your skin? Maybe you feel overwhelmed and a sense of wanting to hide or cry. Breathe deeply and say to yourself "I am not alone in these thoughts, it is human to be self-critical at times."
3. Drop the idea that self-compassion is somehow selfish. If you have the idea that self-compassion is somehow selfish, think again. How do you react to others when you are feeling calm and loving toward yourself, as opposed to feeling unsafe and threatened? Ultimately, self-compassion is an act of great loving-kindness to everyone you come in contact with.
4. Personify self-compassion. Self-compassion may be a friend that you haven't met yet, or at least an acquaintance that you don't know very well. Personalize self-compassion by imagining a loving, older and wiser brother or sister. This can be a totally made-up person, or he or she may have some qualities of someone who once showed you kindness.
5. Picture your personified self-compassion helping you to talk back to your negative thoughts. He or she might say, "it's okay to make mistakes," or "you are really trying your best."
6. Let your next action come from a place of self-compassion. Let your growing self-compassionate voice guide you through all your actions today.

Take note of how you feel at the end of a day of focusing on self-compassion.



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## Flexing your parenting style for teens and young adults

Through the joys and sorrows, nothing has illuminated my parenting as much as my mindfulness practice, especially when parenting teens and young adults.

*The best part of mindful parenting is the increase in your belief that you are a good parent, that you are competent and you can make it through the 20-plus years, the next stage of development, and sometimes the next few minutes.*

This belief in your ability to master your environment is called self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an internal voice that says “I can do this.” you can build parenting self-efficacy through your mindfulness practice. Self-efficacy along with parenting satisfaction can wax and wane. You might be delighted with yourself and your 8 year-old, but when kids hit puberty, it’s common for adults to report decreasing parenting satisfaction.

### ADAPTING AND FLEXING YOUR PARENTING STYLE WITH EMERGING ADULTS

The best part of mindful parenting is the increase in your belief that you are a good parent, that you are competent and you can make it through the 20-plus years, the next stage of development... and sometimes the next few minutes.

1. **Normalize** – It’s normal for teenagers and young-adults to test boundaries, challenge authority, and make mistakes. Keep in mind that their frontal lobes are not yet fully formed. We know now that the human brain, in particular the part of the brain that governs impulsivity, is not fully formed until the mid-twenties. So don’t focus on mistakes. Instead, just like when they were toddlers, focus on keeping them safe. Having said that, this is where your letting go practice can be helpful. With teens and young adults we have to give up control. Teens and young adults generally don’t like being plopped into playpens. Think in terms of harm-reduction vs. boy(or girl) in the bubble.
2. **Non-attachment** – Teenagers and young adults give us a lot of opportunities to practice non-attachment. Practice mindfulness by picking your battles. Let go of the little things, like the soda cans and empty chip bags all over the family room. Instead, focus on what matters. If your child has hit a rough patch, visualize him or her in the next best place. Ask if they would like you help to get there.
3. **Take the consultant stance** – Here’s a secret: Teens and young adults are so annoyed by their parents because they still need us. They hate this fact. It makes them very irritable. But they need our financial support, or at least financial advice, the lodging we can provide, and sometimes comfort and advice when they are feeling down. To keep irritability down and communication high, consider taking the consultant stance: mindfully stand by for the moment they need you, give them your take on the situation, then calmly step aside. At this point in your parenting career, you can expect to not like some of the choices your young adults make. How you respond to these choices, out of fear and control, or patience and respect, will determine your stress level and quality of relationship you have with your adult kids.
4. **Curiosity** – Raising even the most mature young adults can be challenging. Watch your reactions with curiosity. Be curious about your responses to your teen’s music, clothes, and choices in friends. Your reactions might be a response to some unfinished business from your own childhood. This might be an opportunity to re-parent yourself.
5. **Self-care** – Don’t forget to take care of yourself. One of the best ways to do this is to have a gentle exercise routine that includes mindful movement. Keeping up with your mindfulness practice even when you think you don’t have the time will help your stress level stay in a healthy range and help you make better decisions.



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DAY THIRTEEN

## Let go of fixing, listening is loving

Last year I worked with a young man who just ended a three-year relationship. I watched as he went through the process of desperately holding on, blaming himself, lashing out, and feeling completely shattered and rejected. As a therapist I am able to stay detached from the suffering and let compassion lead the way, but If you are close to a young adult, maybe your own child, you know there is nothing more painful to watch.

*The cold, hard truth was that I could not fix my child's broken heart. I took a few deep breaths as I rubbed her back, remembering that all I needed to do was be a witness, and honor her emotions.*

I remember the feeling of losing a love – you may too – going from being joined at the hip to feeling like you have just lost a limb. As an older adult helping a younger adults through this process you may rationally know it can be a good learning experience but it can be very frightening to watch. I remember my feelings of helplessness as my own daughter mourned the loss of her beloved a few years ago. In a bit of a panic, I did a good job of dreaming up worse-case scenarios: What if this very normal right of passage causes her do something impulsive and dangerous, or worse, turns into a full-blown set-back?

### LISTENING IS LOVING

... Then I remembered the importance of just being present. The cold, hard truth was that I could not fix my child's broken heart. I took a few deep breaths as I rubbed her back, remembering that all I needed to do was be a witness, just like I am with the young adults in my therapy practice, and honor her emotions. I did not need to come up with some clever solution, distract her with gifts, or spurt out overused (but true) platitudes like "time heals." As I let go of trying to fix, and let myself simply be a witness to her pain, something shifted. I could feel us both relax a little.

Need some help surviving a break-up? Join the Everyday Mindfulness Toolbox and take a look at our free worksheet – Minding a Broken Heart and/or Surviving rRejection.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

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DAY FOURTEEN

# Let go of planning

A health crisis, a job loss, a rejection letter...rejection love. We can tantrum, “it’s not fair”...“I don’t want to relocate!”...“I can’t accept that it’s over!”...

The ideas of equanimity and acceptance are central to mindfulness meditation, and can help us welcome life’s detours.

*“Consider that not getting what you want can be a wonderful stroke of luck” – The Dalai Lama*

## THE GIFT OF PLAN B

1. When something unexpectedly unpleasant or unwanted comes up, watch your physical reaction. Is there a tightening in your stomach or shoulders? Are your hands clenched? Especially watch what the breath is doing. Take deep even breaths.
2. Ask the magic question, “what is the best thing to do in this moment?” and follow-up questions, “how can I use this situation to show compassion?” What am I resisting? What is my fear? Is my resistance helping or making the situation more painful?
3. What is the gift of plan B? Look for the gift in the situation. There is always a gift in plan B. Think of time in the past when getting what you wanted did not turn out to be all that great, and a time when plans fell through and something unexpectedly beneficial happened. The Dalai Lama has been quoted as saying “Remember that not getting what you want can be a wonderful stroke of luck.”



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

## DAY FIFTEEN

# Let go of your edge

I once attended a conference on mindfulness that included health care experts, corporate executives, and politicians. I learned that executives at Google were hesitant to join a company-sponsored mindfulness program because they were afraid to lose their “edge.” What exactly does this mean? Professionally speaking, or in other domains of life, what is the benefit of finding and keeping your edge?

At a minimum, staying perpetually on edge will wear down your nervous system. In addition Extreme edginess will keep you from accessing creativity and will stop you from making important connections.

We might define “edginess” as the need to be hyper-vigilant and driven to be “on-top-of-your-game” at all times. This professional edge might even include a sometimes cut-throat competitiveness and ruthlessness. Our capitalist culture may lead us to believe that if we soften our edge, or even blink, we might miss an opportunity, get taken by surprise, or get “thrown under the bus.”

This way of thinking, this going about life with a certain edginess, speaks to a lack of trust in oneself, the people we come in contact with every day, and the organizations we are a part of, and the flow of life.

More practically, being on edge all the time is actually counterproductive – and we have the neuroscience to prove it!

### EXAMINE YOUR OWN EDGINESS

Take a few deep breaths, gather your letting-go buddies and your journal. Consider the following questions:

1. How do I define being “on edge.” What does it feel like mentally? Physically?
2. Who do I feel like I need to be “edgy” with ...co-workers, friends, even loved ones? Can I identify people in my life... co-workers, friends, loved ones that I can completely relax with, be authentic, imperfect, let my guard down?
3. How does being on edge serve me? What does it accomplish?
4. What would it be like to approach life with more softness, more trust? What would I gain?

At a minimum, staying perpetually on edge will wear down your nervous system. In addition it might keep you from accessing creativity and may stop you from making important connections. Because this kind of hyper-vigilance stimulates the fight-or-flight response, it can lead to hasty decision-making. So when you think about it, being edgy all the time makes you kind of – well, dull. Try to let go of or at least softening your edge today.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

DAY SIXTEEN

## Let go of an old identity

This is not about a beauty make-over, But rather an inside make-over that might be long overdue. It might be time to let go of labels that you don't want anymore, and maybe never even asked for. How do you identify yourself? You might say "I'm the mother of two...grandfather... CEO...dancer...a dentist." But like everything, our identities morph and change over our life-span, and holding on to or buying into an identity that no longer fits can be unproductive and painful.

When it comes to our identity it might be wise to take the attitude of holding on "not too tight, not too loose"

Even if our identity feels up-to-date, we are so much more than a list of labels, and yet, we need to have some sense of identity to shape our lives. When it comes to identity, it might be wise to use the advice given by Youngey Mingur Rinpoche regarding the proper effort when meditating: "not too tight and not too loose."

### FIND THE RIGHT BALANCE WITH YOUR IDENTITY

1. Start with five minutes of mindful breathing, gently ask any thoughts to come back later.
2. How would you have identified yourself ten years ago? Were you a teacher, parent of a toddler? a student? Now apply the same question to your identity five years ago.
3. From the previous step, what still applies? Is there some label you want to let go of, or start to shed?
4. Focus on the concept of "not too tight, not too lose" today. Can you feel a sense of ease and spaciousness around your identity?
5. It also might be helpful to remember a basic human right that we should all identify with – that is – we all have the right to make mistakes, change, grow, and move on.

You are allowed to update your identity and focus on and foster the best aspects of your being. Not doing so robs you and the world of your ever developing insight and gifts.



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DAY SEVENTEEN

## Let go of technology

Want to see something really cool in 3D? Take a look at real life! Look mindfully today at a tree, a train, or a teapot. Notice the depth and gradation of color – wow...no special glasses required!

Spending too much time on screens, whether it's your lap-top or a cell phone, can make real life start to feel flat. Feeling delight and awe about small, real things in everyday experience is a great way to flex your mindfulness muscles.

If we are constantly over-stimulated by the flashing lights, bells and whistles offered through technology, we can start to see our lives as dull, gray, and one-dimensional. Recently I had a patient tell me that the world once again seemed three-dimensional after a much-needed vacation away from her job as a computer programmer. I've had other patients recovering from trauma or depression say "Colors seem vivid again."

I once spent a weekend with friends who had a new high-definition TV. We had fun watching an action movie on Friday night. The image was so crisp that I actually felt a little nauseous at one point. The next night we went into The Big Apple to see a Broadway play. Wow. no glasses required. We laughed at the thought that we might soon need 3D glasses to see a Broadway play. Don't let this be your future! Practice mindfully focusing on something not coming from a screen today!

### LET GO OF TECHNOLOGY – SET YOURSELF UP FOR A TECH-FREE DAY

Join The Everyday Mindfulness Toolbox on [mindfulhub.com](http://mindfulhub.com) and download the following worksheets:

1. Using Technology Mindfully
2. Setting yourself up for a day of silence



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DAY EIGHTEEN

## Let go of prejudice

You might be thinking, “oh I can skip this one – it doesn’t apply to me.” But at times we all let pre-conceived opinions, judgements, or positions run the show. Subtle or not-so-subtle, these biases color our world, so it’s helpful to shine the light of mindfulness on them, and, if we can’t completely break free, at least loosen the grip these automatic thoughts have on our ability to let go.

What would it be like if you had a cartoon thought bubble over your head that everyone could read? Luckily your automatic thoughts are yours and yours alone,

### LET GO OF PREJUDICE BY PRACTICING EQUANIMITY

Equanimity, the ability to keep an evenness of temper, even in stressful situations is one of the foundations of mindfulness and is a wonderful aid when you are trying to let go of a mindset that is causing you to suffer. Practicing equanimity brings peace of mind, and quiets the automatic tendency to label situations and people as good or bad, fortunate or unfortunate. With practice over time, equanimity can grow from a peaceful mind state to a solid trait that becomes more of a way of life, one that cannot be easily shaken.

To build your equanimity muscle, start to notice the one-word labels you place on people or things as you go about your day. What would it be like if you had a cartoon thought bubble over your head that everyone could read? Luckily your automatic thoughts are yours and yours alone.

Just note the words you use to label people and situations. Are they negative, harsh? It’s okay. Try not to add another layer of judgment by judging yourself.

What is your emotional response to your automatic thoughts. Is there an urge to act on your judgment? Did the thought add tension to your body? heaviness to your heart? Is there a possibility you can soften the judgement? Think of the person or event in a more neutral light, even for a moment. Does this change your emotional response? Would it change your behavior?

Be kind to yourself as you practice letting go of prejudices and automatic thoughts. Chances are they developed as a means of self-protection, but letting go of these biases is called for when they keep us from feeling peaceful and practicing equanimity.



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DAY NINETEEN

## Stay open to love

You might be wearing a heavy coat of armour. It may have served you well in the past. Perhaps you had to protect yourself from unreliable caregivers, or the disappointment of untrustworthy friends. It was quite brilliant of you to don this armour under these circumstances. But the problem with wearing armour is that it is quite possibly keeping you from the good will of the present-day people around you. Also armour is really, really heavy.

*“For love to work, you have to take it in...”*  
*George Valliant – director of the Harvard Grant study*

### TAKE OFF YOUR ARMOUR

Think of a kindness you have received, big or small.

How did you react to this kindness? Can you stay open to it and take it in? Or does the armour get in the way?

If you have had inconsistent experience with loving kindness, you may feel kind of raw, maybe even suspicious of kindness. You may even feel like kindness is overdue and owed to you. This is normal ...and a good time to practice deep breathing, calming your nervous system, to help in taking in the kindness as a healing force.

Practice feeling grateful for the time and attention given to you.

For the next few days, notice small kindnesses around you, a door held open, a phone called returned. Notice your reaction. Suspicion, worries of ulterior motives? Are you hiding behind your armour, or can you stay open to loving kindness?

Notice your patterns of shutting down to loving kindness over the next few days.



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DAY TWENTY

## Let go of fearing pain

Unknown There are four heart-opening and heart-healing mindsets that Buddhists call the four immeasurables: Equanimity, Loving-kindness, Compassion, and sympathetic Joy. These four mindsets are referred to as “immeasurable” because of their limitless ability to end suffering. Each immeasurable counteracts a mindset that keeps us stuck and prevents us from letting go of pain.

On day 22 I presented a letting go exercise that illustrated how judgement and prejudice can be counteracted by practicing equanimity. Yesterday, day 23, we looked at a loving-kindness practice that helps in staying open to love – even if we’ve been burned by love in the past. Today we look at Compassion, and staying open to another’s pain.

You may be thinking, “Okay...enough of this letting go practice...it’s way too heavy...” But ultimately compassion helps us relieve our discomfort with pain. So I invite you to give it a try:

### MAKING PEACE WITH PAIN

Fearlessness is the hidden gift of compassion

Think about someone you care about (if you have not done this exercise before, it is suggested that you do not use a child or someone too close to you. Picturing an acquaintance, or a more distant friend or relative is a better way to start.)

Picture this person in your mind, and picture their suffering. Is it chronic illness, old age, loneliness, or addiction?

What feelings come up when you picture this person’s suffering? Some common feelings that we might be afraid to admit include: contracting or shutting down; controlling, which is often about trying to remove your own pain about this situation; and helplessness, which is also about your own pain, but can leave you feeling angry, resentful, or even depressed.

Don’t be afraid to address these feelings. It’s the only way to get through them. In small doses, feel them and relax into them.

As you let go of feelings of contracting, controlling, and helplessness, is it easier for you to picture being a compassionate presence to the pain of others?

This practice of staying present to pain is not a giving in or a defeat, but rather a compassionate acceptance of what is. From this stance we can decide what the best thing to do is (and it might be nothing), and act in the best interest of our loved one.

Compassion practice helps us let go of closing off to suffering and is replaced by an internal fearlessness and an ability to be awake and present to the good, bad, and ugly of life. And this fearlessness is the hidden gift of compassion.



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## Let go of the myth of 'some day'

Some day you will have a perfect job. Some day you will be twenty pounds lighter. Some day, your kids will all be independent and you can spend your days as you please. Some day your spouse will be able to read your mind and fulfill your every need without you having to tell him or her. Some day you might be elderly, looking back on your life realizing you missed a good deal of it waiting for 'some day.'

It is healthy to aspire, to have dreams and goals, but these dreams and goals can very easily get in the way of your day-to-day peace of mind. So how do we balance 'some day' with the 'here-and-now'?

'Some day' can be a great place to hang out, as long as we don't spend too much time there, and we are mindful that our 'some day' thoughts are not tinged with revenge or envy.

### LET GO OF 'SOME DAY'

1. Breathe, relax, allow your mind to settle
2. Look around you. What present-day achievements were once 'some-day' ideas?
3. Chances are that your present-day achievements are bittersweet – that there was something that you had to give up in order to get what you have, whether that was a job in a different town, a bigger family, or more opportunity to travel. Acknowledge this fact, and spend some time appreciating all the lessons you've learned and the blessings you have given by the way "some day" played itself out.
4. Now let go of striving all together for the next five minutes. Take this break from 'some-day' thinking and focus on some aspect of 'this day' that brings you contentment and joy.
5. Use your mindfulness practice to bring yourself to 'this day' mind on a regular basis. The key is to balance healthy ambition with gratitude.

'Some day' can be a great place to hang out, as long as we don't spend too much time there, and we are mindful that our 'some day' thoughts are not tinged with revenge or envy...and don't let your 'some day' dreams be shaped by anything but your deepest values.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

DAY TWENTY TWO

## Be free from envy

UnknownEnvy is a really tough emotion – a cross between a yearning for the good fortune bestowed on another and hostility toward the individual for having the good fortune. Even if the lucky one is a good friend, irrational though it is, envy sometimes runs the show.

“It’s not fair...why me...why not me...I’ve worked just as hard...Why don’t I have his luck...?” This is what the internal dialogue of envy sounds like. When you are caught in the grip of envy, you feel pain, alienation, and a joy-sucking pit in your stomach.

*Envy is not a new emotion, but it's been given a new power-boost. Thanks to social media, we can now sit by and watch the parade of other people's happiness, 24/7. It has an addictive quality to it. We know it is hurting us, making us sad. We play the less than/more than comparison game on Facebook, Tumblr, and Instagram...and yet we keep going back for more.*

### BREAK DOWN ENVY BY BUILDING UP JOY

When it comes to working with envy, you really want to center yourself. Don't skip this step! Take a few deep belly breaths and get grounded. Watch Karen's breathing demo for a closer look.

Start by remembering when you felt unburdened joy for someone. Perhaps while watching a child play with care-free abandon, or an animal running unrestrained. Notice how easily you connect with and share in the joy of this being when envy is not present.

Now think of a time when you felt weighed down by envy for a friend's free time, a sibling's income, or a co-worker's talent. Notice the sting of envy.

Rest. Take a break from feeling the injustice. Shift your gaze if necessary. Rest again if feelings of resentment come back. Turn your thoughts back to the carefree joy you felt by practice step two.

Try to return to the situation that causes the sense of lacking, but this time apply joy. Join in with the joy of the good fortune. Picture joy as an underground spring with a limitless source. Trust that there is enough joy for everyone.



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## Let go of bad news

Are you a news junkie? Do you feel like you are going to miss something important if you don't read a paper every day? Observing how much time you spend each day ingesting negative, upsetting, and just plain scary news is a great mindfulness exercise. Whether it's the New York Times, or tuning in to a local news station for background noise as you are getting ready for work, there is rarely a cheery story to be found in the headlines. Why is this so? Unfortunately bad news is a bigger media money-maker, and the more sensational and disturbing the story, the better.

Luckily, you are mindful, and you can take back your brain and focus on more positive events happening in the world, and they are happening, you just need to know where to look. Yes, we need to be informed, but there is a point where our need for information becomes another distraction, another habit that takes us out of the here and now.

*"Read not the times, read the eternities" ~ Henry David Thoreau*

### LET GO OF BAD NEWS

1. If you have a regular diet of news, either print, audio, or video, notice how it makes you feel to imbibe this media. Do you go into a trance as you are reading? Do certain news stories make you feel superior? Conversely, do you feel anxious after listening to the news? Notice how the news creates cravings for a certain outcome or possession or aversions to your present circumstances.
2. Try a news-free day. Just for one day, break up your news routine. Notice the feelings that come up. Do you feel out of the loop, or like you are missing something? Challenge that feeling by reciting this mantra, "I have everything I need."
3. Henry David Thoreau said, "Read not the times, read the eternities." Replace your current news diet with something different. Try reading a passage from an inspirational book to start your day. We are not suggesting that you take up an in-depth bible study. This practice can be as short as five or ten minutes a day. There are many great books and web sources that can provide you with short daily readings. Try one of these sources for more positive messages: [yesmagazine.org](http://yesmagazine.org), or [positivelypositive.com](http://positivelypositive.com).
4. Make a plan to limit the negative messages you get from the media over the next month. Use this newly found time to seek out positive news sources that appeal to you.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

# Letting go of powerlessness

It's easy to get caught up in feeling powerless. Even if things are going pretty smoothly in your personal life, you might feel deflated by global events, take the current refugee crisis in Europe for instance.

The ramping up of the presidential campaign can also stir up a sense of powerlessness. With each presidential campaign the grandstanding and drama seem to escalate, obscuring urgent issues. The focus on showmanship (or woman ship) over social issues can make one wonder, "Will anything change?" "Can I do anything about it?"

Coming into the present moment, seeing an object in front of you in 3D, focusing on your breath, while gently pushing away distractions is in itself an act of power – possibly the only true power there is.

When these thoughts bubble up, feelings of helplessness often follow. Learned helplessness is a term used in psychology that describes a loss of personal power and control that arises from abuse, neglect, persecution or oppression. But even daily life make you feel helpless if you don't have time to take care of yourself.

You can take back your power.

*Acceptance is not the same as helplessness! Its just being with what is for the moment, and this "acceptance pause" almost always makes room for change.*

## BALANCING POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

1. Contradiction alert! The first step in taking back you power is to let go of it. You might be hyper-focusing on a situation right now. Whether it is world-wide, or personal to you let the problem be and rest your mind on your breath, or your present surroundings. Just stop. Stop planning, even if you are sitting in your car or in line. Picture yourself handing the problem over to a wise mentor for just a few minutes. "But...But...your mind will say...If I stop obsessing about the situation it will get out of hand!" The opposite is actually true and we the neuroscience to prove it! Coming into the present moment, seeing an object in front of you in 3D, focusing on your breath, while gently pushing away distractions is in itself an act of power – possibly the only true power there is.

Every time you take time out – even just 3 minutes of focusing on your breath, you are resetting your nervous system – moving away from the fight or flight response which often hampers our decision-making skills and making us act in unskillful ways. Dropping the power struggle will allow you to experience the rest and digest response and help you view personal and world situations with more clarity and calm. This will create a window of acceptance. Acceptance is not the same as helplessness! Its just being with what is for the moment, and this "acceptance pause" almost always makes room for change.

2. Keep coming back to the breath – Your mind will naturally want to wander. Old habits die hard. You might find yourself going back to your favorite obsession or fear. Simply bring your attention back to your breath, as if you were kindly trying to get the attention of an unruly puppy.
3. Focus on the higher ground – Still feeling helpless? Consider this: for every "bad guy" out there, we can find at least two brave warriors. You are not in this alone – ever. Add some positive news to your news feed, like The Daily Good's Hero page.
4. After focusing on higher ground, come back to the breath again – Practice letting go of power and powerlessness and focusing on the present moment on a daily basis to regain and build a sense of safety, calm, and peace.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

## Stop putting self-care on the back burner

Compassion fatigue, also known as secondary trauma, burn-out, vicarious trauma, or empathetic strain is an occupational hazard for therapists, health-care professionals, parents and other care-givers. It's a catch-22 that only deeply caring people are susceptible to compassion fatigue, and only deeply caring people become care-givers. Compassion fatigue is a physical, emotional or spiritual exhaustion that takes over a caregiver and causes an inability to experience joy or feel empathy for others. Mindfulness meditation can help caregivers heal from, and even better, prevent compassion fatigue by resetting the caregiver's nervous system and replenishing stores of compassion.

*It's a catch-22 that only deeply caring people are susceptible to compassion fatigue, and only deeply caring people become care-givers*

Symptoms of compassion fatigue can mimic PTSD and include exhaustion, loss of interest and feelings of hopelessness and irritability. If you are a caregiver who is exposed to traumatic situations, you might even experience nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, restricted range of feelings and difficulty sleeping.

*Be gentle with yourself as you make changes that move you toward better self-care. Don't make self-care another burden. Keep playing with your self-care routine until it feels truly restorative. I make it a practice to review my self-care regimen every season.*

### TAKE SELF-CARE OFF THE BACK BURNER

1. Have a daily practice of self-care that includes supportive colleagues and friends, a healthy diet and exercise regime, and adequate breaks during the day where you focus on your breathing and quiet your mind. This may sound obvious, but many care givers regularly skip meals, even bathroom breaks! For this reason, I always give new patients the D.E.S. quiz by asking how they are doing with Diet, Exercise, and Sleep. If you are seriously struggling in of these areas, it might be time to reexamine your daily routine. Be gentle with yourself as you make changes that move you toward better self-care. Don't make self-care another burden. Keep playing with your self-care routine until it feels truly restorative.
2. Preventing burnout really has two pillars. One is everyday self-care, the other is periodic deep restoration. Have a longer term plan for restoration that might include professional development, retreat time, or other forms of personal enrichment. Take a look at our Coping vs. Restoration worksheets for more info. Even setting yourself up for an at-home day of silence 3 or 4 times a year can make a big difference.
3. Take an inventory of your energy level at the beginning and end of every day. Before you go to bed at night, envision your ideal energy state. You might say to yourself, "I plan to feel calm and refreshed tomorrow. I'll start the day with five minutes of inspirational reading or gentle stretching" Very often, action follows thought, and planting this seed at bedtime will subconsciously encourage to act in ways that will support your ideal state.

Compassion fatigue feeds on isolation. Don't wait until you are completely exhausted to talk to a friend, colleague or other health professional.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

## Let it go or let it be?

Some life events cause a distinct chasm – on one side stands “before,” on the other side “after.” The deeper the chasm, the more desperately we try to get back to “before.” Chronic illness, a break-up, addiction, the death of a loved one. When we can’t accept a situation we might try frantically to change it, reeling against it, trying to control the outcome. We might be so intent on fighting the reality of the situation that we inadvertently cause more pain.

*Letting it be allows moments of peace during a situation that we can't, but may desperately want to escape. It allows a brief respite to consider the possibility of feeling reconnected...to a loved one, a community, to the here-and-now...*

Has anyone ever told you to “let it go” when you were in deep pain? Did this feel like a slap in the face, cause a surge of anger, leave you feeling misunderstood, even more alone?...if this has happened to you, you’re actually not alone.

If you have experienced this reaction in the face of the well-meaning “let it go” advice-giver, chances are you are experiencing a grief so deep that letting go is not an option. This is where letting it be comes into play.

Last spring I attended a weekend retreat on grief with a friend who experienced the sudden loss of her son. We talked about the awful slap in the face of being told to “let it go.” My friend said, “Letting it go implies it’s gone...but it’s not gone. Letting it be is coming to terms with what is and not beating yourself up over what was or what could have been.”

In contrast to letting it go, Letting it be builds a bridge over the chasm of before and after, as opposed to futile attempts to fill in the chasm. Letting it be allows moments of peace during a situation that we can’t, but may desperately want to escape. It allows a brief respite to consider the possibility of feeling reconnected...to a loved one, a community, to the here-and-now...to something bigger. Letting it be comes and goes, but it presents a moment of mindfulness...and the possibility of a good life in spite of the chasm.

For most of us the ability to Let it Be comes and goes. With small doses of letting it be we can start to build an altered, but good life, perhaps even enjoying the journey. Like power and powerlessness, letting it be makes room for real peace, one moment, sometimes one second at a time.



*We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!*

## Let go the habits that are holding you back

We all have them, habits that get in our way of reaching our full potential. At it's heart, mindfulness is about changing habits – habits of the mind that feed into unskillful action.

In our mindfulness practice we work with unproductive, habitual thoughts – for this is the start of any addiction. For example we might wake up in the morning and without even getting out of bed start to feel dread: Maybe a long list of chores await us...maybe we don't want to be alone. This mental habit sets up a chain reaction in the body, that increases our stress level. Based on these feelings of dread and overwhelm, we might think we need two cups of coffee to make it through the morning instead of one. Already we have set up the body and mind to be in a state of anxiety instead of ease.

*Include Compassion: If you are having trouble sticking to your new routine, be gentle with yourself. We are creatures of habit, not will power, so it might take a few attempts for your new habit to take hold.*

Based on this example, it's easy to see how thoughts and actions are linked. We can draw this scenario out further; the two cups of coffee lead to a blood sugar crash mid-morning, which leads to a third cup of coffee and a muffin, possibly leading to an irritable mood that contributes to poor communication with friends, family or colleagues. You can see the wheel of suffering in action here. Now replace coffee and donuts with something more damaging...you get the picture.

Over time these habits can lead to a state of everyday fatigue and chronic stress. But let's go back to the initial morning thought that triggered this cascade. Suppose your mindfulness routine included getting out of bed, practicing ten minutes of gentle yoga, and having cup of tea instead of highly caffeinated coffee, followed by ten or twenty minutes of seated meditation in which you examine the initial thoughts that your day will be dreadful?

We know it can be challenging to change a habit, so we offer the following steps to get you started, and our next few letting go posts will help you to dismantle habits of thought, word, and deed.

### START TO DISSOLVE YOUR HABITS

These step are important in changing any habit, whether it's a change in mindset, exercise or diet routine, or a troublesome addiction:

1. Prepare: Using our example above, you might prepare by getting your house ready. Set up a dedicated yoga/mediation spot. Purchase some healthy tea. If you think you will be tempted by the coffee, remove it from your house.
2. Be precise: As you develop your plan be as precise as possible. Write down a start date for your new routine, the time you will get up every morning, and the time you will complete your routine. Will you take one day off a week? Work out all the details.
3. Be Specific: Will you drink your tea before your meditation, or after? These might seem like small details, but in the first few days and weeks of building a new habit, you want to make your actions as well-defined as possible.
4. Share your plan: Share your plan with a trusted ally who will support you through the first thirty to sixty days of your new routine. Make sure your ally is someone you can trust to give you positive feedback, not guilt, if you lapses in your new routine.
5. Include Compassion: If you are having trouble sticking to your new routine, be gentle with yourself. We are creatures of habit, not will power, so it might take a few attempts for your new habit to take hold.



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DAY TWENTY EIGHT

# Letting go of drama

We humans will go to great lengths to stay out of the present moment.

The present moment terrifies us.

We can be very ingenious with the variety of drama we create and cling to in order to stay away from the here-and-now.

## WHAT KIND OF DRAMA DO YOU CREATE FOR YOURSELF?

Read through the following list of dramatic distractions. Which style of drama suits you? Do you...

1. Hold on to a belief or idea, even though it no longer serves you?
2. Cling too tightly to a relationship that is changing?
3. Feel compelled to do and have "it all" even though you are never satisfied?
4. Make yourself miserable by following the American Dream...or some other status quo?
5. Play a story line over and over in your head to justify your behavior?
6. Over-react on a daily basis, even though part of you knows it is causing suffering for you and those around you?
7. What a lot of trouble we go through to avoid the present moment. How determined we are to hold on to our habitual reactions and defenses.

See if you can let go of the drama today. Be with what scares you. Even a small opening, a moment of reacting as opposed to responding, might give you a taste of peace, and the realization that you are connected and accepted. Drop the drama, breathe, look around. You are safe to chose differently- safe to chose a new, less dramatic script. This drama-free moment of peace might motivate you to drop habits that are stopping you from a bigger letting go.



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# Integrating ways of being

Consider the different ways we can experience life – different aspects of our being that help us function...until they don't. We can be cerebral and goal oriented, for instance, or we can be predominantly kinesthetic, placing the emphasis on our body and the five senses.

There are other ways we can segregate our experience. Think about the person who leads with emotion versus the friend who is highly logical. Compare your neighbor with a rich inner life, who barely seems to interact with anyone at all, with your outgoing former roommate who was always throwing parties.

There are times in life when you have to lead with your head, be practical, and get the job done. On the other hand you may have had to be very emotional to get yourself heard and your needs taken care of. These aspects are all important tools for survival, success, and happiness. Problems arise when we let one of these aspects dominate our lives. In doing so, we run the risk of becoming inflexible, stuck in one way of being, neglecting to explore other aspects that are often the key to letting go.

## PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER

When we are split into segments, we are often closed off to the heart, yet the heart is where the process of letting go begins

Try the following exercises to help with re-integration:

1. Mind/body split - If you are spending too much time in your head planning and not enough time in your body, you run the risk of ignoring basic self-care. Ask yourself, "what kind of nourishment does my body need now, in order for my mind to stay clear. On the other hand, too much time focused on sense-pleasures (or displeasure for that matter) can cause long-term negative consequences. To find mind/body balance, get up and move at least every hour when you are working on a cerebral task. If your tendency is to get caught up in too many body-based activities that reap short-term reward or distract you from keeping order, let go of this trap by setting up some long-term goals. Remember we need both short term pleasure and long-term goals to stay balanced.
2. Emotional/logical split – The right side of the brain governs, emotions, visual cues, and story-telling, It's great when we are bonding with someone, but left unchecked and on it's own the emotional brain can lead to feelings of chaos and anxiety. The logical left brain helps us get stuff done, stay on task, and apply reason when emotions or impulses are running amok. But lopsided logical thinking can leave a lot of important information out of the picture. To find right brain/left brain balance, apply the opposite. If you are a creative person who is sometimes prone to chaos, find a mentor to help you with the practical details of your next big project. Absorbing some organizational skills from a mentor will help you make the most of your creativity. Are you a master at logic? Do you find yourself being frustrated with emotional conversations? The next time you feel helpless in the face of difficult emotions, practice compassion by just listening. Emotions can not be quantified, and they are not right or wrong. They just are. As long as everyone is safe, listen to emotions, and stay open to a creative idea of at least 24 hours before you apply logic.
3. Internal/external split – Research shows that when we have a good sense internal motivation and values, we are less susceptible to the ups and downs of success and failure. However too much of an inner focus can leave us feeling isolated. Externally focused people are good "connectors" and can have a healthy curiosity and willingness to join important causes. But too much of an external focus can leave you vulnerable to the perceptions of others, which try as we may, we can never totally control. To find internal/external balance if you tend to be inwardly focused, consider taking a class in something new. I have had many shy and introverted patients who benefit from improvisation classes, dancing and volunteer activities. If that's too much of a leap, start by building taking a second or two to notice the face of your local barista. Say good morning and thank you to your coworkers. If you feel you have an external focus and would like to balance this tendency with more inner motivation, try to taking the VIA signature strengths survey to get a better sense of your core values.

If you have experienced trauma, you may have had to make a real split to survive. If the trauma is behind you but you are still struggling to let go of the tendency to split, ask for help.



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## DAY THIRTY

# Make peace with your true nature

Our deeper nature usually prevails, and what a relief when it does.

Remember the big hair of the 1980s? It was a time when young men and women alike were subjecting themselves to a head full of chemicals followed by gobs of sticky, slimy, hair gel. Madonna or Michael, Whitney, or Cameron, we wanted that look no matter what the cost, and don't forget to throw in a scrunchy!

My hair, however, did not want to go along with this fashion trend. Thick, heavy, and straighter than straight, I would take my mane to the salon, only to have the perm fizzle out a day or two later. I was so determined to fight my hair's true nature that more than once I went back for the dreaded day-after perm.

My hair's true nature always prevailed, as nature is wont to do.

Our deeper nature usually prevails too, and what a relief when it does. If you are hiding more than straight hair... a tendency to be shy and quiet, for instance, because of some mistaken belief that extroverts have all the fun – let this idea go. Give in to being introverted. Try it for a day our two. You can always put the wig back on.

## EMBRACE YOUR TRUE NATURE

1. Choose a day to get you hair permed...kidding...this exercise is scary and can make you feel vulnerable so add a bit of humor and a ton of self-compassion. It can also be immensely and deeply freeing.
2. Think about a couple of personality traits that you fight with. Personality traits like introversion vs. extraversion, leading with emotionality vs. a propensity for logic are fairly enduring. You were born with a tendency toward certain traits like being guarded vs. outgoing, or cautious vs. adventurous, then life experience took over to continue to shape your unique personality.
3. Once you have identified a trait that troubles you the next step is to figure out why you fight with this trait? Were you criticized by teachers for being too bubbly? Did a stern care-giver frown upon your sensitive nature? With great compassion, as if you are being welcomed home by a wise mentor, invite this trait to spend the day with you.
4. How would you express this trait now that you are grown and free to reveal it any way you please? Maybe today is the day you stay home from the company dinner and curl up with a book. Maybe today is the day you unleash the belly laugh you have been stifling for a decade.
5. Failing to understand and accept our true nature keeps us from cultivating our strengths, and can drive fear, sadness, destruction, and addiction. Let go and share your true nature.



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# Get started

EVERYDAY MINDFULNESS TOOLBOX

## Practical tools to quickly recenter and increase happiness.

Join the online resource for practical tools to quickly recenter and increase happiness in your day-to-day life. With tips, tools, articles, videos, worksheets and more, you will find everything you need to incorporate your mindfulness into your busy lifestyle. The resources range from quick, two-minute to longer 30-minute practices that you can do at work, home or anywhere in between. You will have unlimited access to the complete toolbox of resources seven days per week, fifty-two weeks per year. We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness everyday.



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